

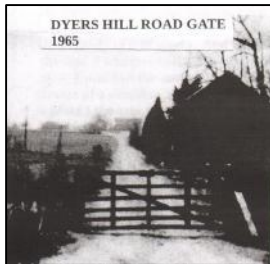
## COUNTRY, KENTUCKY, AND WINTER STORIES

By John F. Hall

There is usually a bitter cold winter wind that blows up Dyers Hill and slams into my old Antebellum house that sits on top of Dyers Hill. It is a blessing when the wind is calm, and I can walk out my front door, to my mail box, and not catch a death of cold." That is an expression from the 1600's. It is not meant to be taken literally as a warning of impending death, but is most likely a variant of "to catch a cold." The main things that reminds me, that time waits for no one, are the towering cedar trees along the west side of Dyers Hill Road. My nephew, Corey Harrison trimmed the cedar branches below the height of ten feet. He plans to erect a fence so that his daughter, Katie can keep her horse in the pasture next to their house. Yesterday, I heard the sound of a bucket truck, that needed a new muffler, stop in front of my house. My wife, Paula said that two men wearing bright yellow reflective vests were in the truck. I believe that Corey asked them to trim additional cedar tree branches that he could not reach.



My mind drifted back to 1965, when those tall, majestic cedar trees were less than five feet tall, and growing all along the fence row. I was tending my father-in-law's cattle. I thinned out all of the cedar trees, with the exception of one cedar tree, every 15 feet apart, to help support the barbed wire fence posts. These posts had dry rotted at their base, and they could barely keep the cattle in the pasture, and off the dirt farm road. I came across a picture that I took in 1965, of a wide wooden gate, that once existed at the entrance of Dyers Hill Road. In that picture, you can barely see my old house on Dyers Hill. At that time, the road was a private drive way. Looking at that picture, I remembered during a 1978 January snow storm, that I moved my wife and son, John Andrew, up that dirt road and into that dilapidated old farm house. We worked, one room at a time, year after year, to turn it into home that we have been blessed to live in these past 46 years. '



In writing this story, I came across a poem called, "Bless the Winter," in the Kentucky Farm Bureau Magazine. It does not credit an author. These are the words of encouragement found in that Poem: "As I stepped out into the chill of an early winter morn, I was taken back, at first, by the bite of cold air. I shivered as though I was feeling the brisk breeze for the first time and the frosty feeling that now surrounded me. I wrapped my arms closely to my chest as if to drape a blanket around me, trying desperately to stay warm. And in that moment, I paused to see a full moon giving way to the sun. I was mesmerized by what stars were still visible, twinkling as if they were brand new. I watched the steam rise gently from a nearby stream, and observed the familiar aroma of a neighbor's wood stove flame. Suddenly I'm transported to a simpler time; to a place I thought was lost in my mind, and to a time when life's clock ran slower. And as quickly as the winter wind had engulfed me, the warmth within me took over my senses leaving me at peace and with a taste of the past. Bless the winter."

My favorite writer is Jesse Stuart. He is a writer from eastern Kentucky. Years ago, after giving a Speech at Murray State University, Jesse Stuart suffered a heart attack. He was rushed to the Murray Hospital. He was so impressed with the medical treatment, that saved his life, that he donated his papers covering the period 1930 to 1982, to Murray State University. The Jesse Stuart Collection can be found in the Pogue Library on campus. Jesse and I experienced similar life threatening events in Murray. He suffered a heart attack. I suffered congestive heart failure, kidney failure, and lung failure. And by the grace of God, the hospital was able to keep us alive. We were both laid flat on our backs, contemplating our encounter with mortality. My wife, Paula and my son, John Andrew both believed that I was dying.



Once I was stabilized, I was transported by ambulance to Baptist Health Hospital in Paducah, Kentucky. After spending two weeks, under the care of a four-doctor team, a discharge nurse came to the side of my hospital bed. She looked at me and said: “Mr. Hall, you almost died. If you had not gone to the emergency room at the Murray hospital, within an hour, you would be dead.” Jesse Stuart wrote his memoir and called it, “The Year of My Rebirth. It begins in Murray, goes on to his recovery in the local hospital, and then chronicles his readjustment to a sedentary life at home where he heals from a serious heart attack. I liked the cover of his memoir book. It has his picture with the words, “No Visitors, Doctors Orders.” As I am ever so slowly regaining my health, I don’t want overnight visitors either. They require attention to their needs, and my wife is not well, or able to entertain them. Jesse’s book is still relevant to Kentucky readers.

