

THE CONCERT

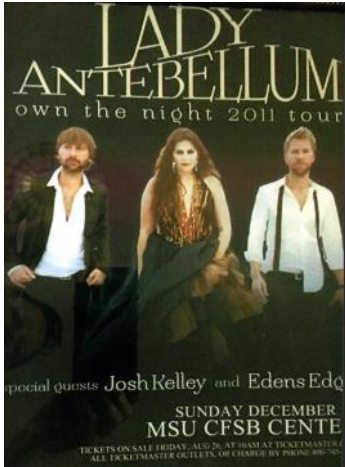
By John F. Hall

Under the staircase in my old Antebellum house, I framed a small advertisement poster from the Lady Antebellum “Own The Night 2011 Tour.” Paula, my son, his kids and I attended the concert at Murray State University. Framing the poster is my way of preserving a memory. I put a picture of that poster with this story. I am a 1970 graduate of Murray State. Our 50th reunion is scheduled for this year. The pandemic may cause the reunion to be canceled.



This is a story about how I was able to travel to and from a different concert, one that I attended by myself, a long, long, time ago. The story revolves around the people that I met before and after the concert. I was 17 at that time. Marie and Donny Osmond sang a popular Song titled “I’m a Little Bit Country, I’m a Little Bit Rock N’ Roll.” Marie likes to sing country, Donny likes to sing Rock and roll. This story is about a rock and roll concert by singer Gene Pitney.

After writing true stories for over 40 years, and being in the twilight of my life, I feel like a cowboy in a picture with his horse. He was off his horse and in a cowboy kneeling position. Looking at the picture, I thought he was praying and thanking the Good Lord for another day out on the range. Before I began writing this story, I felt like I had run out of stories. I’ve been in a dry spell before. It’s as if Christ takes the talent away. I told Lexie Crisp that I would have to ask the Good Lord to help me think about other things to write about. Lexie replied, “I’m sure you will think of more great stories to write.” Even Skyler and Jade encourage me by telling me that they look forward to receiving my stories. They keep this writer young at heart. I’ve been mailing them stories for years. They are my surrogate granddaughters. They give this old cowboy, at heart, a reason to get back on my proverbial horse, and to continue to write stories.



I went down to Nashville in 1963, to see the Gene Pitney concert. At that time, he was a 23-year old upcoming, decent, rock and roll singer and song writer. I wanted to see him sing the song, “The Man Who shot Liberty Valance.” The song was written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David. I was a teenage paratrooper in the 101st Airborne Division at that time. I signed out of my unit on a three-day pass, on Friday afternoon. I had to report back by 7:30 AM, Monday and be in the morning formation. The bus station on Fort Campbell is located about a mile or so from my unit, B Company 327th Infantry. The bus station building is made of concrete blocks. It is still there, but it is vacant. I thumbed a ride from another soldier and he dropped me off at the bus station. Thanks to the Good Lord and the Greyhound bus, I was about to go to my first rock and roll concert. I intended to spend the weekend in Nashville, but all I carried with me was a toothbrush.

I asked the Greyhound bus driver if he would drop me off at the YMCA in downtown Nashville. At that time in 1963, YMCA had a hotel and it charged a few dollars a night for the military to rent a room. I believe that I was given sheets, a pillow and case, a blanket and towels. I had to make my bed and turn in the dirty linen after I checked out. The Gene Pitney concert was scheduled for Saturday night. I checked into the YMCA Hotel Friday night. I paid for two nights. I decided to explore downtown Nashville. I walked by several honky tonk bars. I was too young to buy a drink, but old enough to die for my county. I noticed several people running. I thought there might have been an accident. So I ran after them. They went into a building that looked like a big church. It was the Ryman Auditorium. It is also known as the Grand Ole Opry House and Union Gospel Tabernacle. It has a seating capacity of 2,262

Next to the auditorium was a single engine fire station. A man in a fireman's uniform was sitting outside as I came by. He asked me a question, "Son! Have you ever been to the Grand Ole Opry?" I stopped and looked at the fireman. To be honest, at that time in my life, I never heard of the Grand Ole Opry. I said, "No! Sir." The fireman asked me a second question, "Son, would you like to go?" I replied, "How much does it cost?" I had just enough money to buy a Gene Pitney Concert ticket, pay for the hotel room, buy meals, and have enough money left over for a bus ticket back to Fort Campbell. The fireman said, "Son, it won't cost you anything. Just follow me."

I followed the fireman into the fire station, then out a back door, and then into a side door into the auditorium. We went up some stairs that lead to the back stage of the Opry. The performers and their assistance were all in a hurry. The stage director was directing some performers into small dressing rooms. The big country performers had their names on the VIP rooms. No one paid any attention to me, I guess because I was with the fireman. They might have thought that I was the fireman's son. He turned to me and said, "Now son, you walk down those steps and find you a seat. Enjoy the show!" I said, "Thank you, Sir" The fireman just smiled. Country music was new to me. I was in Nashville for a rock and roll concert. Now I found my self sitting close to the stage. I became intrigued by the country music performers.

