

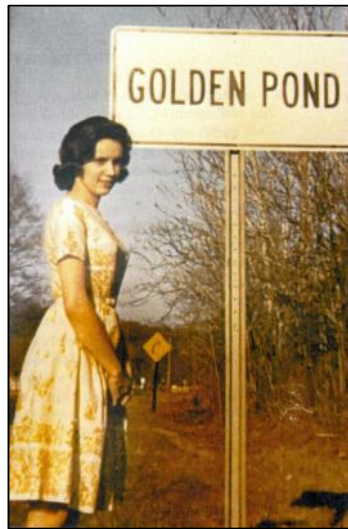
## THE GIRL FROM GOLDEN POND

By John F. Hall

In 1964, I took a photograph of an 18 year old girl named Paula Andree Oakley. The photograph was taken on the west side of the town of Golden Pond, Kentucky. The girl was standing by a town sign, on the eastbound shoulder of Highways 68/80. Down the highway, barely in the picture, is the Sunset Inn. It's a combination restaurant and food market that also sells gasoline. The food market has an outside hydraulic car-lift that allows customers to change their car oil. It has two gasoline pumps in front of the market.



The girl, in the photograph, was a freshman at Murray State College, in Murray, Kentucky, when the photograph was taken. She commuted, during the week, to and from



the college with her two older brothers, Grover and Bruce. Her mother, Pauline worked in Civil Service on Fort Campbell. Her father, Andrew worked on the farm. They lived across the road from the Sunset Inn, in a red brick house. The picture of Paula Oakley was taken during the month of November. All of the leaves on the trees, in the picture, had fallen to the ground. This true story is about the events that led up to my quest to obtain a Kentucky Historical Marker for the town of Golden Pond. The protagonist in this story is the TVA Director over the Land Between the Rivers (LBL) in the 1960s. The photograph that I took of Paula Oakley, on that November day, can also be found in George Bleidt's and Jim Wallace's 1980's Pictorial History, "Lest We Forget, Between the Rivers," and Jim Wallace's 2000 Pictorial History, "Lest We Forget,

Between the Rivers, The Golden Pond Area." If you believe, that Christ is involved in the lives of mankind, then this story will not surprise you.

My story begins when I was seven months away from the completion of my three-year Army enlistment. After crashing into the trees, during a night parachute jump, out of a Huey helicopter, I decided that it was time to switch Army jobs. I transferred from the 3rd Platoon, B Company, 327th Infantry, 101st Airborne to the Fort Campbell Security Platoon. Its mission is to provide escort security to the Navy base located on Fort Campbell. This Navy base was involved in the manufacture of nuclear weapons. I was not allowed to go on any escort security missions until I was given a Secret security clearance. The secondary mission of the Security Platoon was to provide a six-man team to perform military honors. After providing military honors, for a soldier killed in a motorcycle accident, in Benton, Kentucky, our team stopped for supper at the Sunset Inn Restaurant in Golden Pond.

Our team was in two station wagons. I was the driver of one of the station wagons. I never heard of the town of Golden Pond. I walked inside the restaurant and ordered a soft

drink, a hamburger, and French fries. When I was about finished with my meal, Paula Oakley, her sister Marsha, and Marsha's younger friend, Cathy Underhill, came into the restaurant, for a carry-out order. In a story that I wrote in 2022, called, "Honor Guard Soldiers in Golden Pond," I failed to mention that Cathy was with them. My middle name is Francis, and Cathy, for some reason, started to call me "Franciswa," That is not even the French spelling of my name.

In the 2022 story, I wrote how I first met Paula, that night, at her grandmother's house. We agreed to correspond with each other. While I was waiting for my Secret security clearance to be approved, I was detailed to be a Colonel's driver at the 101st Airborne Division Headquarters. He was located on the second floor of the wooden, World War II building. It was constructed in 1942. I sat in a desk chair outside of the Colonel's office. He allowed me to read my college literature book, and do my homework, while I waited to take him where he needed to go. I did not own a car, so I would take a Greyhound bus, from Fort Campbell to Clarksville, Tennessee. I would walk several blocks from the bus station, to the Austin Peay campus. The night course was a little over one hour. After class, I would walk back to the bus station, and take another bus back to Fort Campbell.

