

Letters from The House Between

Formerly Notes from Toad Hall

Issue 2 Spring 2020



Covid19

Dear Friends,
much has been written
about the pandemic during
these days of isolation. Why add
my own? Here are quotes from
others that encourage me.

Perfect Pandemic Wisdom

When the Black Plague reached
Wittenberg, where Martin Luther
lived and worked, he had this to
say:

*I shall ask God mercifully to protect
us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify
the air, administer medicine, and take
it. I shall avoid places and persons
where my presence is not needed in
order not to become contaminated*

*and thus perchance infect and pollute
others, and so cause their death as a result
of my negligence. If God should wish
to take me, he will surely find me and I
have done what he has expected of me
and so I am not responsible for either my
own death or the death of others. If my
neighbor needs me, however, I shall not
avoid place or person, but will go freely.*

Indefinitely

*The word rang in our ears as we read the
email. Since all flights had been suspended
into and out of Nepal, the US Embassy*

*had organized
two evacuation
flights for US citizens
... and also a warning for
those who would remain. There
would be no guarantee of future
flights. Prepare to remain in Nepal
indefinitely.*

*That was not the word we wanted
to hear. As middle class Americans
we are accustomed to have the power
to choose and to manage. We are
accustomed to feelings of control.
But, along with many of you, the
coronavirus pandemic has revealed
a truth that is quite uncomfortable.
We are—in fact—quite small, weak,
and broken.*



... The anxiety and fear that this global pandemic has unearthed in me is an ugly reminder of my own functional unbelief. And I'm sorry for that.

But to be shown the depth of my need for Jesus is a gift. To be confronted with my dependence on the middle class American idols of choice, management, and control is a grace. To hold out my empty hands to receive all things in Christ is an unshakeable treasure.

*- Phillip and Missy Jenson
live and work in Nepal*

Kiss the Wave

How long until all is well? Can we keep our heads above water for another day? Another month? ... Will we go under? Will our lives be shipwrecked; our futures dashed before we're rescued?

Spurgeon was a beloved British minister in the late 1800s who preached to over ten million(!) people in his lifetime. In addition to his indefatigable preaching, he also published thousands of sermons and established multiple orphanages for boys and girls.

But he also suffered from severe depression for much of his life, with frequent thoughts of suicide. He was well acquainted with the drowning nature of despair, and he knew full well what it meant for all things not to be well.

At age twenty-two, Spurgeon was a pastor of a large church and the father of a young family. One day as he preached to thousands in a large Music Hall, pranksters yelled "fire!" and started a mass panic for the exits. Seven people were

killed; trampled to death, and twenty-eight were severely injured. Spurgeon's mind was never the same again.

His wife later wrote, "My beloved's anguish was so deep and violent, that reason seemed to totter in her throne, and we sometimes feared he will never preach again."

And yet, here is what Spurgeon said after many years of living, day by day, in the darkest waters of depression: "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages."

... The people of God are not exempt from the waves of this world. We aren't immune to all that threatens to break our fragile bodies and tender spirits. But the people of God know that whatever causes us to cling to the Rock of Ages is

for the well-being of their eternal souls. In whom will we trust in the deep?

Even today, as reason seems to totter in her throne, can we learn to welcome the waves that throw us against the Rock of Ages?

No depth; no storm; no shipwreck; no world-wide tsunami wave can ever separate you from the One who rescued you, keeps you, and even now, is making all things well.

- Kim blogs at givenbreath.com

Daily Life

It's good to be reminded we must all live in the ordinary space right before us even in the midst of the waves that wash over us daily. Life goes on. In new ways for sure, with schools cancelled and working from home mandatory. These are some of the ordinary, mundane details of life at The House Between where we daily witness the hand of God in small ways.

MARCH 25 Our Tennessee family was planning to move to Minnesota by June 1st. Now what? Nothing is certain. Expecting them by June, I



ordered a full CSA share rather than our normal half. What will I do with all that kale if they don't make it?

MARCH 27 A friend sent a recipe from The Pioneer Woman. Her cinnamon rolls with glaze makes 9 pans full! Too much even for a carb lover like me. Reduced, it made 3 pans. Gave two away. One to our next door neighbors who have 3 kids. One has pneumonia. The other 2 and the dad quickly followed with Covid19 symptoms. Was it? It seems likely. Without testing, no one knows. Denis left a pan of tender, warm rolls on their door step.

MARCH 29 Virtual church this morning. Being together virtually is good, but we miss the real. Our pastor has been sick with a cough and fever for two weeks. Scary. Denis and I prayed a long time. So many to remember and hope for.

MARCH 30 Day 16 of isolation. Beautiful, sunny, warm. Hard to believe we're in a global crisis. Couldn't focus on writing. Changed a few sentences. Gave up. Went out to do yard cleanup. The hydrangeas still have last year's blossoms hanging brown and crisp. Dry stalks poking up thick as a forest. Filled a giant bag with waste and dumped it down the ravine.

