

Noah & Margo®

By Philip Siddons

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. It was in the days, in the early morning of time, when kids didn't listen to their parents and generally stayed out with the family horse well past curfew. In the evenings, after the humming bird races in heaven, God would look down at the earth and start to get a headache. People were picking too much food and hoarding it. Some went hungry while others watched their stock piles rot because they hadn't invented preservatives. And God knew that when humans did get around to inventing preservatives, they'd cause cancer.

By now, most of the politicians and magistrates were on the take. Even when they did get caught, these powerful crooks would retire rich and earn even more money by publishing memoirs commemorating their decadence. Not much was going right. One gender of humankind was bossing the other around for no rational reason, so God was toying with two ideas.

The first idea was to change all the hormones over night. This would reverse the aggressiveness in one gender and put the shoe on the other foot for a while. The second idea was to change the languages between the sexes. Instead of bossing each other around, they'd have to work hard at communicating to overcome the loneliness. In the end though, God decided to wipe the slate clean and start a new human race.

On the morning when God was about to open flood gate number five to the big dam to wash the earth clean before starting a new humanity, God saw a black man named Ham walking down the road. An ostrich was strolling along behind him. Black people were God's favorite color. To God, variety was the spice of life. But along with everything else that humanity had messed up, it had been decided by a

small town council, up in Northern Mesopotamia, that yellow people were going to be the preferred color. From then on, the blacks, the reds and the whites were thought of as "inferior." The more God thought about it, the more angry God became.

Right when God was about to reach for the lever to the dam, this Ham fellow started God laughing. He had on a pair of weird sun glasses with strings looping down and going behind his head (as if it would catch them if they fell). He had a shirt that looked like it had been used as a paint rag and his baggy shorts were made of feathers which perfectly matched the ostrich walking behind him.

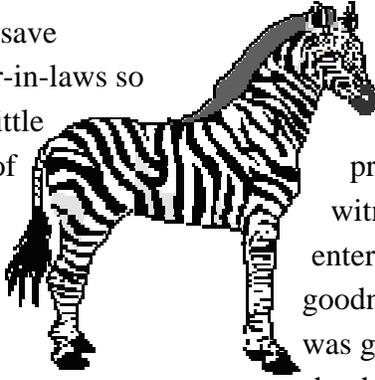


God was laughing so much at Ham's creative apparel that God decided a bit of this craziness must be carried over into the next try at humanity. Some of these humans were really good sports, despite their mistakes, so God stopped Ham and asked a few questions. In no time, God found out that Ham came from a nice family. His dad was a black man named Noah and his mom, who was red, was named Margo. God remembered having a few walks with this young couple who were in their late five hundreds – the prime of their life. In addition to their son Ham, who had tried out for the priesthood but had flunked the dress code, there was Shem, an accountant and Japheth, a jazz musician.

With the incredible luck that only the Creator could have, Noah and Margo's three boys and their wives had put off having children until they were in their two hundreds when their mortgages would be paid off. They were the only family clan in the human race without young children. The Almighty

knew little ones would not be able to handle what was coming.

Right then and there, God decided to save Margo, Noah and their sons and daughter-in-laws so that there would be a few people with a little imagination – preventing the next batch of humans from turning out like the ones before. And God felt good about the decision.



pride in meticulously gathering two of every species he could find.

Margo somehow forgot about the circumstances and counted her blessings. She realized that this was probably the funniest thing the earth ever witnessed and it was her privilege to be entertained right in her own back yard. “Thank goodness I didn’t marry that boring fellow who was going to invent collecting postage stamps” she thought.

When Noah was told to start building a cargo ship in the middle of the desert, instead of laughing he said, “Why not!” You see, in Noah’s high school yearbook, most people scribbled things like, “Good luck – you’ll need it.” His class voted him “The person most likely not to succeed.” He barely passed his courses and the only thing he was ever interested in was wood shop.

“Have I got a project for you” God said, but the worst part of it for Noah was telling his wife Margo. So he didn’t. He just started in on it.

“What are you building now, honey, a 450 cubit long wooden patio?” she asked.

