

GENE AND GEORGE AND OTHER COUNTRY STORIES

John F. Hall

Many years ago, my wife, Paula and I went to a Marie Osmond country music concert in Owensboro, Kentucky. One of the songs that she sang was written by Martin J. Cooper. She usually sings the song with her brother,



Donny Osmond. He was not there for that concert. I believe a member of her band sang Donny's part of that song. The name of the song is, "I'm a Little Bit Country, a Little Bit Rock 'n' Roll. These are a few of Martin J. Cooper's lyrics: "I'm a little bit country, and I'm a little bit rock 'n' roll. I'm a little bit Memphis and Nashville, with a little bit of Motown in my soul. I don't know if it's good or bad, but I know I love it so. I'm a little bit country, I'm a little bit rock 'n' roll...".

The day before my great niece, Katie Harrison celebrated her ninth birthday, I drove down to her house, which is a "arrow's flight," from my house. She was sitting in a Kawasaki four-wheeler with her younger sister, Lilly, and two of Katie's school friends. As I got out of my car, a tiny dog ran up to me. I petted the dog and it turned over on its back. It wanted me to rub its stomach. I picked it up and walked up to the front steps as Katie's mom, Michelle came out the front door. I handed her the little dog and two envelopes. On the first envelope, I had written Katie's name. It contained a birthday card and a \$20 bill. The second envelope had Michelle's name on it. It contained three hard-copy pictures from Lilly's birthday party from this past summer. Michelle cannot hear or speak. I don't know sign language, so I pointed to the names on the envelopes. Michelle acknowledged that she understood. I walked by the girls and stopped. I told them to be good. They all said they would be good. I got into my car and drove back to my house.

Katie and Lilly remind me of my granddaughters, Andrea and Heather when they were that age. The previous day, Katie's dad, Corey Harrison was on a tractor with a large bush



hog. He was mowing the tall grass on the dirt road between the soybean fields. He was making preparations for the hay ride to be held the next day. I did not take Andrea, Heather, and John-John on a hay ride on this farm. We always drove over the farm, that belonged to my in-laws, in my 1989 Ford Broncho pickup truck. The first time this happened, Andrea was nine years old. I let Andrea stand up behind the steering wheel and let her steer the truck.

Heather was on the passenger side, and John-John was sitting on the middle arm rest. I was controlling the brake and gas pedals as we drove - over the dirt roads. One might say that Katie and Lilly are filling Andrea's and Heather's shoes, having fun on the farm.

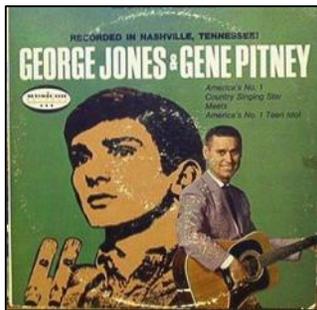
Max Barnes and Troy Seals wrote the song, "Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes." Prior to turning 18, I was mainly interested in rock and roll music. I remember taking a

Greyhound bus from Fort Campbell to Nashville to go to a rock concert by the singer Gene Pitney. He was 23 years old at the time. I stayed at the downtown YMCA. In 1963, the cost for the room was \$3.00 a night. They gave me bed linen and two towels. I was told to make my own bed and turn in the linen and towels after my stay.

After the rock and roll concert, I walked back to the YMCA. On the way, I walked by a one-truck fire station. A fireman, in uniform, was sitting in a chair in front of the fire station. He looked at me and asked me this question: “Son, have you ever been to the Grand Ole Opry?” I replied: “How much does it cost?” I had spent most of my money and I had just enough money to buy my meals the next day. The fireman did not answer my question. He said: “Follow me.” We went into the fire station and then out the back door. We crossed a one lane alley and up the stairs into a back stage area. No one seemed to pay any attention to me. I guess they thought that I was the fireman's son. The fireman said: “Son, go sit on the front row and enjoy the show.” I did not know anything about the Grand Ole Opry or the Ryman Auditorium, the Mother Church of Country Music.

These are some of Max Barnes and Troy Seals lyrics: “You know this old world is full of singers, but just a few are chosen, to tear your heart out when they sing. Imagine life without 'em. All your radio heroes like the outlaw that walks through Jesse's dreams. No, there'll never be another Red-Headed Stranger; a Man in Black and Folsom Prison Blues; the Okie from Muskogee, or Hello, Darling. Lord, I wonder who's gonna fill their shoes?... God bless the boys from Memphis, Blue Suede Shoes and Elvis. Much too soon, he left this world in tears. They tore up the Fifties, Old Jerry Lee and Charlie, and 'Go Cat Go' still echoes thru the years. You know the heart of country music still beats in Luke the Drifter. You can tell it when he sang 'I saw the Light'. Old Marty, Hank, and Lefty, why I can feel 'em right here with me on the Silver Eagle rolling through the night. Who's gonna fill their shoes? Who's gonna stand that tall? Who's gonna play the Opry and the Walbash Cannon Ball? 'Who's gonna give their heart and soul to get to me and you? Lord, I wonder who's gonna fill their shoes?”

To this day, I still wonder about that fireman that led me to the back stage of the Ryman Auditorium. It was my first exposure to country music. After the show was over, I started



walking back to the YMCA. I noticed that the fireman's chair was gone and the light's were out in the fire station. I did not get the fireman's name. At that time in history, George Jones was America's number one country music singing star. And Gene Pitney was America's number one teen idol. In 1965, these two singing artists got together in Nashville and made a studio album called: “George Jones & Gene Pitney.” George Jones lived a turbulent life and he died in 2013, at the age of 81. By comparison, Gene Pitney lived a calm life. He died of natural causes in England in 2006, after performing at a concert. He was 66 years old.

I've written before, that melodies bring back memories. My wife, Paula and I are down in Nashville every three months, mainly to see my dermatologist, Dr. Natalie Curcio. My

granddaughter, Andrea works there. The traffic is really a challenge. As long as Christ gives me breath, grace, and inspiration, I shall continue to write country stories.

John F. Hall

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

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