I stayed for the entire show. Artist like Roy Acuff, Don Gibson, Jim Reeves, Jim Ed Brown and Minnie Pearl were some of the performers at the Opry that night. I did not know who they were and they certainly did not know me. The fireman, that let me watch the show for free, had gone home for the night. I wondered if that fireman might have had a son that died and I reminded him of his son? There is a lot of loneliness in this world.

I walked back to my room at the YMCA. I was looking forward to going to the Gene Pitney Concert. Saturday morning came and I slept until almost noon. I walked to the concert that I believe was held in the former city convention center. I could feel the loud energy when I walked into the center. When Gene Pitney came on stage, the teenage girls went crazy and started screaming his name. Thankfully, most of them stopped screaming when he began to sing. Then he began to sing the words that I wanted to hear: "When Liberty Valance rode to town the womenfolk would hide, they'd hide. When Liberty Valance walked around, the men would step aside. "Cause the point of a gun was the

only law that Liberty understood. When it came to shooting straight and fast, he was mighty good. From out of the East a stranger came, a law book in his hand, a man, the kind of a man the West would need to tame a troubled land. Many a man would face his gun and many a man would fall. The man who shot Liberty Valance, he shot-Liberty Valance, he was the bravest of them all. The love of a girl can make a man stay on when he should go, stay on. Just building a peaceful life where love is free to grow. But the point of a gun was the only law that Liberty understood. When the final showdown came at last, a law book was no good. Alone and afraid, she prayed that he'd return that fateful night, oh that night. When nothing she said could keep her man from going out to fight. From the moment a girl gets to be full grown, the very first thing she learns, when two men go out to face each other, only one returns. Everyone heard two shots ring out. One shot made Liberty fall. The man who shot Liberty Valance, he was the bravest of them all..."

After the concert, I walked back to my room in the YMCA. I felt the money that I spent for concert was worth it. Songs have always been a part of my life. I use song lyrics in my stories to enhance the theme of the story. I overslept the next day. I don't recall if I spent too much money at the concert or I missed the bus. What ever the reason, I decided to hitch-hike a ride back to Fort Campbell. This is something that I don't recommend anyone do, regardless of their age. There is too much evil in the world today.

I was given a ride by a farmer going north on Highway 41. He said that he was only going about 20 miles. I told him that 20 miles was closer to my destination. After 30 minutes, he stopped his pickup truck on the side of the road at a four-way intersection. He said, "this is as far as I can take you on this road. I'm turning right here to go to my farm." I said to the farmer, "Thank you for the lift. Can you tell me how many miles is it to Fort Campbell?" The farmer had a look of concern come over his face. He said, "Oh son, you are on the wrong road! This is Highway 41 and you need to be on Highway 41-A. I got this sickening feeling in my stomach, that I had messed up. But I was usually good at making a quick recovery from a pending disaster.

I asked the farmer how could I get over to Highway 41-A. The farmer said, "Go take that road to your left. It's over ten miles to 41-A and there are not many cars that use that farm road." It was late in the day. I thanked the farmer and began walking down that road. It was paved and not much wider than a one-lane road. It had no painted white lines on the edges of the road. It was getting dark and there was no moon. I did not have a flashlight or any thing to drink. I needed to be on Highway 41-A by 5:30 AM to have enough time to thumb a ride to Fort Campbell. The road had an unreal number of curves. I would pace myself by walking, then running. I think the farmer gave me the distance to 41-A by how the crow would fly. The road would go south, then north, and then west. My night vision was slowly kicking in, but it was getting really dark. I began to run and I almost ran off the road. I did want to be counted as "absent without leave" (AWOL). Even walking on a road, in near total darkness, except for some faint star light, is difficult and a little spooky. It reminded me of the movie, "The Wizard of Oz." Dorothy, the Scarecrow, and the Tin-man were on the Yellow Brick Road in a dark forest. They began to sing: "Lions

and tigers and bears, oh my!” But I felt no fear, even in almost total darkness. I felt that Christ was with me. He has never given up on me.

In 1670, a man named Blaise Pascal in his *Pensee* (a thought or reflection put into literary form), wrote, “we shall all die alone.” I pity Blaise. He was such a lost soul and a fool. No one dies alone. Regardless if family or friends are present, Jesus Christ will always be there, for each of us, when our time on earth has run out. Blaise was searching for the truth and he failed to read John 14:6, Jesus answered, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”

