

THE LEAFLESS TREES

By John F. Hall

I was driving home from Cadiz. The reason that I was in town was to mail a late Christmas card to Janet, Tony, and Naya James. They live in Evansville. I put two of my stories with the card and I was concerned that it might not have sufficient postage. I put three stamps on the envelope. I went into the Cadiz Post Office and asked the Postal Clerk to weigh the envelope. She said it would cost \$1.20 to mail and that I had more than sufficient postage. I thanked her and wished her a Merry Christmas.

Driving back home, memories from the past raced across my mind. I thought about Janet and Tony James when they were engaged to be married. I wanted to give them a special wedding video. I had developed a unique training film for the Army Reserve. Thanks to a fellow Reservist, that was over the General Electric video production studio at the Louisville plant, I was able to direct the acting portion of the training film. I took a flight from Louisville to Charlottesville, Virginia to obtain Russian propaganda film for use in the training film. Looking back, I loved what I was doing. I became the Director of a Command Post Training Exercise (CPX), doing something that no one else had done before and the Army Reserve gave me a medal for my efforts. I was having so much fun, that I would have paid them to let me do it again.

The special wedding video for Janet and Tony would include an interview in a beautiful Antebellum house located just west of Hopkinsville. The owners of the house thought it was a sweet idea and they were more than proud to allow me to film inside their home. This was the part inside of me that wanted to be a movie director, if only for a few days. I accomplished that passion with the Army Reserve CPX, the wedding video and a short movie that I directed, produced and wrote titled: "The Boy And The Moonshiners." The real satisfaction of the wedding video is that Janet and Tony remain married to this day. Jesus Christ began His ministry at the wedding feast of Cana where He turned water into wine. In John, Chapter 2, Verses 1:2 are these words: "On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and His disciples had also been invited to the wedding."

At the wedding reception that I was taping, I inserted the background song of Randy Travis singing, "Forever And Ever, Amen." The song was written by Don Schultz and Paul Overstreet. These are some of their lyrics: "You might think that I'm talking foolish. You've heard that I'm wild and I'm free. You may wonder how I can promise you now, this love for you always will be. But you're not just time that I'm killin'. I'm no longer one of those guys. As sure as I live this love that I give, is gonna be yours until the day that I die. Oh baby, I'm gonna love you forever, forever and ever amen. As long as old men sit and talk about the weather. As long as old women sit and talk about old men. If you wonder how long I'll be faithful, I'll be happy to tell you again. I'm gonna love you forever and ever, forever and ever, amen. They say time takes its hold on a body. Makes young girls brown hair turn gray. But honey, I don't care, I ain't in love with your hair..."

“And if it all fell out, well, I'd love you anyway. They say time can play tricks on a memory. Make people forget the things they knew. But it's easy to see it's happening to me... If you wonder how long I'll be faithful, well, just listen to how this song ends. I'm gonna love you forever and ever, forever and ever, amen...”.

I was turning off Highway 272 onto the old Highway 68/80 and I looked up at the leafless trees by Magistrate Larry Lawrence's repair shop. And the inspiration hit me to



write a story about the leafless trees. An English Baptist preacher named Charles Haydon Spurgeon wrote a book titled, “The Leafless Tree.” These are some of his words: “There is something within a tree mysterious, hidden and unknown, which preserves life in it when every thing outwards tends to kill it... You see the tree in winter, standing naked and bare,

without any sign of life. Its roots buried in the hard and frozen soil, and its naked branches exposed to every blast, without a bloom or bud; yet the substance is in the tree when the leaves are gone. It is still alive, and it shall, by and by, in due season, bud and bloom...” I have three tall sugar maple trees in my front yard. They provide wonderful shade and brilliant color leaves in the fall. I miss the leaves when they all fall off the trees.

Michelle and John Phillips wrote the song, “California Dreamin.” When I hear that song I am reminded about my first trip to Los Angeles, California when I was 16. I also remember the 40 plus days that I lived in Desert Hot Springs, California. The two days that I was in Los Angeles were painful. The smog burned my eyes. These are some of the Phillips' lyrics: “All the leaves are brown and the sky is gray. I've been for a walk on a winter's day. I'd be safe and warm if I was in LA. California dreamin on such a winter's day. Stopped into a church I passed along the way. Well, I got down on my knees and I pretend to pray. You know the Preacher liked the cold. He knows I'm gonna stay. California dreamin on such a winter's day...”.

This is the last story that I intend to finish in 2020. I don't have any New Year's resolutions. I just pray that the Good Lord will protect those that I love and those that love me. Bob Cooper wrote the hymn, “The Trees Are All Bare.” I will let Bob's words end this story. These are his lyrics: “The trees are all bare, not a leaf to be seen. And the meadows their beauty has lost. Now winter has come and 'tis cold for man and beast. And the streams they are all fast bound down with frost. 'Twas down in the farmyard where oxen feed on straw. They send forth their breath like steam. Sweet Betsy the milkmaid now she must go. For flakes of ice she finds a-floating on her cream. 'Tis now all the

small birds to the barn-door fly for food and gently they rest on the spray. A-down the plantation the hares do search for food and lift their foot steps sure for fear they do betray. Now Christmas is come and our song is almost done. For we soon shall have the turning of the year. So fill up your glasses and let your health go round. For I wish you all a joyful New Year.”

John F. Hall

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