

## THE OLE PIANO MAN

By John F. Hall

My wife Paula wanted a piano to take lessons. In high school she played a flute in the band. She could read music. Our granddaughters, Andrea and Heather took piano lessons and played at several recitals. They would practice the piano at our old Kentucky home. Now that they are away at college, we just have the memories of their playing on DVDs.

I could only play one tune on the piano with some proficiency. In 1806, Jane Taylor wrote a poem that became a beloved song that just about everyone knows. There are the lyrics to that song: "Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are. Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky. When the blazing sun is gone, when there's nothing shines upon, then show your little light, twinkle, twinkle all the night. Then the traveler in the dark thanks you for your tiny spark; he could not see where to go, if you did not twinkle so. In the dark blue sky you keep, and often through my curtains peep. For you never shut your eye till the sun is in the sky. "Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are."

Jane Taylor, in talking about her poem, said she tried to conjure some child in her presence. I will share a funny story about my granddaughter Andrea and a star that I told her belongs to her. One evening back when Andrea was four years old, we were walking behind my house. I had been doing some painting and left a ladder by an outside wall. I stopped by the ladder and pointed up to the sky. In a kidding manner, I said that the brightest star belongs to her. Andrea looked at that star. She then looked at the ladder and said to me, "Well! Go get it!" I hope some day, when I am gone, that Andrea, Heather, Jade, Lexie and Skyler will believe that they are shining stars.

Mozart composed a set of variations to Jane Taylor's poem for the piano. He might have done this as piano exercises for the music students he was teaching. Andrea and Heather took piano lessons after school. They came to our house on the weekends and continued to practice piano. I had them practice Taylor's song along with the music required by their piano teacher. Today, the lid on the upright piano contains Andrea's and Heather's dance pictures. Through playing the piano, my granddaughters were exposed to classical music and they may develop an appreciation for composers like Bach or Mozart that will stay with them for life.

This is the part of my story when I tell a story within a story. I met a person, many decades ago, who also played the piano. The person is Harold Ray Ragsdale from the small town of Clarksdale, Georgia. He started taking piano lessons at the age of six. One rainy night, when I was in law enforcement, I received a dispatch that a car had flipped over and there were injuries. The car hydroplaned highway 117 south of Hopkinsville. The ambulance arrived about the same time I did. I looked at Mr. Ragsdale driver's license. The man seemed very familiar to me. His passenger, Ron Williams also seemed familiar to me. I told him that he sure looked like Andy William's brother. He just smiled at me and made no comment. They told me that they were returning from

Paducah, Kentucky after seeing a physic. Mr. Ragsdale was hospitalized. It was very early in the morning but I decided to call my long time friend Mike Herndon. I told Mike that I believe this man might be a famous singer. Mike was the editor of the Hopkinsville newspaper. We are graduates of Hopkinsville Community College.

One reason why I was suspicious was that the heavily damaged car was a very expensive Mercedes-Benz. It was one of the most expensive cars in the world at that time. Mike thanked me. That morning he was granted permission to interview Mr. Ragsdale. Mr. Ragsdale is known professionally as Ray Stevens. He is a American country and pop-singer-songwriter and comedian, known for his Grammy-winning recording “Everything is Beautiful” and “The Streak.”

Very few times that I worked the road as a Kentucky State Trooper did I have such interesting encounters with famous people. The other day, I was listening to a song by Lionel Richie titled “Say you, Say Me.” I like what he wrote in verse four of that song, “As we go down life’s lonesome highway, seems the hardest thing to do is to find a friend or two. That helping hand, someone who understands. That when you feel you’ve lost your way, you’ve got some one there to say I’ll show you the way.” Time and time again, I tell those I love to take it to Christ in prayer. He will show you the way, the truth and the life. John 14:6.

When my niece Gabby came to visit, Paula and I took her to the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center in Nashville, Tennessee I asked permission from the hotel’s assistant manager to play a tune on a baby grand piano that was located in the lobby. He told me to make it quick because the piano was only to be used by professional pianists. I was not blessed by the Good Lord with any musical talent. So I sat down and put my hands on the keyboard and played the only tune I knew by heart. About the time I finished playing, a security guard came out of a nearby office. He said I was not allowed to be playing on the piano. So this ole piano player’s career in the Musical City came to a swift end.

\*Read more stories by John F. Hall at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>