

SEVERAL DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

By John F. Hall

As the end of 2019 draws near, I decided to write an uplifting story about how I spent part of this year's Christmas. I start each day mainly with a prayer thanking Jesus Christ for those that I love. The synopsis of this story is about having visitors come to my old house on Dyers Hill Road, then going around visiting family and friends in Nashville, Bowling Green and Russellville. The story begins with my visit to granddaughters Skyler and Lexie Crisp a few days before Christmas. I gave each of them a little bag filled with the same kind of treats that I would give them when they were little. While I was there with Skyler and Lexie, I was listening intently to what they were saying. The late Fred Rogers wrote, "More and more I've come to understand that listening is one of the most important things that we can do for one another. Whether the other be an adult or a child, our engagement in listening to who that person is can often be our greatest gift. Whether that person is speaking or playing or dancing, building or singing or painting, if we care, we can listen."

On Christmas Eve, Paula and I served a light meal to my son John Andrew, his wife Lori, granddaughter Andrea and her boyfriend Andrew, grandson John-John, step grandson Cole, my niece Gabby, brother-in-law Roger and sister-in-law Marsha. My granddaughter Heather and her boyfriend Sam had to work and they would drive in from Bowling Green on Christmas Day. I gave the blessing for the meal and thanked God for the food, for those in attendance and for their safe return home. My granddaughter Andrea and her boyfriend Andrew had to return to Nashville that night. So they opened up their gifts after the meal.

On Christmas day, I went to church services. It was unusually warm for a winter's day. Attendance was low. The "snow birds" had long since traveled to Florida. I serve as the senior usher and I open the church door. Several men at the church, with no real advance warning, experienced the death of their spouses year. Several women experience the same thing with the death of their spouses. As I open the door for them, I look into their sad eyes. It was William Shakespeare who once said, "The eyes are the window to your soul." The great Roman philosopher Cicero said, "The face is a picture of the mind as the eyes its interpreter." I'm in the church choir. Tony Thomas is also in the choir. Two weeks ago, he died from a brain tumor. His wife Nancy is in the choir and she came to church that day. She received comfort from all the choir members. It is in praising Jesus Christ that we all receive comfort.

Dr. Jeff Benjamin wrote, "I believe it is a fact that we do not see all that is before us, our eyes ability is limited physically. But our hearts convey the most poignant picture through our eyes. It is not merely a window but a reflection of our state of mind. My eyes are greenish and brightest when I am happy and brown and dull when I am sad. So for me keeping a clear vision, a desire, of what I want in this life to make me happy-will make me see clearer. If you can't see what you want in your mind's eye then what hope do you have of seeing what you want with your physical eyes." Two members of the congregation, Randolph and Andrea Olson told me on the Sunday before Christmas that

they are flying out to California to be with their two grandsons. Such is the magic of Christmas.

On Christmas Day, my son, John Andrew gave my wife, Paula a very big, over sized clock to put on the wall of our covered deck that is still in the process of being completed. The clock reminds me of the proverbial phrase, "Time waits for no man." The phrase means that a person should not procrastinate as time and tide won't wait. It alludes to the fact that human events or concerns cannot stop the passage of time or the movement of the tides.

The phrase first appeared in 1395 in Chaucer's Prologue to the Clerk's Tale. Chaucer uses the Clerk's prologue to explain the techniques to be used in narrating a good story. My granddaughter, Heather and her boyfriend Sam came from Bowling Green for the traditional Christmas supper. We always invite Paula's sister, Marsha and her husband Roger to these events. It was 26 years ago, one week before Christmas, that their son, Dale was killed with six other boys as they were returning from getting snacks at Hilltop Market. Marsha and Roger consider Andrea, Heather and John-John to be their grandchildren too! The feeling is mutual as they give each other gifts. More importantly, they give Marsha and Roger hugs. In situations where a family member is lost, we cherish the memory of their lives. My son and Dale were like brothers. My most vivid memory of Dale has him standing in my front yard when he was nine years old. He was looking down the long road, worried that his parents, who worked at the same factory in Cadiz, were late coming home. I told him not to worry as we both stood there. A recent memory raced across my mind. I remember standing on the HCA gym floor with Lexie Crisp as she introduced me as her grandfather. It is not blood that makes a family member, it is love. This is the message that Jesus Christ wants us to remember. A breeze came across the stillness on that hill. Then a smile came upon Dale's face as his parent's car came into view. Every Christmas, before he died, he would walk the very short distance from his house, to help Paula put Christmas ornaments our tree. Nearly every day he would come over to our house.

The Christmas clock gift is made by the Baldauf Clock Company. That company was



established in 1864, a few years after our old farm house was built. Paula and I still have the Nativity scene that we purchased over 50 years ago. It has the infant Jesus, his mother Mary, and her husband Joseph. It has one shepherd carrying a sheep on his shoulders and two other sheep following him. It has the Magi. It has an oxen and a donkey. There is an Angel above the manger. All these years have passed and there is a figure in the manger,

hiding in plain sight, that I did not pay any attention to. It is a shepherd playing a bagpipe. I first thought that it was not Biblical to have that figure in the manger. All of the figures in the manger are glued to the manger's floor.

