

THE PROMISES AND THE PRAYERS

By John F. Hall

It seemed like it was only yesterday when I was walking across the Flagler Street bridge in Miami, Florida. The year was 1959 and I was 14 years old. I liked to listen to rock and roll songs. I carried a small battery operated transistor radio. Walking along, listening to love songs, eased my restless mind. At that time, Joe Rock, Jimmy Beaumont, Janet Vogel, Joe Verscharen, and Walley Lester wrote the song, "This I Swear." This was the first love song that I remember best. The writers formed a singing group called the Skyliners. It was considered an unusual rock group, at that time, because it had a female singer, Janet Vogel.



When the Skyliners released their song, the Cuban Revolution was on-going with Fidel Castro about to overthrow the government of Fulgencio Batista. When Batista was in power, Havana was kind of a "sin city" with all kinds of illegal activity. People would drive down from the big cities "up north," and over night in Miami. They would drive down to Key West and take the ferry boat to Havana, 90 miles away. I was a student at Ada Merritt Junior High School. The school was built in 1923 and it was the first junior high school in South Florida. I had a Cuban friend in my homeroom class. His parents fled Cuba for a better life in Florida. I remember having supper at his house. His mother fried bananas. That was the first time, and the last time, that I ate fried bananas. Just about everyone will break open a banana from the top stem. If you watch a monkey break open a banana, it will hold the banana stem down with one hand. It will pinch the other end and open the banana. It is simple and easy.

Some teachers at Ada Merritt Junior High would not allow condescending statements to be made about Fidel Castro. They thought he was a good person and that he would give the Cuban people freedom. As it turned out, he betrayed the Cuban people and he nearly started World War III by allowing the Russians to put nuclear missiles in Cuba. At the age of 17, I believed that my life would end, and I would die in Havana. But the Russians pulled their missiles out of Cuba. There are two large concrete Lion statues at the front entrance to Ada Merritt Junior High. I once, foolishly, thought that the Lions were made of solid gold. I told my fellow students that the reason no one stole the Lions is because each one weighed a ton. The school is now a K-8 school. It is several blocks from where I once lived. Today, they call that area "Little Havana." If you don't speak Spanish, you might have a hard time understanding their conversations.

These are some of the Skyliners' lyrics: "My love for you will last till time itself is through. Oh my darling, oh my darling, this I swear is true. My heart is yours my dear, there will be no one new. Oh my darling, oh my darling, this I swear is true. I promise you that I will never make you cry. This love will be eternally, cross my heart and hope to die. My lips, my kiss, my vow, nobody else but you. Oh my darling, oh my darling, this I swear is true...". Frank Myers and Gary Baker wrote a song with a similar name,

but they eliminate the word, “This.” Their song is called, “I Swear.” The song was released in 1993.

These are some of their lyrics: “I see the questions in your eyes. I know what's weighing on your mind. But you can be sure I know my part, 'cause I'll stand besides you through the years. You'll only cry those happy tears, and though I'll make mistakes, I'll never break your heart. Like the shadow that's by your side, I'll be there. For better or worse, 'til death do us part. I'll build your dreams with these two hands. We'll hang some memories on the wall. And when there's silver in your hair, you won't have to ask if I still care. 'Cause as time turns the page, my love won't age at all. I swear, by the moon and the stars in the sky, I'll be there, I swear. I'll love you with every beat of my heart, I swear, I swear...”.

Country music singer, John Michael Montgomery does an excellent rendition of the song, “I swear.” There is a part in his music video where an elderly couple is in a country store. The man updates a sign in that store with the number “7.” The sign has these words, “This is our 57th Year.” For my wife, Paula, we celebrated our 57th wedding anniversary this past April. We have hung memories on the walls of every room in our old farm house on Dyers Hill Road. We even have two pictures of the grandchildren in the downstairs bathroom.

