

## INSIGHT INTO HUMANITY

By John F. Hall

For the past 45 years, I've been a story writer. William Shakespeare, in a play, wrote: "All the worlds a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts..."



The first time I read those words was in my first college course. It was a night literature course at Austin Peay College in Clarksville, Tennessee in 1964. The final part of Shakespeare's writing, about the stages of man, contained these words: "Last scene of all, that ends this strange eventful history, is second childishness and mere oblivion; sans teeth, sans eyes, sans everything...". The word "sans" is an archaic word for "without." My very good friend, Tom Vinson lives Shakespeare's words. Today, he is 92 years old and is in a nursing home. He lost his eye sight (sans eyes). He lost his hearing (sans ears). He lost his ability to taste food (sans taste). He lost his ability to take care of himself (sans everything).

The rain came and the temperature dropped below 32 degrees. The rain turned into ice on the windshield of my 2016 Ford Escape. Then the snow came and covered the ice on the windshield. I started this story on February 1, 2023 and I looked out the living room window. The U.S. Mail truck got stuck trying to back up to the two mail boxes in front of my house on Dyers Hill Road. There is a circular drive in front of the house. The driver of the mail truck tried to go around the usual way, but the ice on the road prevented that. So the driver tried to back up to the main road and slid into an earthen embankment? The U.S. Mail truck was unable to move backwards or forward.

The mail truck needed a new muffler and it was making a loud noise trying to get unstuck. My brother-in-law, Roger Garner lives next door to me. He came out of his house to see if he could be of any assistance to the mail carrier. At the age of nearly 78, I was not able to offer immediate assistance. My right shoulder rotator cuff has a torn tendon and it needs to be repaired. I think my rheumatoid arthritis has also caused damage the ball-and-socket in that shoulder. I tolerate the pain, stiffness and swelling. I've limited my daily activities, but it still interferes with my sleep. I have epidural injections, in my spine, every four months to lesson the pain from my spinal stenosis. To make matters worse, my right foot, after two failed surgeries, needs another surgery. This surgery calls for the surgeon to break four toes, and insert a six-inch pin in each toe. I told my surgeon that I had enough torture; no more surgeries; and i would endure the pain. I cannot incur being disabled for six weeks. My wife, Paula has age-related macular degeneration of her eyes. She will incur loss in the center of the field of her vision. The center of her retina will deteriorate. Treatment can help, but Paula's condition can't be cured. We have been married for 58 years, come April 17th. We tell people that we were young and dumb, when we got married, as teenagers. I'm not sure what insight into humanity I can give. No matter the preparation for a marriage, no matter the cost of a marriage, or place of the marriage, over 50 percent of marriages end up in divorce.

I looked outside at the winter storm. It covered the sidewalk, that goes to the mail boxes, with a layer of ice and snow. I've repeated a line from the movie, "The Fatal Glass of Beer," several times, to my wife, Paula. W.C. Fields, in jest, five times said that day: "It ain't a fit night out for man or beast." The ice froze on the tree branches in front of my house. Roger Garner carefully, and slowly walked on the solid ice and slowly it over to the mail truck. He told the mail carrier to turn the front wheels sharply to the right. Standing on the frozen grass, he gave the truck a push and had the mail carrier slowly go forward. It was enough to slide the mail truck off the embankment. He told the mail carrier that he would take his mail, and my mail, since we are kin, and deliver it to me. The mail carrier thanked him and slowly drove the hill.

I came out of my house and met Roger at the edge of my front porch. I had been watching Roger helping the mail carrier. I told Roger that he needed to be given a gold star for helping the mail carrier. He handed me my mail and said that he deserved two stars. Roger safely made it back to his house. The following week, I received a brief letter from Nancy Thomas. We sang in the church choir with her husband, Tony, until he died. She mentioned a few things in her letter; that she would be in Florida for six weeks and she would be back on April 1st. She made a comment on a story that I gave her, she wrote: "You have such a keen insight into humanity." That gave me the title for this story. As a nonfiction story writer, I try to go beyond writing just facts and give information in an emotional, relatable way. Sometimes I can find the "why" about the "what." I have a sciatic nerve that sends unbearable pain from my spine, to my right hip, and all the way down my right leg to my bad foot. Last year, after listening to a commercial on TV, I ordered an adjustable pressure strap that goes below the knee, and at a position near the top of the knee calf. Once you strap it on, it stops about 96 percent of the nerve pain. It costs \$29 and it works.

I was looking for a good winter's hymn as it is cold and windy outside. There is still ice and snow on the frozen ground. Samuel Longfellow wrote the hymn, "Tis Winter Now, The Fallen Snow." These are his lyrics: "Tis winter now, the fallen snow has left the heavens all coldly clear; through leafless boughs the sharp winds blow, and all the earth lies dead and drear. And yet God's love is not Withdrawn; His life within the keen air breathes; His beauty paints the crimson dawn, and clothes each branch with glittering wreaths. And though abroad the sharp winds blow, and skies are chill, and frosts are keen, home draws her circle now, and warmer glow her light within. O God you give the winter's cold, as well as summer's joyous rays, You warmly in Your love enfold, and keep us through life's wintry days."

I'll end this story, about some of my woes, with the words found in Ecclesiastes, Chapter 1, Verse 9: "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun." And the snow continues to fall, as I thank Christ for His grace and inspiration.

John F. Hall

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