Must curtail reading the news. Not helping attitude.

Cooking is my creative outlet right now. No, wait. It's always been. Somehow more satisfying these days because the rhythms are familiar and soothing. Thawed a 2 pound package of ground venison. It's very lean; my brother adds a little bacon to it. Made an interesting pasta



sauce. I liked it. Lots left over. Will freeze and give away.

Anita and her nephew Michael came over this afternoon. I have shitake mushroom plugs. She drilled holes in a dead tree, shoved in the plugs, sealed them with red wax. Hopefully, the spores will produce a crop of mushrooms later this year. They couldn't come inside, so we talked through the garage door. Hard not to hug them. They were heating soup on a camp stove and gobbling cinnamon rolls for lunch. They ate all but two—and planned to finish those off on the way home.

MARCH 31 Every morning cardinals sing outside our bedroom window. Loud praises. Denis says they're threats, not praise.

Friends from New York sent a cookbook. *Ottolenghi Simple*. Sorry. Never heard of him. But it looks fabulous. I'm craving vegetables and fruit which we are out of.

Denis and I had a little disagreement. I can't remember what it was about. But it included 10 hours of social and emotional distancing. All better now.

We can't afford to do this. Not in these times. These times? I guess no time is a good time to fight with your spouse.

Last night Denis looked at my pill box and said "You know you're old when you envy your wife's new vitamin pill box."

APRIL 1 FOOL'S DAY I thought of playing a trick on Denis but in these days of uncertainty, I decided it would be too mean. Playing tricks doesn't seem appropriate this year. I mean, for now. That we have a winter storm warning is tricky enough.

APRIL 2 I was about to store our snow shovels. Good thing I didn't. Six inches of snow last night. What?! It won't stay long, but still.

The tulips planted last fall are poking up. I lost my mind and bought 300 bulbs. Yesterday I saw deer tracks in the flower beds. They have nibbled the rising iris and severed the tulip tips. Rabbits are lurking out there, too. I used to think how darling they were leaping and cavorting through the yard until I learned that is their mating ritual.

APRIL 10 I talked Denis into playing UpWords with me. He occasionally consents even though I beat him every time. He says it wouldn't be so bad if I didn't think it was funny. We've been reading aloud to each other for a break from binge-watching Netflix.

APRIL 13 Today I made a pineapple carrot cake with cream cheese icing. Big mistake! Now I can't stop thinking about it sitting on the counter. I've already had two pieces. Need to do something about this.

Later. Gave a quarter of it to Anita. Took the rest to friends nearby. Left it

on the porch and rang the doorbell. A cake hit and run. It's nice they liked it, but it's a gift to spare me.

APRIL 18 Discovered a mallard made a nest in a sheltered spot next to our garage. I was watering the peonies which are popping through the ground. When I reached the last one a sudden movement startled me when a frightened duck flew away. There beneath the rose trellis were 8 pale green eggs. What a gift! Thanks to God for such unexpected beauty.

APRIL 20 A crew arrived to dethatch our lawn with big noisy machines. I worried the whole time for our mama duck. (We've named her Corona.) She'd already had a bad day when 5 rude males arrived and chased her down the hill. Now this. She was gone. Perhaps for good?

APRIL 21 Corona is back! She's been sitting on her nest since early morning when I peeked around the corner. I think she may be brooding now. It will take 28 days to hatch her eggs. She only leaves the nest a few times a day for a short while to eat.

The interesting thing about ducks—all birds, I guess—she lays one egg a day. Remarkably, they will not begin to “germinate” until she sits on them to brood. That way the babies all hatch on the same day. Perhaps around May 20th. Who taught them that?

I'm getting closer to finishing “No Place” my manuscript of our wandering years. Because we lived in New Mexico during that time I learned to love Mexican food so am including a few recipes in the book. Last night I made Green Chile Stew to make sure I had the proportions right. When I finished Denis looked



at the huge pot and asked was I expecting company? I hadn't thought of that. Now what?

Our Chattanooga family has been waiting for a decision. Shaun interviewed for an art teacher position in a high school. This is so hard.

APRIL 22 Shaun got the job! So exciting! If in December they hadn't pulled the trigger on moving, this wouldn't be happening. A local friend moved across town due to decisions made before Covid19. She called it crazy stupid to move during this time. What do we call moving across country? Only with God's help.

It's hard to practically love friends and neighbors while in isolation. I had a virtual appointment with my R.A. and asked if my medications made me THAT immunosuppressed. “Yes, they do” was the unhappy answer. Denis is my gatekeeper. I chafe, but it's probably wise since I like risk-taking.

Since cooking is a favorite pastime perhaps that could spread a little cheer. Denis helping, last Saturday—another batch of cinnamon rolls went

out. Did I mention the glaze is a maple syrup espresso coffee concoction?! We journeyed around and dropped them off with friends. It was a beautiful, warm day and stopping to chat at a safe distance was life-giving.

