

## THE DINNER BELL, THE WISHING WELL, AND THE WALLS

By John F. Hall

My son, John Andrew decided to build wooden wishing wells for a profit. I told him that I would like one for my front yard. I asked my wife, Paula where she wanted the wishing



well to be placed. She said that she would like it placed the same distance across the sidewalk, from the dinner bell in our front yard. She said that it would be readily seen by people coming up the road to our house. My son finished applying a final stain on the wishing well, at his house. He put the wishing well on his small trailer and drove it over to my house. The Wishing well weighs approximately 71 pounds. I told my son to drive across my front yard and to stop the trailer near where I wanted the wishing well. He used a tape, to measure the distance from the red dinner bell, to the center of where the

wishing well would be placed. He put a twig in the grass to mark the center where the wishing well would be placed. He walked over to the stock barn, to get one of his fire slates, that he stored there. The heavy slate is four inches thick and it will keep the wooden wishing well off the ground.

There is an antique dinner bell in my front yard. The dinner bell was originally black and



it was located on the east side of the house. I decided that it would look better in front of the house. Dinner bells date back to the beginning of the twentieth century. The farm bell ringing at noon would signify dinner time. The bell was mounted on a post. It was usually located outside of the kitchen door. It was rung for meals, to make notification of bad weather, to call others in case of a fire, to notify others in case of a serious home injury, to make a death notification, and to bring in the new year. My grandchildren, Andrea, Heather, and John-John, when they were little, liked to ring the bell. As to the age of the iron dinner bell, because my farm

house was built in 1861, I would venture a guess that it is at least 162 years old. The asking price for a similar antique dinner bell is \$1,800 to \$3,000. But the nostalgic value is priceless. To my grandchildren, this is old house is their old home place, where they grew up. It is where they sat at the large dinner table for birthdays, holidays, and family meals. It's where they practiced their piano lessons, and had sleep-overs with their friends from school.

There is a Roman-British-Celtic mythology about the wishing well. Some people believed that the guardians or dwellers of the well would grant them a wish if they paid a price. After uttering a wish, one would drop coins in the well. The wish would be granted "by the guardian or dweller, based upon how the coin would land at the bottom of the well. If the coin landed face up, the guardian of the well would grant the wish. If the coin landed tails up, the wish would be ignored. This European folklore idea, that a wish would be granted, came from the notion that water housed deities or had been placed

there by the gods. This practice is thought to have risen because water is a source of life, and was often a scarce commodity.

Andrew Blakemore wrote a poem called, "The Wishing Well." These are his words: "At the bottom of the wishing well a penny lies in the water, dropped there by a little girl, a soldier's only daughter, who wished her dad's safe return as he marched off to war...". "Her tiny heart was broken by a letter through the door. Informing he was missing and presuming he was dead. No words could hurt more deeply than those few words that it said. Her mother than just cried and cried, the little girl did too. She ran back to the well because her wish did not come true. She asked it why it didn't grant the wish that she did make. 'You cannot be a wishing well, you're nothing but a fake!' Her plea remained unanswered, then a voice came from below, and from the gloom a face appeared which smiled and said: 'Hello.' The vision was her father, and his vision was so clear. 'Please dry those tears for I've come back, don't weep for me my dear.' The little girl began to smile, 'Dear father it is you!' Oh thank you, thank you, wishing well, you've made my wish come true."

Paula Swanson wrote the poem, "The Old Dinner Bell." I decided that the old dinner bell, and the hook holding it up, needed a fresh coat of red paint. The dinner bell is on a cedar post about 20 feet in front of my front porch swing. When I sit on the swing, I have a View of the corn fields in front of the house. The recent rains have made the corn a bright green, and growing, oh so tall. Every time I drive to and from my old farm house, it's the dinner bell that I see. These are Paula Swanson's words: "The dinner bell sits silently on its hook, calls to meals no more. My grandmother's bell rang every night; we came running. Sunday, always fried chicken, Wednesday, was a large pot roast, Friday, pork chops, I lived for those days, my favorite three meals. Ran fast on those days, wash your hands and face. Sit down so we can say grace. Pass the potatoes, those days stay with me. I sometimes ring the old bell, just because I can." Being the man of the house, I'm the primary grace giver. I should be using the standard go-to blessing: "Lord bless this food to the nourishment of our bodies and us to your service, in Jesus' name, Amen." But as my family will tell you, I don't end my grace by saying: "Amen." I say: "Grace is said, the hog is dead, let's eat." I say that, in jest, because the dinning room, before it was turned into something out of a magazine, was where, one hundred years ago, they cut up hogs to make sausage.