Within thirty seconds after Noah’s answer, Margo’s face went pale, then transformed to an absence of color only later to return to red. Just her luck. Her husband was asking her and the kids to pack up and move again. Another one of his harebrained schemes to go to the new world and seek his fortune. This time, it is supposed to be the end of the world and everyone is doomed.

Margo began to laugh, not at her husband’s latest project nor her son Ham, who was coming up the driveway. She was laughing at the collection of animals trailing behind him. Not only were her husband and sons building a boat in the middle of nowhere, they were collecting animals for the trip. Of course Ham had a great time being in charge of animal gathering. She knew he was all thumbs, when it came to carpentry, but he was taking some

Margo pitched in with her husband, sons and daughter-in-laws and passed her time trying to make the inside of the boat livable. She figured that if the water never came, they would at least have a nice summer house.

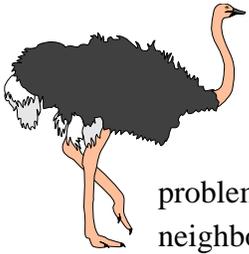
The neighbors had become a problem. They bribed their friends at the courthouse to rezone the neighborhood prohibiting arks. “It’ll lower the value of the property” they argued. It wasn’t long before their friends stopped coming by. All this talk about the end of the world and a flood was getting a little fanatic. And with his obsession with boat building, Noah had really let down his bowling team. His absence made them short-handed so the team came in last in the league.

Early one evening, when Margo and Noah were sitting on their back porch in the shadow of their nearly finished boat, Margo said, “Suppose you’re wrong? Maybe you misunderstood what God said. You know, I can’t even send you to the store to get a simple list of groceries without you coming back with the wrong things. Maybe God said that WE are going to be destroyed and everyone else is going to be saved.”

Noah looked at his wife - she always was a worrier. He paused, with a concerned look on his face but finally said, “Nah! . . . But even so, it sure has been fun building this boat. Did you see the stained glass window I put in on the upper level

today? I think it's a nice touch but I've got to figure out what to do about the rest room facilities."

The days passed quickly and the clan busily prepared dried food for the boat. They gathered grains for the animals that were accumulating in their back yard. Despite all the problems they were having with the neighbors, the animals were the best behaved.



The lambs were napping with the lions. The giraffes didn't seem to mind the monkeys climbing up their necks. Sure there were some household spat about someone being allowed to take along more than others on the trip. These family arguments were nothing, however, compared to the abuse they had to take from the townspeople.

The police were serving summons daily for disturbing the peace. The family was considered so weird for their boat building and animal gathering that the neighborhood children were prohibited from playing near the property. There were even casual tunics for sale which said:

Vacation on Noah's Desert Love Boat: No Seasickness Guaranteed!

On the afternoon they finished piling the sacks of grain into the boat, Charlotte, Japheth's wife, was up on top of the boat nailing down the last roofing shingle when she felt a few drops of rain. Noah was over in the orchard picking a few limes for dinner. Suddenly God came up to him and said, "Noah, this is it! Plan on having dinner on the boat tonight and have Ham get all those animals on board. Oh yea, don't forget the ostriches. I would hate to have to figure out the design on those again."

That afternoon, everyone got on board and thought Noah was only testing the suitability of the living quarters. At the most, they thought they were having a picnic inside the new house boat. After the storm, they would all go back home and play a few games of pinochle.

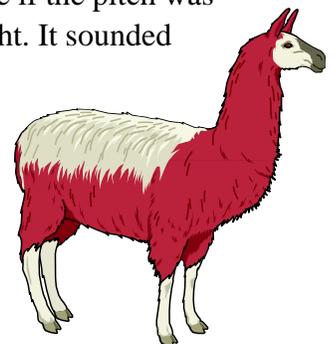
The rain kept coming down and the back yard turned to mud. They had to shut the door to keep from getting wet. After they closed themselves in and lit a few candles, Noah said, "This is it!" in his most authoritative voice.

For a minute, everyone almost believed that this funny talk about the end of the world was true. Perhaps Noah had done all this boat building and animal gathering for something other than a summer lark.