One more piece needs to fall into place for Shaun's teaching job. He must be certified to teach in Minnesota. That office is backlogged. Wait. Wait. So stressful.

MAY 1 The certification office says it will take 90 days to process Shaun's file. By then it will be too late. The school must move on to other candidates. We are devastated. For them. We hold out hands to God. What's His plan now?”

MAY 4 Denis had a brilliant idea and ordered toilet paper from Office Max. Problem: smallest amount is box of 80 rolls. When they arrived today, he pumped his fist and shouted, “Honey, I've killed a wooly mammoth and brought it home to you.” Wonderful. We won't need more until 2025.

Until then, Amen.



Ransom Notes

May 7

While writing this page I went to check on Corona who is still brooding eggs under our rose trellis. It was shocking to find her missing and all her eggs broken and eaten. She was a gift. A beautiful part of creation. Why did this happen? With her gone we readjust our hopes.

Life is fragile. This includes the life of Ransom. We've been told that during such turbulent economic times ministries and nonprofits suffer. But, we know God, who has faithfully cared for us all these years, will not stop now. That you continue to pray and think of us is another wonderful gift.



When we first began isolating and our social life was at zero, I thought NOW I'll get so much writing done. I've made a lot of progress. At the same time, as I'm sure you experience, other responsibilities you hadn't expected pop up. Staying in touch with family and friends means taking time to reach out to them. We are staying safe and picking up groceries curbside, but must often remake and reorder as many things are out of stock.

I was extremely touched to hear from a friend whose mother is in a care center. She writes: "... probably the hardest thing has been thinking these may be her last months on earth and we can't see her! ... My mom has always been an avid reader but due to macular degeneration she can no longer read so we've had the joy of reading to her [by phone] Your book, "God in the Sink" has been the new favorite! She has delighted in your honesty and humor but also appreciated lessons shared from the stories. I wanted you to know how much your words have been used and appreciated!"

I am so thankful to be part of encouraging others. This, too, is a wonderful and unexpected gift.

We sometimes forget how much music nourishes and soothes our hearts. A couple of listening suggestions you may enjoy:

All Creatures A dear friend, Katy Hutson and friends launched another album for *Rain for Roots*. "All Creatures" is a beautiful expression of true hope found in knowing God. Especially reassuring to children during a time filled with many unknowns. Order it through their website. <https://rainforroots.com/>

2020 Folk singer Eliza Gilkyson released a new album. *2020* was written and produced before the pandemic and yet is perfect for our time. I've been listening and even as we mourn the loss of little things like dead ducklings, our eyes fill with wonder at the beauty of the world. Her final piece gives voice to this, reminding us of all we have in the wonder of creation.



Pray for us as we pray for you. May we all be steadfast and full of love and hope in Christ even when life is difficult.

And Finally...

Time to Laugh

It seems important to laugh during these times. Laughter is restorative, it helps us breathe and loosens tension. We are finding ways of keeping a sense of humor—not from nasty jokes and cheap tricks, but reflections of intelligent wit and open-heartedness sometimes coupled with a bit of irony.

Denis shares tweets he knows would make me laugh.

*Me, one year ago: If I had a week with nowhere to go and nothing to do this house would be organized neat and clean.

Me, today: Nope. Not the problem.

*The pandemic hasn't affected me at all. Is anyone else up to six meals a day?

*Homeschooling update: one child expelled, one suspended, one teacher fired for drinking on the job.

I'm rereading Brian Doyle's *Book of Uncommon Prayer*. Funny, touching, and terribly current.

Ann Lamott—rereading *Bird by Bird*. She forces me to recognize myself and it makes me laugh. Speaking of great writers who make a lot of money—*"not one of them writes elegant first drafts. All right, one of them does, but we do not like her very much. We do not think she has a rich inner life or that God likes her or can even stand her. (Although when I mentioned this to my priest friend Tom, he said you can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out God hates all the same people you do.)"*

Lord, help us trust you in days of trouble, and rejoice in all things, well, almost all. Am working on it.



Warmly,

Margie Haack

About Letters From the House Between

If you drive through western Kentucky where two great southern rivers – the Cumberland and the Tennessee – come together, you pass over the dams that bind them and a land emerges bordered on all sides by water, simply called The Land Between the Lakes. As we drove, we thought about the changes coming as we aged and needed to move from Toad Hall, our home of thirty-three years. We needed a place where certain features were on the main floor so as body parts fail one doesn't need to climb stairs to reach them. We thought of that place as "The House Between," a place bound on one side by years past where we raised children, continued our ministry and grew older, and on the other side, a place in heaven where God holds a perfect place of restoration yet to come. Our new home is a reminder that this is only a "place between" what is now and what will one day be true Home forever. Thus: The House Between.

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