John Denver wrote the song, “Poems, Prayers and Promises.” These are some of his lyrics: “I've been lately thinking about my life's time. All the things I've done, how it's been. And I can't help believing in my mind, I know I'm gonna hate to see it end. I've seen a lot of sunshine, slept out in the rain. Spent a night or two all on my own...” I have to say it now, it's been a good life, all in all. It's really fine to have a chance to hang around, and lie by the fire and watch the evening tire, while all my friends and my old lady, sit and watch the sun go down.... Talk of poems and prayers and promises and things that we believe in. How sweet it is to love someone, how right it is to care. How long it's been since yesterday and how about tomorrow? What about our dreams and all the memories we share. The days they pass so quickly now, nights are seldom long. Time around me whispers when it's cold. The changes somehow frighten me, still I have to smile. It turns me to think of growing old. For though my life's been good to me, there's still so much to do. So many things my mind's never known. I'd like to raise a family, I'd like to sail away, and dance across the mountains, on the moon, yes I would...”.

I've been sharing my life with others in the stories that I write. I'm reminded of what Saint Francis said: “For it is in giving that we receive.” That is exactly what I have been doing with my stories these past 45 years. I just give them away, and not for fortune or fame. I leave them for family and friends to ponder. Christ has truly blessed me with His grace upon grace upon grace, and His inspiration to write these stories. I was walking back from my mailbox, just the other day. I looked up at the gray filled sky. There was a small opening and the sun was shining through the clouds. It was one of those rare moments when I just said, “Here I am Lord.” He paints a new picture with clouds nearly every cloudy day. It's just one of those things that we take for granted, until the clouds

become angry and put fear in our souls. He gives us so much to appreciate in the change of seasons.

In Psalm, Chapter 23, Verses 2-3 are these words: "He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me besides still waters, He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right path for His name sake." When I read those words, my mind drifts back to the days when cattle roamed the fields in front of my house. I would bush bog down the sassafras trees and sage grass. This would keep the pastures green for the cattle by suppressing the sage grass. I remember calling the cattle up and feeding them hay and field corn on the cob. They would come up at the sound of my voice and take the corn cob out of my hand.

There are three small ponds in front of my house. Their waters are still most of the year. In the back pages of my mind are memories of being on Lake Barkley and Kentucky Lake. When storms would suddenly crop up, they would turn the still waters into "white caps." The mean, rolling waves could easily sink a small boat. Yet nothing that I have experienced could ever compare to being on the high seas and running head long into a typhoon with menacing wave higher than 60 feet. Each time the waves crashed onto the ship, I thought the ship would break in half. So I prayed that Christ would spare me.

In John, Chapter 14, Verse 13-14, are these words: "And whenever you ask in my name, I will do so, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it." Looking back, I know that Christ has answered my prayers and He has kept me from danger more times than I deserve. He has given me hope, joy, peace, strength and wisdom to face what ever it is that I face everyday. One way to have a good day is to ask for one. David Banner wrote the country song, "Lord I Hope This Day Is Good." These are some of his lyrics: "Lord, I hope this day is good. I'm feelin' empty and misunderstood. I should be thankful. Lord, I know I should, but Lord I hope this day is good. Lord, have You forgotten me? I've been prayin' to You faithfully. I'm not sayin' I'm a righteous man, but Lord I hope You understand. I don't need fortune and I don't need fame. Send down the thunder, Lord, send down the rain. But when You're plannin' just how it will be, plan a good day for me... You've been the King since the dawn of time. All that I'm askin' is a little less crime. It might be hard for the devil to do, but it would be easy for you. Lord, I hope this day is good. I'm feelin' empty and misunderstood. I should be thankful, Lord, I know I should, but Lord I hope this day is good..."

What shall I write about promises and prayers? It's what I write in my stories. Christ's promises are real. He does answer prayers that are in His plans for us and for our salvation. Christ does help those that believe, love, and trust in Him unconditionally. He is in control of our life. He does not do things on our conditions or on our terms. I am the least worthy of His love and the talent that He has given me. Besides hoping for a good day, just tell Jesus that you love Him. And if you can spare some of your time, please say a prayer for me. I need all the prayers that I can get.

John F. Hall

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