An elephant whinnied and one of the parakeets landed on Margo's shoulder. Shem, who was up on the next level looking out of the partially opened stained glass window, called down and said, "Holy Mackerel! There's about two hundred people slopping through the mud coming toward the boat. Better lock that door, dad!"

Right after they slipped the bolt tight, the knocking began. Just to have the last laugh, Noah climbed up to the window and yelled out into the rain, "Thought I didn't know what I was doing, eh? Well the word they'll invent for my expertise is 'archeologist.'" Nobody outside laughed, so Noah shut the window.

To try to take their minds off the knocking and the sounds of angry voices, they all went around and checked to see if the pitch was keeping the boat watertight. It sounded like chaos outside. Because of the darkness and the rain coming down in torrents, little could be seen through that upper window.



The first five hours of the trip were a lark. Everyone was congratulating Noah for his foresight. Ham fed the animals and talked about their distinguishing marks. The rest of the clan eventually managed to begin a few hands of cards when Ham called out from the animal section, "Oh no! I've got two female Amadillians. They'll become extinct."

Everyone tried their best to cheer him up. Margo's joke got their minds back to the cards. She said, with as much seriousness in her voice as she could muster, "And its too bad the snakes can't multiply."

"Why can't the snakes multiply?" Ham said falling for it.

"Because," Margo continued, "they are only adders."

All went fine for the first evening but when it was time for bed, things started going down hill. No one had figured out how to assign the chores of the houseboat. It became overwhelmingly obvious that someone had to clean the animal stalls. Later that night, you never saw a more grouchy, tired and unsociable group of relatives in your life. By the next morning, none of the people or animals had managed to get a wink of sleep and everyone was at each other's throats.

The food wasn't right. Things were damp and musty. No matter what you put into your mouth, it all tasted like elephant trunk or birds' wings. Probably the only thing that kept Margo, Noah and their sons and their daughter-in-laws alive was their hatred. As they heard the rain relentlessly pound on the roof over the top deck, each of them secretly planned ways to get even with their in-laws for taking a favorite spot, stealing their dessert or snoring.

After several days of this, they were all so exhausted that they looked at each other through bloodshot



eyes. In fact, they all got a little punchy and stayed that way for the next several weeks. They told jokes to pass the time. In no time, they began to laugh at anything. Even comments like "pass the salt" would start a round of laughter. They would tell themselves, if they could survive this, they could make it through anything.

From sitting in their cramped quarters, constantly hearing the complaining neighs, chirps and roars of the animals, they spent a lot of time asking themselves philosophical questions. "What are humans that God is mindful of us?" Noah asked out loud one evening as he was getting nudged by a horse's hoof while scraping parrot droppings off his toga.

A lot of things transpired during these weeks of deplorable conditions. Poems were composed. The bag pipes were invented. Shem's wife Rachel came up with the concept of ice cream but unfortunately she forgot it before she wrote it down. Noah discovered that a few mosquitoes had gotten into the boat and everyone was depressed about it except the birds. Everyone experienced transactional analysis, mid-life crisis and self-actualization.

As the weeks went by, everyone had several significant emotional experiences. There was enlightenment. There were petty feuds. Weeks transpired when one refused to talk with another. There were crying jags and laughing fits. Everyone got religion and lost it several times. In the end, though, there was cooperation because there was no choice.

Stories. They all took turns telling stories. Out of their weariness came beautiful tales of ages long ago when unicorns romped on the hills and when the children of Queens and Kings unconsciously played with village folk as a matter of course.

Suddenly, in the dead of the night and after weeks of this, there was a loud scraping sound on the bottom of the boat.



Everyone jumped out of their hammocks. It seemed that the rain had stopped and their craft had rubbed against land.

“Land” someone said.

“October 10th and the rain stopped and it’s my birthday!”

Margo announced from the corner as she looked at the calendar she had drawn on the wall.

“No it’s not” said Wendy, her daughter-in-law. “Don’t you remember? You forgot to mark the weekends and I told you about it but you never listen to me. Your calendar is way off.”

