

A HARVEST, A HOUSE, AND A SONG

By John F. Hall

This is the month of September, 2023. I'm multitasking by typing this story from the Notes app on my old iPhone 6, and making DVD copies on an old duplicator. The target DVD is a Hall history project that I started in 1988, and that I completed in 1993. It was



my first, and only experiment using crude video and sound equipment. I had no editing capacity, and the jump from one clip to the next was rough, to say the least. Yesterday, my brother-in-law, Bruce Oakley drove over from Murray, Kentucky to have lunch with his sister, Marsha and her husband, Roger Garner. Bruce's wife, Brenda came with him. Marsha also invited me, my wife, Paula, and my son, John and his wife, Lori. Bruce is one week younger than me. Fifteen years ago, he was injured in a fall that left him disabled. He can walk, only by using a rollator.

When I go to Walmart, I will take my rollator with me. I can walk without it, but since I suffered congestive heart failure, back in March 2023, my new cardiologist wants me to use it, mainly to help prevent me from falling. I get dizzy, at times, if I get up too fast from a sitting position. Walmart removed all the benches due to COVID-19, and decided not to put them back. I use the seat on my rollator to rest when I get short of breath. On the bright side, at least my mind is sharp and I am able to write more stories.

Roger Garner went outside, after lunch, and sat on his porch swing. I came out of his house and stood by his swing. We listened to the sounds of several combines, in the distance. We could see the dust being churned up, into the air, by those combines. Later that night, I- was returning home from a Christian Fraternity meeting in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. As I turned off highway 68 onto Kentucky 272, I observed three combines parked, side by side. All of the combines had their bright driving lights turned on. This allowed the reapers to work all through the night, to harvest the corn. The combine drivers had their doors open. I could hear them talking in Spanish. Craig Perry is the corporate farmer that rents the farm from the widow lady. Paula and I own our house and one acre of land, in the middle of that farm. Craig's daughter, Shannon, is his foreman. She is tough as nails. But when I see her at a store, she would give me a hug. She knows how much her late grandfather, Tom Vinson and I were good friends. Tom died at the age of 92. His sight was gone, as well as his hearing. But his memory remained sharp. Back in the day in 1985, we worked together for two long years, to get the Trigg County, Kentucky, Volume I History Book, compiled and published. My fondest memories, were sitting under a shade tree, in Tom's front yard. We just talked about saving as much Trigg County history, as we could. It was a work of love, and not for money. Craig Perry is Tom Vinson's nephew-in-law.

I can't recall when I ever read anything about the humble corn stalk. Edna Proctor wrote the poem, "The Tasseled Corn." These are her words: "The rose may bloom for England, the lily for France unfold; Ireland may honor the shamrock, Scotland her thistle bold; but the shield of the great republic, the glory of the West, shall bear a stalk of tasseled corn, of all our wealth the best."

A few reasons why I like to write stories about farming, is because I live in the middle of a farm, I once was a part-time farmer, and I enjoy looking at the row crops planted by the corporate farmer that rents the farm from the widow lady. Bernhardt Holst wrote a poem called, "Corn is King." These are his words: "Hail to the golden corn, whose stalks our fields adorn, hail it as king; plant it in fertile field, nor greater blessing wield its praises sing. Corn is the best of food, for man and beast is good, the nation's pride; let all the people know, as seasons come and go, how best this corn to grow and health betide. Sweet is the tassel-bloom, sweeter than rare perfume, and richer still; soft are the yellow hair, as they pollen bear, down where the kernels are, life to instill. Rich is the yellow grain, nurtured by dew and rain, in summer time; soon will the reapers come, singing the harvest song, joyous the harvest home, in every clime. We praise our God who gave this plant our land to save from famine dire; let heartfelt thanks abound, let hills and valleys resound, let all the plains rebound, to God aspire."