Paula and I dated during the months of November and December in 1964. I would take a Greyhound bus to Hopkinsville, and then another bus from Hopkinsville to Golden Pond. I would borrow a car, that belonged to Paula's father, to take her to the movies, and to a roller skating rink in Murray. When Paula was a high school at Trigg County High School, she played the flute. During the tobacco growing season, she would help pull tobacco plants, for the tobacco setter. Because Paula's mother worked off the farm, Paula would cook meals for the hired hands. When she was much younger, she would stand on a wooden soda crate, and iron her brother's clothes. Her first job, after we were married, was at Jeannie Stuart Hospital in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Paula worked for a pathologist, who trained her to be a histologist. Later, she went to work in Civil Service on Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

In January of 1965, my Secret security clearance was approved. I received orders to go on my first escort security mission. Our six-man team traveled to Milan, Tennessee to escort the Navy's classified cargo, by train, to San Francisco, California. Our team was scheduled to fly back to Nashville, Tennessee, once the Navy's cargo was turned over to Navy security personnel. The Navy was overly committed, and was unable to escort its classified cargo to South Korea. The Vietnam War was intensifying. Our team was given new orders to provide escort security on a Merchant Marine ship that was taking the classified cargo to South Korea. Half way to South Korea, the ship ran into a typhoon in the East China Sea. And after several near plane crashes, in Korea and in the United States, our team made it back to Nashville, Tennessee.

My plan, before I met Paula Oakley, was to return to Florida and go to a college there, once my three-year enlistment ended in seven months. My dad, Charles J. Hall was not too happy that I was getting married. He felt that I would not be able to earn a college degree if I was married. He was wrong, of course. But after surviving bad parachute jumps, a typhoon, and several, near plane crash, my days of cheating death made me

think differently. I decided to make Golden Pond my next home. I proposed to Paula, and we were married at South Chapel, on Fort Campbell, April 17, 1965. All of the soldiers in the Security Platoon came to the wedding. Army Chaplain Frank Riley performed the marriage ceremony. We lived in Paula's parent's house in Golden Pond, for over a year.

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) began its forced buyout and made everyone leave Golden Pond and other areas of the Land Between the Rivers. A few individuals refused to sell their property to the TVA. Donnie Holland, in a public speech given to the public, at the dedication of the Golden Pond Interpretive Overlook, on October 22, 2016, stated: "These individuals were arrested by U.S. Marshall's, and were lodged in a jail in Louisville, Kentucky, for weeks. The Land Between the Lakes (LBL) Director had the homes and other buildings, owned by these incarcerated individuals, burned to the ground." On October 1, 1999, management of the LBL was transferred from the TVA to the USDA Forest Service in accordance with the Land Between the Lakes Protective Act of 1998. According to a TVA employee, the LBL Director did not go quietly. He spitefully had material, significant to the heritage of Golden Pond, removed from the LBL library, boxed up and removed.

In the spring of 1966, I was helping my father-in-law, Andrew Oakley, by salvaging fencing, barbwire, metal roofing, and barn lumber. Andrew was a one-in-a-million survivor of melanoma cancer. His right arm was severely impacted. I used a three-pound hammer to knock the brick off his house in Golden Pond. The house was removed, first by a semi-truck, to the Cumberland River; then by a barge across the Cumberland River. Then by the semi-truck to a farm located five miles west of Cadiz. On one, hot summer's day, I was working in a fence row, across the main highway from the Sunset Inn. A Preacher named Randolph Allen, came flying down the gravel road where I was working. His car was kicking up a huge cloud of dust. I don't know why he was in such a hurry. He saw me working, and he hit the brakes. The Preacher's car slid sideways, passed me up, and stopped.

He backed his car up to where I was working, and he rolled the passenger window down. I guess that I might have looked like a ghost, all covered in white limestone stone dust that his tires kicked up. The preacher said to me: "Do you need anything to drink? I thanked him and told him that I had a jug of lemonade. Then he asked: "Where are you and Paula going to live when the TVA makes you move out of Golden Pond?" I told him that we would try to find a place in Cadiz. Then he said: "Congress just passed a new GI Bill, and a new community college opened in Hopkinsville. You should look into it." I told him that I would.