And with that, Margo and Wendy got into one of the most physical fights yet seen in time. It took all four men to pull them away from each other. You see, when they hit land, it riled everyone up and they were not prepared to even hope.

Noah stuck his head out of the window and saw that there was nothing but water, except for one little piece of land. “Must be the top of a mountain” he called down to the others.

After each person had taken their turn looking at the small island of earth, they decided that good times must be coming. They celebrated by going out on the roof of the boat. Wendy and Margo hugged one another. For the first time in weeks, it was not raining so they all danced like children. They didn’t know what to do with the fresh air and the only animals allowed on the deck were the birds. The doves went through the window and flew around for a while. Finding no place to land, other than the boat, they came back inside.

Life got better for everyone, now that the rain had stopped. There was the outside roof of the boat and a chance for sunbathing. The doves flew away one afternoon and were presumed drowned after a week. To everyone’s surprise, though, they finally came back.

One day, when everyone had slept in, one of the doves, which had been away for several days, flew

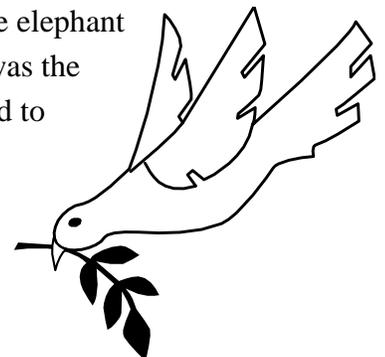
in the opened hatch and landed on Noah’s face. Most everyone had experienced, one time or another, waking up with difficulty in breathing because an animal was sleeping on their face. To everyone’s amazement, this dove had a branch in its beak.

Everyone rushed to the roof. It was too good to believe. There was land all around them. Most of it was mud, but it was beautiful mud with beautiful muddy trees and muddy bushes and muddy mountains.

On Noah’s six-hundredth and first birthday, and no one dared to dispute Margo’s calendar, everyone jumped off the boat and had the longest and funniest mud war in the history of civilization. Even the animals stumbled out and rolled around and frolicked in the mud. It was quite a sight. For weeks these humans and animals had been cooped up in that wooden crate and you could not tell one from the other. Everyone was covered with mud and stunk to high heaven. Everyone was smiling. “Land ho!”

In a few hours, they all settled down on top of a hill about a thousand cubits from their boat. The animals tottered off in different directions, wandering just far enough to graze. Most of the animals were sick of the junk food the people had been feeding them. Everyone was too grateful to speak. It was a profound moment.

It was also a sad moment. All they had was each other and that rotting, dilapidated boat. Nothing remained in their former houseboat that didn’t smell like the elephant house at the zoo. This was the moment that God picked to show up and greet the disembarked passengers.



As God came up the hill to where they all were sitting, Noah called out, “Nice to see You, . . . and by the way, thanks! We’re glad You didn’t leave us behind.”

God smiled and started to talk about how this sort of thing was never going to happen again. About how they are all going to have children – which was no surprise to them. And God talked about how they were to start over being vegetarians because the earth needed every living being to reproduce - not to mention eating meat was bad for them.

And just to do something really special, God pointed up at the sky. In doing so, God waved a hand across and created this bright colored cloth or ribbon up in the air. It was beautiful. Here they were, sopping wet with mud and gray and surrounded by earth tones and God was painting colors in the sky.

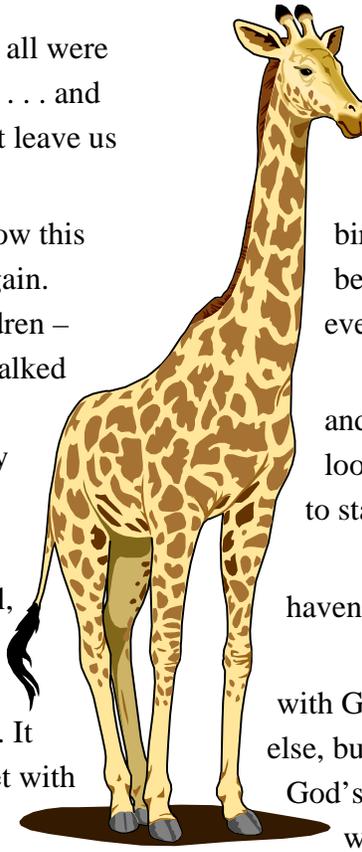
“Wow!” Margo said. “How did You do that?”

