

THE OLD HOUSE ACROSS THE FIELDS OF CORN

By John F. Hall

A rogue spring thunder storm, with straight-line south winds, over 70 miles an hour, hit the old farm house with a vengeance. It caused a power outage that lasted for five hours. Two ancient towering trees on the far south backyard came crashing to the ground. One tree blocked the dirt road leading to a large, deep pond. I called the widow lady that owns the farm. She, in turn, notified the corporate farmer that rents the farm.



Craig Perry is the corporate farmer. His daughter, Shannon is his foreman. Every year they bring about 15 or more Mexicans up from Mexico to help raise and harvest 300 acres of tobacco and several thousand acres of corn and other row crops. Shannon's brother, Patrick was one of the seven students killed in a car wreck that also killed my nephew, Dale Garner. About 14 years ago, I lost another nephew, Kerry Oakley. He was killed in a truck accident. His daughter, Jade would come up to me, when she about four years old and say, "Uncle John, I want to go to the big house and play." So I would take her up stairs, in my old house, and let her play with her cousin's Andrea's and Heather's dolls and doll houses. '

I am writing this story looking out a second story window at fields of corn. Murrah Roger and Allan Mark wrote the song, "Where Corn Don't Grow." I love to take the readers of my stories on a roller coaster ride of emotions. Song writers are the best story tellers. The person in the song could just as easily been me. These are some of their lyrics: "As we sat on the front porch of that old gray house where I was born and raised, staring at the dusty fields where my daddy worked hard everyday. I think it kinda hurt him when I said, 'Daddy there's a lot that I don't know. But don't you ever dream about a life where corn don't grow?' He just sat there silent staring at his favorite coffee cup. I saw a storm of emotions in his eyes when he looked up. He said 'son I know at your age it seems like this ole world is turnin' slow. And you think you'll find it all where corn don't grow. Hard times are real there's dusty fields no matter where you go. You may change your mind 'cause the weeds are high where corn don't grow.' I remember feeling guilty when daddy turned and walked back into the house. I was only 17 back then but I thought that I knew more than I know now. I can't say that he didn't warn me this city life's a rough row to hoe. Ain't it funny how a dream can turn around, where corn don't grow...".

Sitting on my front porch swing, breathing the fresh air and listening to the birds sing, life may not be better than this, I thought, as I looked out at the fresh fields of corn. I've been given so much grace upon grace upon grace upon grace. I've been blessed much, much more than I deserve. Across the fields of corn is Dyers Chapel Methodist Church cemetery. It touches the widow lady's farm. The straight-line winds that downed the two huge trees at the back of my one acre lot, also damaged one of the tall tombstones in that cemetery. I've never been in the Methodist Church that is across the highway from the cemetery. I've been in the big Methodist Church in Cadiz a few times, when they invited all the churches for a Christmas choral singing.

We celebrated my grandson, John-John's birthday on the covered deck at my house. Paula put up a lettered "Happy Birthday" on the inside of the deck ceiling. We keep small colored lights all around the inside of the deck. It was a little chilly when the wind picked up. He turned 20 on Wednesday, May 5th. Paula baked him a chocolate birthday cake and made homemade ice cream. We invited my in-laws, Roger and Marsha Garner, that live next to us, to join in the celebration. They consider John-John to be their grandson too. Their only child, Dale was killed in a car accident 27 years. They also consider my granddaughters, Andrea, 25 and Heather, 24 as their granddaughters, And the feeling is mutual. I have three surrogate granddaughters, Jade, Skyler and Lexie. I've been there, for them, all their young lives. I try to have my stories teach them some lessons. Such as life is not fair or easy at times. The main lesson that I try to teach them is to keep Christ in their lives as a shield against the destructive storms of life.

It is part of the circle of life, that some of my Christian Fraternity Brothers know well. When children become adults, they move away. Andrea lives in Smyrna, Tennessee. Heather lives in Louisville. Their parents become empty-nesters. When grandchildren become adults, their grandparents lose some of the importance and significance they once played in their lives. As I am writing this story, I can hear the familiar whine of the yellow crop-duster's engine, as it dives up and down to spray the freshly planted fields of corn. The ground is so saturated from the recent rain storms, that the hi-boy tractor sprayer cannot get in to spray the fields of corn.

