

FOREVER, IN MY HEART

By John F. Hall

My oldest granddaughter, Andrea mailed me a birthday card for my 79th birthday. Inside the card she wrote: “An-Father, when you can, I want you to write a story about your



favorite memory with me, or one that stands out to you. No rush, I know you are down in your back pretty bad.” As I do, in most of my life stories, I define the topic. Andrea wants me to write a story about my favorite memory with her. So I ponder, what makes a favorite memory? One definition of a favorite memory is, “an adventure that leaves a lasting impression.” I have so many beautiful memories of the times that I spent with Andrea throughout her childhood, adolescence, and growing up. So many of the people who enjoy and read my stories, have never met Andrea. For those readers, that have not met Andrea, and in the way of an introduction, I will include several short stories, that revolve around my favorite memory of Andrea with me. My wife,

Paula and I thought that we would not have grandchildren. And, all that we expected, from our only child, John, was some grand dogs. So Andrea coming into this world, was a blessing. I don’t know how to express it, other than to say that Andrea got a hold of my heart.

The first short story is about the time that I would drive Andrea to kindergarten at Heritage Christ Academy (HCA) in Hopkinsville. One public elementary school in Hopkinsville had a first grade teacher that lied to us. She told Paula that our son ' could read and that he was doing just fine. She retired that year. At a parent teacher conference the next year, John’s second grade teacher, told Paula that John could not read. I paid to have him tutored. As they were constructing HCA, on the bypass, I went over and I asked the Headmaster, one question: “How fast can you teach Andrea to read in kindergarten?” He told me that they just hired Tara Felts, a recent graduate of Murray State University. Mrs. Felts had completed a special reading program, and she could have Andrea reading in six months. I told Andrea’s parents that I would drive Andrea to HCA, and I would pay for her tuition, if they would give their permission to let her attend that Christian school.

The second short story is about the American flag. As I was driving Andrea to HCA, she



always wanted me to drive over and look at a very large American flag. The flag was at the Wildcat Chevrolet dealership, on the east side of Cadiz, Kentucky. Andrea was amazed at the size of the stars and stripes on that flag. Then I would continue to drive to Hoptown, as the locals called Hopkinsville. Andrea would say: “let’s sing kiss an angel good morning.” So I would put a CD in the CD/radio in my 1984, Oldsmobile 442. That was one mean muscle car. Andrea was tall enough to buckle up in front seat next to me. She felt like she was in heaven, as we sang along with country singer, Charlie Pride.

I don't know the number of times that Andrea and I sang, "Kiss An Angel Good Morning." The song was written by Ben Peters. These are some of his lyrics: "When ever I chance to meet some old friends on the street, they wonder how does a man get to be this way? I've always got a smiling face, any time and any place, I just smile and say, you've got to kiss an angel good mornin' and let her know that you think about her when your gone. Kiss an angel good mornin', and love her like a devil when you get back home. Well, people may fry to guess the secret of happiness, but some of them never learn, it's a simple thing. The secret I'm speaking of is a woman and a man in love, and the answer is in the song I always sing. You've got to kiss an angel good mornin', and let her know you think about her when you're gone. Kiss an angel good mornin', and love her like the devil when you get back home..."

After I let Andrea out at HCA, I would drive over to the Kentucky Revenue office. It is located about a half mile from Walmart, on the west side of the Pennyryle Parkway. I kept that job for seven years, and retired at the age of 62. I would mainly do sales tax returns for the public, and electronically, file their state and federal income taxes. One gentleman, from the local Social Security office, told me that if I waited until I was 70 to start drawing, that the average person would draw 17 checks, before they died. I was the first person in the office to go to lunch. I would drive back to HCA, and eat lunch with Andrea. In her classroom, I would sit on a tiny plastic chair, at a tiny table, with Andrea and seven of her kindergarten classmates. They had their lunch containers, and I had my sac lunch. Andrea would tell her classmates that I was her grandfather and she calls me, "An-Father." Soon, nearly everyone at HCA started calling me An-Father.

Andrea's classmates thought it was neat, to have her grandfather eat lunch with them. I promised Andrea that I would eat lunch with her every school day, that I was not out of the office doing a sales tax audit, or out of town on Army Reserve duty. I kept that promise for nearly 10 years. After eating lunch with Andrea, I would return to the Revenue office. Andrea heard that country music singer, Charlie Pride was having a concert at the Executive Inn in Owensboro, Kentucky. It amazed me that a five-year-old kindergartner would want to see Charlie Pride perform in person. Andrea asked me if I would take her to the Charlie Pride Concert. I asked Heather, Andrea's younger sister, if she wanted to go. Heather did not care about country music and she said, "No." Andrea's little brother, John- John, just liked Thomas The Train cartoons. He was shy in a group setting, and even in Chapel at HCA, he would look down, with his hands in his pants pocket, and not sing a note. I ordered the tickets for Andrea, my wife Paula, and for myself. Usually, at the end of concerts, VIPs would be taken back to meet the singer. I was no VIP, and I planned to drive home, as soon as the concert was over.

The day of the Charlie Pride Concert arrived. I drove up to Owensboro with Paula and Andrea. I arrived early to get a front row seat for Andrea. I observed what I thought was a security person for Charlie Pride. I showed him my retired Kentucky State Police identification. I asked him to tell Charlie that a five-year-old fan would like to meet him. I pointed to Andrea sitting on the front row with Paula. The security person said that he would tell Charlie Pride. About 10 minutes later, the security man came out and said that



Charlie would like to meet this five- year-old fan. Paula said that she wanted to stay back, to keep our front row seats. Andrea and I followed the security person to Charlie Pride's dressing room. Charlie smiled and he talked to Andrea like she was one of his grandchildren. He was surprised that a five-year old was such a fan. The security person took a picture of Charlie Pride with Andrea and me. Charlie gave Andrea a little hug. Andrea told me that she loves that picture.

Andrea never forgot that a famous singer gave her a few minutes of his time to meet her. That moment in time became my favorite memory. I was able to grant Andrea's wish to let her see Charlie sing. In my stories, I like to put pictures of other beautiful memories in time, along with short stories. When Andrea's parents would bring her to our house, and Paula would open the front door, Andrea would run around her, to get to me. She had a favorite doll. She would talk to that doll, and say over and over again: "Babydoll, babydoll, babydoll." So I gave Andrea the nickname of Babydoll. Andrea and I would sit in my front porch swing, and I would whistle to the birds, high up in the maple trees. They would whistle back, and Andrea thought I could understand what the birds were saying.

Kenneth Loggins, David Foster, and Eva Ein Loggins wrote the song, "Forever." These are their lyrics: "Now, while we're here alone, and all is said and done; now I can let you know, because of all you've Shown. I've grown enough to tell you, you'll always be inside of me. How many years have gone by? So many words words left unspoken, I need you by my side, if only to hold you. Forever in my heart forever we will be. And even when I'm gone, you'll be here in me. Forever. Once, I dreamed that you were gone. I cried out trying to find you. I begged the dream to fade away, and please awaken me. But night took a hold of my heart, and left me with no one to follow. The love that I lost to the dark, I'll always remember. Forever in my heart. Forever here you'll be. Know that when I'm gone, you'll be near to me. Forever in my life, always thought I'd be, I'd be yours. Forever."

I'll end this story with three lyrics from a song written by Mark Sanders and Tia Sellers called, "I Hope You Dance." These are those three lyrics: "I hope you never lose your sense of wonder...May you never take one single breath for granted... Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance.. .".

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

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