God said, “It’s called a rainbow. I’m going to hang one of those out in the sky after every rain storm as a reminder that this won’t happen again.”

In a way, it gave Noah a nice warm feeling to see the rainbow up there. In another way, it made him a little uneasy. If God needed that rainbow as a reminder, suppose God didn’t happen to look in the right direction or had something else in mind and forgot. What if everyone would be finished off again? But from the look on God’s face, Noah knew he was wrong to worry.

That evening after the stickball game that God had organized, God sat with them around the campfire and gave them a whole list of suggestions on how to start their new society.

“You’re going to have to skip the rule, for a while, about not marrying your cousins. You haven’t got any choice about that” God pointed out. “You’re charged with a new beginning of humanity.



Learn from the wrongs of the past. Do the best you can. Make life fun. Make life fair.”

“And oh yea,” God continued, “happy birthday Noah . . . six hundred and one, I believe.” And with that, God started everybody singing happy birthday to Noah.

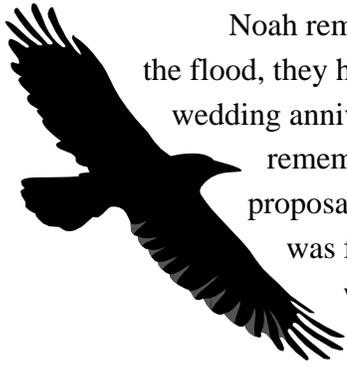
In a few minutes, things settled down and became even more reflective. Noah looked at God and said: “How are we going to start over? We’ve lost everything.”

God looked at him and said, “No you haven’t. You still have everything you need.”

Noah was about to start an argument with God about that one, and so was everyone else, but God just stood there and smiled with God’s unique knowing look. And because God was so beautiful and so mighty and wonderful all at the same time, they decided they shouldn’t get into a tiff about that one. After all, they were standing on land.

A little later, God was going for a walk down on the plain with the animals but Noah kept thinking about their situation. “Everything we need?” Noah mumbled to himself. “God calls this everything? I’d like to know how God thinks I can make a go at things without any hardware stores. And I’d like to know how we’re supposed to have vacations if we don’t even have careers. And the pension plan – what’s going to happen to us when we are in our 900s?”

And then Noah looked over at Margo, sitting nearby. She had a smile on her face because she was watching her boy Shem rolling down the hill, with his wife Rachel, like a couple of kids. She was thinking about children. Noah saw the sparkle in her eyes and delight in her smile. He saw the pink tones of the far off sunset were reflected in the softness of her face.



Noah remembered that just before the flood, they had celebrated their 586th wedding anniversary. He still remembered his awkward proposal for marriage when he was fifteen – or was it Margo who had proposed? It had been some life, so

far. They had a lot of history with each other. The kids were only one hundred years old but they'd grow up one of these days.

And somehow reading her husband's mind, Margo scooted over next to him and settled back into his arms. They watched the sun go down, knowing that it would return on the next morning. It probably would never rain that much again.

"I think God is right about that" Noah said almost unconsciously.

"Right about what, Noah?" asked Margo as she continued to watch the kids from within Noah's arms.

"About having everything we need" he answered as he slowly stroked her hair. She relaxed against him as he continued. "It took me six hundred years, but I've finally realized what's most important in life. It's not the job or the bowling team (but never tell anyone I said that). It's not the flood or the ark. It's not even about surviving." And with gentleness, he looked in Margo's eyes and slowly said, "It's about making life more fun and fair for you. Being with you is all that matters."

God happened to be walking near – just below the hill where they sat. God smiled. For once, at least some of them, had finally gotten the point of it all.

And it was evening. And it was morning. And life started up again. ■¹

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