I watched as the Preacher drove away, kicking up another cloud of dust. I've always believed that Christ does not speak to us directly. He speaks to us in dreams, in messengers, in others, and in things that happen to us. Paula and I, when we lived in Golden Pond, did not own a pot to cook in, or a window to throw out the water. I enrolled in the Hopkinsville Community College in 1966, under the GI Bill. Our son, John Andrew, was born in 1967. He spent the first six weeks of his life in Golden Pond. In 1968, I transferred to Murray State University. I would commute from Cadiz to Murray. I

watched as the TVA bulldozed the buildings the buildings, in Golden Pond, into the ground. The LBL Director was destroying every trace and heritage of Golden Pond.

I told George Bleidt, the former Postmaster of Golden Pond, that we needed to get a Kentucky historical marker for Golden Pond, so that people would not forget that the town once existed. I mentioned to George that I would talk to the LBL Director, to see if he would help me. George told me that I would just be wasting my time. He said that he fought the TVA, and lost. I told George that I had to try.

I made an appointment to speak to the LBL Director. He politely listened to what I wanted to do. I think his face got red red, and he angrily said: "Absolutely no! We are using the name of Golden Pond for our headquarters." I felt that he was arrogant, and I suspected, that he thought that I was just a stupid, idealistic college student. I thanked him for seeing me, and I drove to the former site of Golden Pond. I parked next to the what was called the "flower garden," in the center of town. I got out of my Chevy II and sat on the hood. I knew, that I had as much influence over the LBL Director, as a church mouse. In defeat, and in desperation, I bowed my head and prayed: "Please God, help me." Why should God help me? I was a 24-year old college student, who was up to his neck in student loans. But I also believe that Christ gets involved in the affairs of mankind.

So I was just sitting there, listening to the birds. I looked over at the only remaining remnant of the town. It was a horse block that was used for mounting or dismounting a horse. Then, in the distance, I heard the sound of a dump truck gearing down. It pulled in behind me. Two state highway workers got out, and they walked over and sat under a tree, in the flower garden, to eat their lunch. I don't know how to adequately explain what was happening. Something prompted me to get off the hood of my Chevy 11. And it prompted me to go into the flower garden and to ask the two highway workers a question. I asked: "Is this flower garden part of the highway?" They both agreed that it was. When the TVA was given management authority over the LBL, the state of Kentucky did not deed U.S. 68 to the TVA. Kentucky retained ownership of the highway, and the responsibility to maintain the highway. The TVA had no voice in what the State could put in the flower garden. Some may just write me off, as a lay Christian writer, with a great imagination. But I shall go to my grave with the firm belief that Christ answered my prayer that day.

I contacted the Kentucky Historical Society and requested a historical marker for Golden Pond. I was told to contact Roy McDonald, the Society's representative in Trigg County. Roy told me to work with George Bleidt on the wording for the marker. The previous week, I was in the library at Murray State University. Someone left a Louisville newspaper on one of the tables, and I decided to read it. A reporter wrote several pages about the demise of Golden Pond. He did a magnificent job to research the history of Golden Pond. He also saved me a lot of research work. In the application for the marker, I had to support each line on the marker with facts. George Bleidt asked me for a favor. He said: "John, not everyone that lived in Golden Pond was involved in the making of

moonshine. In their memory, I asked that you not put the word moonshine on the marker.” I agreed to his request.

I told George Bleidt, that at the dedication of the Golden Pond marker, he should select the guest speakers. I would give the town a proper burial. I constructed a miniature coffin. At the unveiling of the Kentucky historical marker, in the flower garden, in Golden Pond, I placed a small noose into the coffin, to symbolize the unjust death of the town. My wife, Paula held the coffin, as George Bleidt, looked on and smiled. I buried coffin at the base of the historical marker. Today, on a hill, above where I took a picture of Paula Andree Oakley in 1964, is the Golden Pond Interpretive Overlook, that was dedicated on October 22, 2016. To see how Golden Pond looked in the 1960s, one should go there.