Jesse Stuart and I are so much alike in our feelings for Kentucky. He wrote, “Kentucky is My Land.” These are some of his words: “Kentucky is my land. It is a place beneath the wind and sun in the very heart of America. It is bounded on the east, north, and west by rivers and on the south by mountains. Only one boundary line is not a natural one, it is a portion of southern boundary that runs westward from the mountains across the lowlands to the Mississippi. Within these natural boundaries is Kentucky, shaped like a mouldboard on a hillside turning plow. Kentucky is neither southern, northern, eastern, nor western, it is the core of America. If the United States can be called a body, Kentucky can be called its heart. I didn’t have any choices as to where I was born, but if I had had my choice, I would have chosen Kentucky. And if I could have chosen wind to breathe, I would have chosen Kentucky wind. With the scent of cedar, pine tree needles, green tobacco leaves, pawpaw, persimmon, and sassafras. I would have chosen too, wind from the sawbriar and greenbriar blossoms.”

Like Jesse, I know the scent of cedar, green tobacco leaves and sassafras trees. When I was 20 years old, I remember driving a small International 240 tractor, pulling a 12-foot wide disk, behind my father-in-law’s house in Golden Pond. I nicked the tail of a copperhead snake and made it angry. As I was coming back to where I hit the snake, it was coming back towards me. I put the tractor in neutral, got off the tractor, and ran to the house to get a 22-caliber rifle. When I came back to the tractor, the snake was circling it, looking for me. I threw dirt clogs at the snake to make it move away from the tractor. Then I put twenty two bullets into that snake before it finally died.

I grew one acre of burley tobacco on the farm where I live, as part of my son's FFA project. We hung it in the stock barn next to my house. We stripped the leaves into grades and sold the baled tobacco at one of the tobacco warehouses in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. I cut down cedar and sassafras trees on the farm where I live. I bush bogged (mowed) the pasture fields in front of my house. I put a tractor radio on the large International tractor that I was using to bush hog the fields. One day, a friend asked me if I would bush hog a field a few miles from where I lived. As I was backing up, in that field, I ran over a very large yellow jacket nest. It seemed like I made few thousands of them very angry. I put the tractor in low gear and froze. The only thing moving was the tractor wheels. The yellow jackets were attacking the wheels. I kept saying to myself: "I am a tractor, I am a tractor." I moved away from nest, and never one sting. Had I panicked, and jumped off the tractor, the jackets might have stung me enough to kill me. I had an affinity for my father-in-laws cattle that I once cared for and fed. I could call them up, in the winter months, and they would come a runnin'. They were like big pets to me. I fed them out of a four-wheel drive, beat-up old Chevrolet truck. I'd throw out ears of field corn and hay out of the bed of the truck. I had this one special cow that would come over to the truck for me to give it an ear of corn. It would take it out of my hand. In the frigid winter months, I would drive down to the pond, and use a five pound sledge hammer to break up the ice on the edge of the pond, so that the cattle could drink the pond water.

Jesse Stuart and I were both teachers. I taught night management and law enforcement courses for the Hopkinsville Community College. But the Army Reserve had me on active duty 100 to 150 days a year in the late 1980s. So my days of being an instructor were short lived. Jesse Stuart wrote so elegantly of his native Kentucky hills in his 2,000 poems, 60 books, novels, children's books, and especially in his 460 short stories. He was one of America's leading writers. In 1982, he suffered a stroke, and he spent the last two years of his life in a coma. He died February 17, 1984, at the age of 77. In that year, I was the Company Commander of the 614th Military Police Company, Kentucky Army National Guard, in Murray, Kentucky. I had 169 soldiers under my command. I was also working full time as a Kentucky State Police (KSP) Trooper, and helping the Trigg County Historical Society with its first history book.

In this story, I put two pictures of Jesse Stuart. I put a picture of the KSP's 75 Anniversary book, and a picture of me that can be found in that book. The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division Association compiled a vocal military history of its members. I submitted a picture when I was an 18 year old paratrooper. I put a picture of my American Legion Post 74 membership card. The Association's Screaming Eagle Magazine, because of the sky high printing and postage cost, will only be digital in 2024. My readers like to see pictures with my stories. Thanks to Mrs. Audrey Lambert, my stories are on her web page (History John F. Hall Stories [ajlambert.com](http://www.ajlambert.com)). They are free to copy. Christ has been good to me, His grace and His inspiration has sustained me, as a writer, for the past 45 years.



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