

THE PREACHER DOWN THE ROAD

By John F. Hall

I can look out my living room window and write a true story. For more than 43 years, my wife, Paula and I have lived on a small farm located five miles west of Cadiz. Our Antebellum house was built in the winter of 1860-1861. Documents found in a metal box, inside a fire damaged desk, that was stored with hay, in a stock barn, show that construction on the house began in 1860. I thought that was an unusual time of the year to build a house. We just own the house and one acre of land in the middle of a 150-acre farm that once belonged to Paula's grandmother, Ivy Oakley. She lived in the old farm house on Dyers Hill, by herself, until she died in 1977.



Less than one tenth of a mile, down Dyers Hill Road, from our house, lives my great nephew, Corey Harrison. He designed and built his house about seven or eight years ago. Corey went to college and became an architect. The company that he worked for went bankrupt and he was out of work. He helped his grandfather, Grover Oakley, work the farm. He decided to follow God's calling and become a preacher. His grandfather was a deacon at Canton Baptist Church and he ordained Corey. What makes this story unusual is that Corey is deaf.

When Corey was a student at the Hopkinsville Community College, he would see, but did



not talk to a fellow student named Michelle. She is deaf and mute. She does not speak. She trained to become a phlebotomist, which is a technician who draws blood from a patient for a variety of procedures including tests. Corey received a Cochlear Implant (CI) that helps him hear. It is hard for me to understand him. I don't sign. Thanks to Artie Grassman, a voice interpreter, Corey and Michelle linked up and were married. After attending a Deaf Day of Prayer in Louisville, that was attended by deaf pastors from

all denominations, he decided to start a church for deaf people. He learned about Hilldale Baptist Church in Clarksville, Tennessee. It has a deaf ministry and a desire to reach out to the deaf. He met with the church's senior pastor, Dr. Larry Robertson. And in 2011, he established his congregation that became New Life Deaf Church.

In October, 2020, after 40 years of work, an organization in Council Bluffs, Iowa, called Deaf Missions, created a Sign language Bible. Going back into history, Thomas Gallaudet in the 1800s traveled to Europe and met with Laurent Clerc, a deaf instructor of sign language. Together they founded the first American school for the deaf and they established a sign language unique to the United States of America. It was inspired by the French Sign Language and may have been inspired by the signing system of the Great Plains Native Americans.

Corey's grandfather, Grover Oakley lived near the beginning of Dyers Hill Road. His brother, Bruce is one week younger than me. I kid Bruce that he needs to respect his elders like me. Bruce fell in his garage and became disabled. It is the main reason that I built a ramp up my deck so he could come visit his sister, Paula and me. Several years ago, I began to notice that something was wrong with Grover.

One day Grover drove up to my house while my son, John was helping me work on my deck. He had a distant and worried look in his eyes. He asked us if we saw his dad, Andrew Oakley. His dad had died two years earlier. Grover's sister, Marsha Garner, lives next door. I told him to go next door and talk to Marsha. He was standing there, oblivious to reality. I did not want to add to his confusion. I wondered if he remembered who I was? He would drive into town and go into a restaurant. He would be disoriented and not know who he was or where he was going. Someone in the restaurant knew him and they called his wife, Betty, to come get him and take him home. He suffered from senile dementia, also known as Alzheimer's disease. Most people who die from Alzheimer's disease die because of aspiration pneumonia. Two years after driving up to my house, Grover died.

Ryan Tedder, Brent Kutzie and Bryan Willett wrote the song "Preacher." These are some of their lyrics: "When I was a kid I use to sell and buy gravity. I knew how to fly and I could teach you for free. Broke every window in my hotel heart when I was only five years old. The 12 years scarred and I'd hear the same voice echo in my mind. Said 'son you got an angel, to chase the devil at the night.' When I was a kid my grandfather was a preacher. He'd talk about God. Yeah he was something like a teacher. He said, ' God only helps those who learn to help themselves.' He was a million miles from a million dollars but you could never spend his wealth. ..". In James, Chapter 3, Verse 1 are these words: "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly."

Corey and Michelle have two daughters, Lilly age three and Katie age seven. They have perfect hearing and no speech problems. They use Sign Language to communicate with



Corey Harrison, pastor of New Life Deaf Church in Clarksville, is pictured with his family including wife Michelle Harrison (left) and daughters Katie Harrison (standing, front) and Lilly Harrison.

their parents. Lilly reminds me of my granddaughter, Heather. Katie reminds me of my granddaughter, Andrea. From my front porch swing, I can hear Lilly and Katie laughing and talking. I can see them running and playing in their front yard. Andrea and Heather did the same thing in my front yard, along with my grandson, John-John. As they get older, they will ride their bikes up and down Dyers Hill Road, just as my grand children did when they were young.

Corey has a one-man construction and landscaping business called Silent-Pro. My son lets him borrow his siding brake that is used commonly for creating cuts and bends in aluminum sheet metal. Preachers don't make much money with a small congregation.

Corey said that there are three to four million deaf and hard-of-hearing in the United States. Of these, many die everyday without knowing Christ.

Since 1978, about four times a year, I would mail a story that is shared with three churches in far western Kentucky. I share my stories with my Christian Fraternity Brothers, my three surrogate granddaughters, and four extended family members. I try to give Jesus Christ honor and glory in my stories. And it is nice to have a Preacher living down the road.

John F. Hall

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