Before John-John's birthday party started, I drove to the Pizza Hut in Murray. This is the type of pizza that he loves. The Pizza Hut in Hopkinsville and in Paris, Tennessee are two economic victims of the Pandemic. I put the four boxes of pizza and one box of bread sticks in the back seat of my car. I wrapped them in a blanket and thermal covering. They remained hot on the trip back to the farm.

Coming up the hill and looking at the old house, I realized that I have been working on the place since 1978. Someday, when Christ calls me home, I won't need my old house anymore. In 1954, Stuart Hamblen wrote the song "This Ole House." The popular song became a hymn. These are some of his lyrics: "This old house once knew my children. This old house once knew my wife. This old house was home and comfort as we fought the storms of life. This old house once rang with laughter. This old house heard many shouts. Now she trembles in the darkness when the lightning' walks about. This old house is a-gettin' shaky. This old house is a-gettin' old. This old house lets in the rain. This old house lets in the cold. Oh my knees are getting' chilly but I feel no fear or pain. 'Cause I see an Angel peekin' through a broken window-pane. Now this old house is afraid of thunder. This old house is afraid of storms. This old house just groans and trembles when the night wind flings it's arms. This old house is a-gettin' feeble. This old house is a-needin' paint. Just like me, it's tuckered out. But I'm getting ready to meet the Saints. Now my old hound dog lies asleepin'. He don't know I'm gonna leave. Else he'd wake up by the fire place and he'd sit there and howl and grieve...".

“Gabriel done brought in my chariot, when the wind blew down the door. Ain’t gonna need this house no longer. Ain’t gonna need this house no more. Ain’t got time to fix the shingles. Ain’t got time to fix the floor. Ain’t got time to oil the hinges nor to mend the window-pane. Ain’t gonna need this house no longer. I’m getting ready to meet the saints...”. If I was a song writer, I would add a few lyrics to the song: This old house lets me do some writin’. This old house porch swing lets me do some swingin’. And this old house lets me do some prayin’. I’ve been given so much grace upon grace upon grace upon grace. I’ve been blessed much, much more than I deserve. Even Shakespeare would be amazed at the number of roles that I’ve played in this life. Christ gets me up every morning with His breath of life. He is mine and I am His. In Christ alone, I stand. I’ll end this story about my old house, that is surrounded by fields of corn, with the words found in Ephesians, Chapter 4, Verses 31-32: “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as God forgave you because of what Christ has done.”

EPILOGUE

This is only the second time that I have used an epilogue in one of my stories. The word epilogue comes from the Greek epilogos which means “conclusion word.” The epilogue originated with Greek playwrights and poets. It served both as a summary of the play’s moral lessons, as well as a wrap up of the characters fates. In my story there are 19 main characters, 15 unnamed Mexican workers, an unknown number of my Christian Fraternity Brothers. One of them, Bob Marko, told me the other evening, that he tried to email me a response to one of my stories, and it came back, un-deliverable. I explained that it was my fault. I should have told everyone that I dropped peoplepc.com. My new email address is johnfhall@yahoo.com. I did not mention the name of widow lady or the pilot flying the crop cluster in the story.

Country singer, Alan Jackson once said, “I’m just a singer of simple songs.” As for me, I’m just a writer of simple stories. I need to recognize and give credit to those that keep me motivated to write in the first place. First is Jesus Christ, for waking me up with a gift of a new day. I thank Mrs. Audrey Lambert and her husband, Mike, for all the work that they do to put my stories on her web page: ajlambert.com. I thank Dr. Natalie Curcio for saving my life from the skin cancer that could have killed me. I thank Dr. Daniel Butler for keeping me alive. He told me, “God keeps you alive, I just do some tinkering. I thank my old college friend and journalist, Mike Herndon. He encourages me to write stories in posterity for my grandchildren. I thank Trish Cunningham for bringing her godchild, Jade Hakes to church 17 years ago. I sat next to Jade for ten years until she moved to Russelleville. She enjoys reading my stories, as does Trish. I became a surrogate grandfather to Skyler and Lexie Crisp at Heritage Christian Academy (HCA) when their dad, Jason was deployed to Iraq. I’m the only grandparent in their life. I have too many Christian Fraternity Brothers to thank that enjoy reading my stories. I wanted my oldest granddaughter, Andrea to read my stories after I was gone. But she asked me to send her one now. One old trick used by William Shakespeare is to use an epilogue in his plays to remind the audience that what they have witnessed was a make-believe world and that it was time for everyone to get back to reality.

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*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>