

## THE LEAVES OF AUTUMN

By John F. Hall

This is a story about the leaves of autumn. I came up with the idea to write this story when I was raking the autumn leaves of yellow, red and brown. Behind my house are two tall maple trees. In the fall, thousands of leaves fall off the two side-by-side trees, especially after a good rain. I have a leaf blower that saves me a lot of raking. But I still have to move the leaves down to my burn pile. The reason people get the leaves off their yards is because if left standing, they are good breeding grounds for ticks.



In my back yard I have a large sandbox, a trampoline and a large basketball concrete pad that get covered over with the autumn leaves. There are too many leaves to mulch and they get in and under the trampoline. Andrea, Heather, and John-John use to play in the



sandbox when they were little children. I thought about disassembling the sandbox. Then one day, I watched two small wild rabbits frolicking in the sandbox. Since those two rabbits found a use for the sandbox, I decided to rake out the leaves and leave it as a playpen for the rabbits. They gave me a lot of enjoyment watching them jump up in the air and do a binky. A binky is an expression of joy from a rabbit. When a

rabbit binkies, it jumps into the air, often twisting and flicking its head and feet. It happens so fast that it's difficult to take a picture of a rabbit doing a binky.

Once I blow or rake the autumn leaves into a pile, I use three plastic 42-gallon trash cans to compress the dry leaves. I first rake the dry leaves into each trash can. I put one trash can inside another trash can and push down to compress the leaves. I continue to fill and compress the leaves in all three trash cans. It's a simple and slow way for this old man to gather up the leaves from the sandbox, inside and under the trampoline and off the basketball pad. I then use my John Deere riding lawnmower and a small four-sided metal trailer to transport the leaves down to my burn pile. I also pick up the broken branches and transport them down to the burn pile. I notify Emergency Services, after 6:00 PM that I am going to have a controlled burn. I keep two water hoses near the burn pile before I light up the night sky.



A dozen years ago, I planted a magnolia tree about 30 feet from my deck. I told Andrea and Heather that when they get married, I wanted to take their picture with their grooms by that magnolia tree. I call the tree "the marriage tree." Unlike the maple trees, the Southern Magnolias are evergreens. Most deciduous trees lose their leaves in the fall. But the Southern Magnolia will drop the older leaves in the spring. L. Jones wrote the song, "Fallen Leaves." These are his lyrics: "Fallen leaves lay scattered on the ground. The birds and flowers that were here now can't be found. All the friends that he once knew are

not around. They are scattered like the leaves upon the ground. Some folks drift along through life and never thrill, to the feeling that a good deed brings until it's too late and they are ready to lie down. There beneath the leaves that scattered on the ground..."

"Lord let my eyes see every need of every man. Make me stop and always lend a helping hand. Then when I'm laid beneath that little grassy mound, there'll be more friends there than leaves upon the ground. To your grave there's no use taking any gold. You cannot use it when it's time for hands to fold. When you leave this earth for a better home someday, the only thing you'll take is what you give away."

Robert Frost wrote a poem titled, "Gathering leaves." Since I am "harvesting" my leaves in my back yard, I know that it is just a matter of time before the three majestic maple trees in my front yard will give me some work to do. These are Robert Frost's words:



"Spades take up leaves no better than spoons, and bags of leaves are light as balloons. I make a great noise of rusting all day, like the rabbit and the deer running away. But the mountains I raise elude my embrace, flowing over my arms and into my face. I may load and unload again and again till I fill the whole shed, and what have I then? Next to nothing for weight, and since they grew duller from contact with the earth, next to nothing for color. Next to nothing for use, but a crop is a crop, and who's to say where the harvest shall stop?"

Now I love the cool shade that my maple trees give me. But more than that, their leaves gave me such memories when the grandchildren were young. I would rake the leaves into a pile at least five-feet tall. All three



would dive into that leafy mountain and laugh with joy, as they buried themselves where I could not see. Then they would rise up and jump out of the pile and try to scare me. Elsie Brady wrote a poem titled "Leaves." These are her words: "Silently they tumble down and come to rest upon the ground to lay a carpet, rich and rare, beneath the trees without a care, content to sleep, their work well done,

colors gleaming in the sun. At other times, they would fly until they nearly reach the sky. Twisting, turning through the air till all the trees stand stark and bare. Exhausted, drop to earth below to wait, like children, for the snow."

All good things must end some day, but it seems that my harvesting leaves on Dyers Hill is here to stay. Robert Frost wrote a very short poem about autumn leaves titled "Nothing Gold Can Stay." These are his words: "Nature's first green is gold, her hardest hue to hold. Her early leaf's a flower; but only for an hour. Then leaf subsides to leaf. So Eden sank to grief, so dawn goes down to day. Nothing gold can stay."

Non-fiction short story writing is mainly what I have been doing these past 42 years. I can identify with the last ten words in L. Jones's song, "Fallen Leaves. I've been giving my stories away to family and friends for the past four decades. There is something that I have in common with the late Kentucky writer, Jesse Stuart. He was interviewed and he said, "I have to write. Writing chose me." I admit that I am the same way. To me it is that invisible need to craft words into a story. It also means to have pictures of what I am crafting. The leaves of autumn are summer's last farewell to me.

John F. Hall

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