To accommodate the widening of U.S. Highway 68, the Golden Pond historical marker was relocated to the westbound lanes, near the turning lane for the Wrangler’s Campground. A rededication program was held on May 7, 2011. William Miller was scheduled to be one of the guest speakers. He was injured in a fall, and was unable to attend. I was in charge of setting up the program, so I had to find someone to read William Miller's remarks. I asked my granddaughter, Andrea Hall, a senior at Trigg County High School, to read the words that William Miller read, at the dedication and unveiling of the Golden Pond historical marker, on May 10, 1970. This is what Andrea read: “Distinguished Platform Guests, Ladies and Gentleman: When I received the invitation to have a part on this dedication program, I'll have to confess that it has been one of the most humbling experiences for me; humbling because I don't feel worthy or qualified to do justice to the occasion. However, I am thankful to you for this privilege and opportunity.

Many years ago a hearty, strong breed of people came to the “between the rivers” area of Kentucky to settle, to make their homes, and to rear their children. They came by flatboat down the Cumberland and the Tennessee rivers; they came by wagon train following the Buffalo trace; they came by horseback and even on foot. These were proud but humble people. They plowed the fertile creek and river bottoms; they cut lumber from the virgin forest; they mined the ore from Mother Earth; and others were employed in necessary occupations of the times that were both beneficial to their neighbors as well as to themselves.

As time passed on, other families moved into the “between the rivers' area; and they, too,, contributed to the social, economic, and cultural life of their times. Many of you, as well as I, were born here. Here we saw, for the first time, the light of day and the darkness of night. Even now in our mind's eye, we can look around the bend or over the hill or up the hollow or down the road and see the places where we were born. Even though the buildings no longer stand, the pictures in our minds are just as vivid and clear as they were many years ago. Here we began to learn the lessons of life, and even though the task-markers were hard and the lessons difficult, we should all be thankful for our God-fearing parents, our teachers, and our friends who were willing to help in our up-bringing.

Here we were taught that all men are not just and all men are not true. But we were also taught that for every scoundrel there was a hero, for every selfish politician there was a dedicated leader, and for every enemy there was a friend. We were taught that a nickel earned was of far more value than a dollar found. In school we were taught the wonder of books but also found time to ponder the eternal mystery of birds in the sky, bees in sun, and flowers on a green hillside. We were taught to have faith in our own ideas when everyone else said they were wrong. We were taught to be gentle with gentle people and tough with tough people. We were taught that there was no shame in tears, but there can be glory in failure and despair in success. We were taught to sell our brawn and brain to the highest bidder but to never put a price tag on our heart, our soul, or on our freedom.

We have come this afternoon to pay this token of respect to our home town. I like to think of Golden Pond in the feminine gender of "she" - for she has mothered and nurtured many sons and daughters. I should like to say to you that Golden Pond is not dead nor will she die. She will live in the hearts, minds, and memories of her people; and as God instructed Moses to teach the Law to his children and his children's children, so should we continue to instruct and relate the story of the land between the river to our children and our children's children.

In years to come many strange people will tread her land, the same land that you and I have trod and loved. They'll View her beauty of springtime and her brilliant colors in the fall. However, as they View these scenes, they will hold no stories or memories for them. This hill, or hollow, or ridge, or bottom will not recall to their minds a family name. Many will not know that here once lived a people who loved and laughed and had sorrow and shed tears. To you and me, the graves of our loved ones who sleep beneath the silent earth are reminders to us that sorrow as well as laughter prevailed here.

Even though some of us have been away from our hometown for sometime and though we haven't been as thoughtful of our old friends as we should have been, there is still a tugging at our heart's door when we come into contact with, or hear the name of, someone from "between the rivers." As we leave this afternoon not knowing when our paths will touch again, I believe John Fawcett's song, "Bless Be the Tie", expresses our feeling so definitely when he said in the last two verses - "We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear and often for each other flows a sympathizing tear. When we asunder part, it gives us inward pain but we shall still be joined in heart and hope to meet again.

As we watch the unveiling of this marker and forever say "Farewell" to a life once lived and loved, let me remind you that Golden Pond is not dead nor will she die -she will live in the hearts, the minds, and the memories of her people until their time is no more." Before William Miller was injured, he came to the Long Creek Cemetery, located just east of Golden Pond off U.S. 68. Paula and I were asked to help with the removal of dead branches, etc. I asked my granddaughters, Andrea and Heather to help. Paula's ancestors are buried there going back to the American Revolution. We had lunch with William Miller. He asked the girls a logic question. They had taken logic at HCA, and they knew the answer.

John F. Hall

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