

GRACE, INSPIRATION, PRAYERS, AND THE OLD MAN

John F. Hall

When I wrote my first nonfiction story for the Journal in Fancy Farm, Kentucky, 44 years ago, I never gave any thought to the possibility that I would still be writing stories for the Journal in 2022. Actually, I never thought I would live this long. One would have thought that I should have run out of things to write about. But as I believe, it is because of



Christ's grace upon grace upon grace and His inspiration that I have been able to write nonfiction stories in the first place. I use a combination of song and hymn lyrics, mixed in with my life experiences, observations, scriptures, and short pieces, that have enhanced the themes of my stories.

I'll start this story with a short piece by Steven Schumacher called, "Everyone Needs Prayer." These are his words: "Truly, everyone needs prayer, yes, no matter who they are. It's a balm for the spirit, and a comfort to the heart. When life gets rough and rocky, heavy is the weight of grief; prayer will lift that burden and provide healing and relief. The load will be much lighter, after placing all those cares into the hands of the Lord — because everyone needs prayer."

The late George Younce was a 40-year member of the Cathedral Quartet, a Christian singing group. He was a great singer and a wonderful story teller. His friends, Gloria and Bill Gaither, wrote a hymn especially for George. He lied about his age and enlisted in the Army. Like me, he became a paratrooper. George had his share of bumps on the road of life. One day, he got down on his knees and dedicated his life to Christ. The hymn that Gloria and Bill Gaither wrote for George is called, "Saved By Grace." These are some of their lyrics: "If you could see where I once was. If you could go with me back to where I started from, then you would see a miracle of love that took me in its sweet embrace and made me what I am today, just an old sinner saved by grace. I'm just a sinner saved by grace, when I stood condemned to death, He took my place. Now I live and breathe in freedom with each breath of life I take. I'm loved and forgiven back with the living. I'm just a sinner saved by grace. How could I boast of anything I've ever seen or done? How could I dare claim as mine the victories God has won? Where would I be had God not brought me safely to this place? I'm here to say I'm nothing but an old sinner saved by grace..."

I grew up listening to pop singer and actress Olivia-Newton John. Like my wife, Paula, she had been battling breast cancer since 1992. Olivia-Newton died August 8, 2022, at the age of 73. I'm 77 and I'll miss her. She was born in Cambridge, England. Her father was an MI5 officer on the Enigma project at Bletchley Park. He took Rudolf Hess into custody during World War II.

In early 1954, when Olivia-Newton John was five, her family emigrated to Melbourne, Australia. Her father worked as a professor of German and as the master of Ormand College at the University of Melbourne. My dad, Charles J. Hall, could speak fluent

German, and read and write in German. 'It was one reason why he worked so well with the former German scientists during the Apollo 11 project.

There is a pop song that Olivia-Newton John sang on the Johnny Carson TV show back in 1974. It was the Record of the Year and a Grammy winner. The song is called, "I Honestly Love You." The song was written by Jeff Barry and Peter W. Allen. These are their lyrics: "Maybe I hang around here a little more than I should. We both know I got somewhere else to go. But I got something to tell you that I never thought I would. But I believe you really ought to know. I love you. I honestly love you. You don't have to answer, I see it in your eyes. Maybe it's better left unsaid, this is pure and simple. You must realize that it's coming from my heart, and not my head. I love you. I honestly love you. I'm not trying to make you feel uncomfortable. I'm not trying to make you anything at all. But this feeling doesn't come along every day. And I shouldn't blow my chance, when I got the chance to say, I love you, I love you. I honestly love you. If we were born in another place in time, this moment might be ending with a kiss. There you are with yours, and here I am with mine. So I guess, we'll just be leaving it at this." I love you. I honestly love you. I honestly love you."

Da Flame aka Lady Flame wrote a hymn called, "God Answers Prayers." These are some of her lyrics: "If you are ever feeling down, like you have no place to go. If you are feeling like an outcast as your problems over flow. Just remember there is someone, and all it takes is for you to know that God is the answer, and God answers prayers. He sees every weakness, every trial, every mountain and see. And He sees every tear drop, and He wipes them for me. I get down on my knees, and I say Savior help me please because one thing is for certain. My God answers prayers. You may be broken and feel battered, but your strength will surely come. In the midst of all your heart ache, your battles are already won. Just remember in the hard times, don't give up, don't say you're done. Because God is the answer and God answers prayers..."

The other day, Lilly Harrison's mother drove her up to our house. Lilly knocked on our kitchen door. She is our great niece. Paula open the door and Lilly said: "This is for you." And she ran back to her mother's car. Paula opened the envelope that Lilly gave her. It was an invitation to come to her 5th birthday party that was to be held at the Cadiz Park, by Little River. We knew that Lilly likes "Minnie Mouse." So we drove to Walmart and found one for \$10.00, a great deal.

Paula and her sister Marsha left early to go to the Cadiz Park. I decided to go to McDonald's for a take-out big breakfast. I stopped by the park on my way home. I called Katie and Lilly over, and I asked Marsha to take our picture. I asked Katie if she knew who I was. She is eight years old. She said that she did. I asked Lilly if she knew who I was. She said that she did not know. I told her that I was her great uncle. I gave each of them a dollar and took a few pictures before going home. I wanted to work on this story. That afternoon, I drove to the Trigg County Recreational Center north of Cadiz and helped my Christian Fraternity Brothers at the concessions during the Tractor Pull Competition. It's a money raiser for the Fraternity.

Another one of my favorite singers, Judith Durham, who is also from Australia, died on August 5, 2022, at the age of 79. She was once described as having “the purest voice in popular music.” In a similar fashion to a song that Gloria and Bill Gaither wrote for George Younce, Tom Springfield wrote a song for the “Seekers.” Judith Durham is a member of that quartet. These are his lyrics: “There's a new world somewhere they call the promised land. And I'll be there someday if you could hold my hand. I still need you there beside me no matter what I do. For I know I'll never find another you. There is always someone for each of us they say. And you'll be my someone forever and a day. I could search the whole world. over until my life is through, but I know I'll never find another you. It's a long, long journey so stay by my side. When I walk through the storm, you'll be my guide, be my guide. If they gave me a fortune, my pleasure would be small. I could lose it all tomorrow and never mind at all. But if I should lose your love, dear, I don't know what I'd do, for I know I'll never find another you...another you, another you...”. Judith Durham had this Australian way of singing the word “fortune.” I always enjoyed listening to her sing.

I've covered the grace, inspiration, and prayers part of this story. As for the old man portion of the story, I fall back on a song written by Phil Coulter called “The Old Man.” These are some of his lyrics: “The tears have been shed now. We've said our last good-bye. His soul's been blessed and he's laid to rest. And it's now I feel alone. He was more than just a father, a teacher, my best friend...I will never forget him for he made me what I am. Though he may be gone memory lingers on and I miss him...The Old Man. I thought he'd live forever, he seemed so big and strong. But the minutes fly and the years roll by, for a father and a son. And suddenly when it happened, there was much left unsaid. No second chance to thank him for everything he's done...And I miss him...The Old Man...”. So I'm writing stories for my son and others that like and love this old man. And when I'm gone they can always read them, for my work on earth will be done.

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