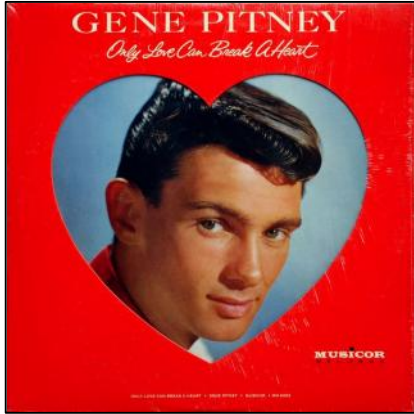
By the time I reached Highway 41-A, I was totally exhausted and about to pass out. Just a few minutes after I raised my thumb into the air, a car came to a screeching stop. I ran as fast as I could to the front passenger side door. It was a soldier from the 502nd, across the street from my unit. I guess he recognized me. I was going to make it to the morning formation on time. The soldier let me out at my unit. I ran up the steps to the third floor and put on my uniform. I did not bother to tie the laces on my jump boots. I ran down the stairs and got into the platoon formation. My squad leader looked at me and smiled. Then he uttered the words that were music to my ears,” All present and accounted for, platoon sergeant.” After the formation, I tied the laces on my jump boots and went to the orderly room to sign in. Word came down that the company would practice loading equipment on flatbed railroad cars. The railroad tracks are just east of the unit. We were told that outside training classes would be held on the bleachers by the railroad tracks. I could not keep my eyes open. I got under the bleachers and just passed out from exhaustion.

My Christian Brother, Frank Raber, told me that I write stories like Louis L'Amour. Several of L'Amour's novels were made into movies. Like most small kids, I played cowboy and Indians. My first job, at \$.25 cents an hour, was using a hay rake to clean out horse manure at a county fair, when I was 12 years old. I liked riding horses. I once feed cattle and mended barbwire fences on the farm where I now live. I some times wonder, if I had been born back in the frontier days, if I might have been a cowboy? The song that Gene Pitney sang at the concert, “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,” was made into a movie by that name. It starred John Wayne, Lee Marvin, and James Stuart.

Audrey Lambert puts my stories on her web page (ajlambert.com). I hope typing this long story does not wear her out. I mainly mail these stories to Jade, Skyler and Lexie. I want to leave something for my adult grand children to read when I am gone. Since I am using a cowboy theme, I'll end this story with the lyrics to a song written by Toby Keith titled, “Should've Been a Cowboy.” These are some of his lyrics: “I bet you never heard ol' Marshall Dillon say Miss Kitty, have you ever thought of runnin' away? Settlin' down, would you marry me if I asked you twice and begged, pretty please? She'd have said, “Yes”, in a New York minute. They never tied the knot, his heart wasn't in it. He just stole a kiss as he rode away. He never hung his hat at Miss Kitty's place. I should've been a cowboy. I should've learned to rope and ride. Wearin' my six-shooter, ridin my pony on a cattle drive. Stealin' the Young girls' hearts just like Gene and Roy. Singing those campfire songs. Woah, I should've been a cowboy. I might have had a sidekick with a funny name. Runnin' wild through the hills chasin' Jesse James. Ending up on the brink of

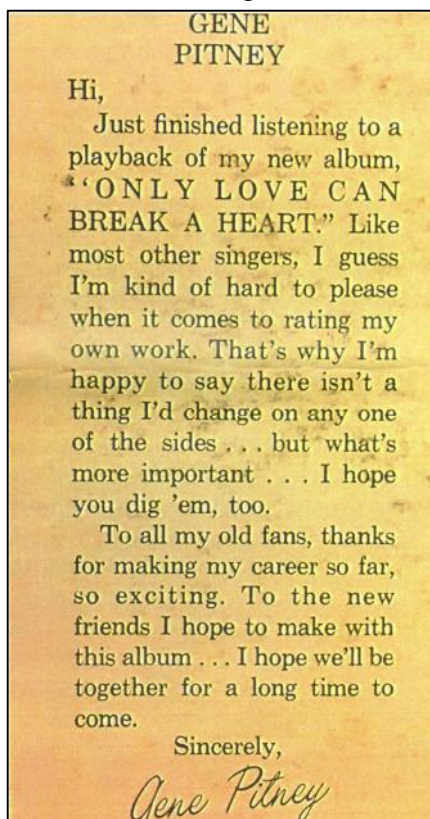
danger. Ridin' shotgun with the Texas Rangers. Go West young man, haven't you been told? California's full of whiskey, woman and gold. Sleepin' out all night beneath the desert stars with a dream in my eye and a prayer in my heart..."

I drove to Fort Campbell to pick up medicine for Paula. And then I drove to Hopkinsville



to pick up a few things. I went to Walgreens Pharmacy to make hard copies of four pictures to use in this story. I was concerned about editing a picture that contained a statement made by Gene Pitney on the back of his "Only Love Can Break a Heart" album. I asked the photo lab lady to assist me on that picture and a picture of the front cover of the album. It was a large facial picture of Gene Pitney. She asked me a question. I had on the mandated facial mask, my white Stetson hat, dress pants and dress shirt, and a formal vest. About all this lady could see was my eyes. She asked, "Is that you?" I smiled and said, "Thank you, but the picture is not me." She thought I was Gene Pitney. I used that picture and a picture of the album by my record player in this story. As Roy Rogers and Dale Evens would sing, "Happy trails to you until we meet again."

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