My next to the oldest granddaughter, Heather Hall's birthday is September 10th. Due to scheduling issues, Heather was not able to drive down from Louisville to have a birthday celebration at our house. So we had the celebration on the 23rd of September. My oldest granddaughter, Andrea drove up from Springfield, Tennessee. My grandson, John-John drove over from his job at Walmart in Hopkinsville. Heather wanted her brother, John-John to come for a breakfast birthday. So my son, John, and his wife, Lori came to celebrate and help cook. My wife's sister Marsha, and her husband, Roger Garner came over. Marsha also helped do some cooking. I gave Heather, Andrea, John-John, and my son, a copy of a two-hour DVD that I put together 30 years ago. The DVD is called, "Charles of America." It is about my dad, Charles J. Hall and his siblings and their children. At the beginning of the DVD I use the song written by James Moore and Robert Blinn called, "I Still Can't Say Goodbye." These are their lyrics: "You know, every time I look in the mirror I see my dad. I think that's why this song means so much to me. When I was young my dad would say, 'C'mon son, lets go out and play.' Sometimes it seems like yesterday. And I'd climb up the closet shelf, when I was all by myself. Grab his hat and fix the brim, pretending I was him. No matter, how hard I tried; no matter how many tears I cried; no matter, how many years go by, I still can't say goodbye. He always took care of Mom and me, we all cut down a Christmas tree. He always had some time for me. Wind blows through the trees, street lights, they still shine bright. Most things are the same, but I miss my dad tonight. I walked by a Salvation Army store, saw a hat like my daddy wore. Tried it on when I walked in, still trying to be like him. No matter, how hard I try; no matter, how many tears I cried; no matter, how many years go by, I still can't say goodbye." In addition to the hope, that just one of my stories might help just one person, I hope that my stories might encourage my older readers, to write their life stories for their children and their grandchildren. To paraphrase the advice given by Ernest Hemingway: "Make the reader of your stories see what you saw and feel what you felt. Try to remember what people said around you and think of it from their perspective...". "Remember exactly how something looked, felt, and sounded, and write it all down..."

The satisfaction, of leaving life stories for future generations, is a lot more valuable than just leaving your name and the dates of your birth and-your death, on an expensive marble tombstone, that, some day, might be neglected and forgotten with the passage of time.

The builder of my house, in 1861, was John J. Dyer. He was a farmer, a Trigg County Sheriff, and a school teacher. To this day, his picture is hanging on a wall in the Trigg County Sheriff's office, in Cadiz, Kentucky. He died, on a return trip from New Orleans. Years later, his wife sold the house and farm to Kate and Pete Jackson. About 15 years ago, the Jackson's held a family reunion at the Lake Barkley State Resort Park. They asked me if they could come and visit the house where their ancestor's once lived. I greeted them and let them tour the house. I explained to them, that after the Flood family purchased the house from Kate and Pete Jackson, they tore down the portico to make a full-length front porch to capture more rain water into the front cistern.

In a previous story called, "The Invitation," I wrote about an Open House that my son, John and I hosted, to honor my wife, Paula Andree Oakley Hall. It was held on June 29, 1980. We mailed out invitations to those who once lived in the house. John J. Dyer had several children. One of his sons, is Rufus Dyer. He had a son, also named Rufus Dyer. I hand delivered an invitation to him. He lived in a very small house located just north of Cadiz, on highway 139. He was a man of humble means. He was in his 805 and a widower. He invited me inside his house. It was sparsely furnished. I handed him the invitation to come to the Open House. I did not see any vehicle when I first drove up to his house. I told him that I would drive him if he needed a ride. He said that he had someone who could take him.

I did not see any pictures on Rufus Dyer's walls. He walked over to a table that had a Bible. Inside the Bible was a picture. He handed me the picture and said: "These are my parents and the picture was taken in 1895." I stood there and studied the picture for a few minutes. When I started to hand the picture back to him, he surprised me. He said: "We lived in that house for 18 wonderful years. I want you to have the picture." I thanked him for the picture. Rufus came to the open house and knocked on the front door. Paula and I greeted him and showed him all of the work that Paula and I did in the old house. After showing Rufus the entire house, we came back to the foyer. It remained essentially unchanged. Paula left to be with the other guests. I watched as Rufus looked intently at the staircase. Then his eyes began to tear up and tears began to roll down his face. This was his childhood home. I was bringing back memories of the times when he would run up and down those steps. His parents were gone, as was his wife. But a smile came on his face. He thanked me for inviting him to the Open House. He said that he had many happy memories living in the old house. He looked tired and the emotions of the afternoon, only he could appreciate. The friend that drove him to the Open House was waiting to take him home. I bid him farewell and watched as he walked away. I wondered if he might have been thinking: "No matter, how hard I try. No matter, how many tears I cry. No matter, how many years go by, I still can't say goodbye."

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