Saint Francis of Assisi is credited with creating the first Nativity scene in 1223 at Greccio, central Italy. He did this in an attempt to place the emphasis of Christmas upon the worship of Christ rather than upon secular materialism and gift giving. My mind drifted back to that bagpipe player in my manger. I wonder how I managed to walk past a manger for a half century and not give a second's thought to that shepherd with his bagpipe.

The origins of the bagpipe can be traced back thousands of years to the ancient city of Ur. This is the home of Abraham and ancient Egypt. In both places simple reed pipes have been found that are viewed by scholars as the forerunners of the modern bagpipe. But at what time and by whom the air bag was added is not known. In the book of Daniel written more than 500 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, six Babylonian musical instruments are mentioned in Daniel 3:5, 10 and 15. The specific words as found in Daniel, Chapter 3, Verse 5 are, "That at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltry, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the King has set."

The day after Christmas, I drove my niece, Gabby down to Nashville so she could spend some time with Andrea. I had Andrea and her boyfriend, Andrew meet us at the Bob Evans restaurant located near the Gaylord Opryland hotel. It was evening but we decided to have a breakfast meal.

I told them that when I was a Captain in the Kentucky National Guard, my boss's name was Bob Evans and he always liked to eat in that restaurant. I mention to them that I would say, to my fellow soldiers, "Well! We are going to the Colonel's house to eat." I listened as Gabby told Andrea about her job as a civilian contractor working in the Pentagon in Washington DC. Andrea talked about her job. As I mentioned previously, you can learn a lot just by listening.

A few days after Christmas, I drove to Bowling Green to take my granddaughter, Heather and her boyfriend, Sam out to lunch. The plan was to have Andrea, Andrew and Gabby drive up from Nashville to join us. A few things spoiled that rendezvous. The three got up late and the Christmas Grinch stomach bug made Andrea and Gabby too sick to travel. Sam said that he was just getting over that bug. Heather suggested that we eat at the White Squirrel restaurant. The place has hand painted pictures of squirrels made to look like famous people such as Elvis, Colonel Sanders and others. I ordered meatloaf and mash potatoes. The cook spread the mash potatoes over the plate. The meatloaf was cut into three, one-inch pieces and placed side by side on top of the mash potatoes. It was absolutely, a delicious meal. I took pictures of the art work on the wall. It appeared to me that this establishment was a former car body shop because it still had the manual roll up, glass garage doors. What is truly interesting about this restaurant is that it is closed on Monday. The tables and chairs are moved out and beer brewing equipment is wheeled in. For one day it becomes a microbrewery that makes a small amount of specialty beer.

On my way back to Cadiz, I stopped in Russellville to spend a couple of hours with granddaughter Jade and her parents, Maryann and Bill. They recently moved into a very nice house on a hill. Trish Cunningham had planned to join us, but she was sick and stayed home. My wife, Paula was also sick and she stayed home. Jade gave her boyfriend Hayden a Christmas gift. It was a Lion King game that I had never played. They asked me to join them and play this game. We had problems putting the game together. As I was sitting with Jade and Hayden, my mind drifted back many years ago when I played the game of Monopoly with Andrea and John-John. Sharing time with young people keeps me young at heart. It was my first time to meet Hayden. He seemed to be very level headed. He knows exactly what he wants to do when he graduates from high school. He will be in a Co-op program as a welder this new year. He will earn money in this part time program. I listened to Jade and Hayden talk about things. Jade is wise beyond her years. Sharing time with family and friends is, in itself, a true gift and a precious memory. After pictures and hugs, I drove home.

As a writer, my mind is always busy thinking about my next story. The fact is, I spend more time with my grandson John-John than with any other grandchild. Donald Alan Schiltz and Paul Overstreet wrote the song, "When You Say Nothing At All." That describes John-John. He just wants to be with me. He is not interested in small talk. That is hard for me because I talk too much. So I trained myself to be silent around John-John. Alison Krauss does a magnificent job singing that song. These are some of the lyrics to this song, "It is amazing how you can speak right to my heart. Without saying a word you can light up the dark. Try as I may I could never explain what I hear when you don't say a thing. The smile on your face lets me know that you need me. There's a truth in your eyes saying you'll never leave me. A touch of your hand says you'll catch me if ever I fall. Now you say it best when you say nothing at all. All day long I can hear people talking out loud, but when you hold me near you drown out the crowd. Old Mister Webster could never define what's being said between your heart and mine. Now you say it best when you say nothing at all..."

Clay Harrison wrote a short piece titled, "The Best Gifts of All." he wrote, "There's nothing like Christmas to make us believe it's more blessed to give than it is to receive. The spirit of Christmas is noble and kind, for when we help others we gain peace of mind. Some gifts are expensive and some works of art, but the best gifts of all are gifts from the heart! The gifts we give others define who we are. And our gifts from the heart send blessings afar. There's nothing like Christmas to make us believe. We're more blessed when we give than when we receive!"

I'll end this Christmas story, on the last day of 2019, with a few uplifting words. I am very grateful and very blessed to have such wonderful friends and family. The next time you greet a loved one or a friend, look deeply into their eyes. Give them a lamp into your soul. We are here, on this earth, as expressed in the words of Mark, Chapter 12, Verses 30—31 to, "Love the Lord God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second verse is to, "Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no greater commandments than these." My favorite Psalm is 119:105,

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” Let the light from the window of your soul reflect unto the eyes of those who love and need you.

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