Standing in the foyer of my old house, I like to look at all the family pictures mounted on the walls. One thing that I wanted to remain the same, when my wife, Paula and I renovated, the house, was the foyer. I put my son's pictures behind the top window panes over the front door, in the foyer. Before the front porch portico was removed, to make a full front porch, one could see sunlight through those top window panes. The only jewel of the old farm house is the foyer and the staircase to the second floor. Looking out the four window panes on the left side of the front door, one can see the red dinner bell. Looking out the window panes on the right Side of the front door, one can see the wishing well.

There is a secret behind one of the pictures in the foyer that only one other person knows. I would not be much of a story writer if I gave away that secret. Someday, that other person may tell. For the past 45 years, I've been blessed to have been given the grace, inspiration, and talent, by Jesus Christ, to write nonfiction stories, and to preserve an old house that has been a home to six. other families.

Back in the day, Amy Grant wrote the song, "If These Walls Could Speak." These are some of her lyrics: "If these old walls, if these old walls could speak of the things they remember well, stories and faces dearly held, a couple in love livin week to week, rooms full of laughter, if these walls could speak. If these old halls, if hallowed halls could talk, these would have a tale to tell of sun going down and dinner bell, and children playing hide and seek from floor to rafter, if these halls could speak. They would tell you that I'm sorry for be in cold and blind and weak. They would tell you that's only that I have a stubborn streak, if these walls could speak. If these old window panes were eyes, I guess they would have seen it all, each little tear, and sigh and footfall, and every dream we came to seek or followed after, if these walls could speak. They would tell you that I owe you more than I could ever pay. Here's someone who really loves you; don't ever go away. That's what these walls would say..."

I heard a tractor coming up the road. I went out to the second floor foyer window and looked out. The county road department was bush hogging the sides of Dyers Hill Road leading up to my house. The red tractor has air conditioning, so the operator was very comfortable. Today is June 30". Yesterday, Paula and I went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky to get new military retired ID cards. It was also my 78th birthday. We then went to the Town Center Pharmacy, around the corner from the Soldier's Center, where we were issued the new ID cards, to pick up our medications. I sometimes ponder how it was so long ago, when I first arrive on Fort Campbell as a 17 year old foolish, and fearless paratrooper. Paula worked as a DOD civilian for 35 years, and retired from the Fort Campbell Army hospital.



I took a picture of the freshly painted red dinner bell, and the wishing well. I had previously taken a picture of John-John, Heather, and Andrea in front of the wishing well. My son, John asked me to have a picture taken of John-John, me and him, in the foyer. I think that my son's wife, Lori took the picture. My son had a birthday cake made for me at Hancock's Neighborhood Market. He told them to put "Happy Birthday Verne" on the cake. It's a nickname that we call each other. I guess it was something that Dru and the others at the store did not know. John came to my house with Lori, after she got off work at the Murray Hospital, and we called Marsh and Roger Gamer to come celebrate my birthday with cake and ice cream. My brother—in-law, Bruce Oakley texted and wished me happy birthday as did John-John, Andrea, Heather, Jade and Trish. Audrey Lambert

mailed me a card and a gift. Marsh Garner gave me a gift. Maria Bruzewski also mailed me a birthday card. I write all of this because birthdays are special.

I need to end this story about the dinner bell, the wishing well, and the walls, with a reminder that each day of life is a gift. And that it is important to stay connected with family and friends. Start each day with a prayer, and end each day with a prayer.

John F. Hall

\*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:  
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