

PICTURES, MEMORIES, AND LANTERNS

By John F. Hall

I don't remember who gave me an old kerosene lantern about seven years ago. It was made before I was born. It was dirty, dusty, and rusty and it needed to be cleaned, sanded and painted. I have two other kerosene lanterns that once belonged to my wife, Paula's grandmothers. One is not usable as the base has rusted. The other lantern is in mint condition. I spray painted both lanterns with gold colored paint. They are just antiques, reminders of the past. I keep them in the master bedroom in my Antebellum farm house. Oh, if only the walls could talk, what stories could they tell?



I put the old lantern in a shed that my son, John helped me build about ten years ago. Every time I go into that shed, I walk past that neglected lantern. I'm surprised that my son did not use his finger and write "wash me" On the lantern's glass chimney. One Sunday after church, I was sitting in my easy chair, and I decided, the Good Lord willing, that when the weather warms up, I will clean the lantern, sand and paint it. I plan to hang it on my front porch to add to the other antiques already there.



Wince Coles wrote the song "By The Glow of The Kerosene Light." These are some of his lyrics: "I remember the time when my grandpa and I would sit by the fire at night, and I would listen to stories of how he once lived...He said mom and dad sent me off to school where I learned to read and write. And they listened for hours as I read from my books... Your grandma and I were wed at 16, Lord she was a beautiful sight. And proudly I placed the ring on her hand... About one year later, your daddy was born, and your grandma held my hand so tight. Oh, I can't tell the joy as she brought forth new life...But having her child, it did weaken her so, she wasn't up for the fight. And she looked so peaceful as she went to her rest...Then as now the times they were hard. To succeed you will try with all your might. And sometimes loved bloomed and sometimes dreams die. By the glow of the kerosene light,,,"

Kerosene lanterns are still widely used for lighting in rural areas of Asia and Africa where electrical distribution is either not available or is too costly for widespread distribution. Two billion people across the globe have no access to electricity. While the fumes from a kerosene lantern are not good, for many people the choice is darkness or light from a kerosene lantern. I did not realize, until recently, that the late country singer, Hank Williams wrote the song "I saw the light." These are some of his lyrics: "I wandered so aimlessly, life filled with sin, I just wouldn't let my dear Savior in. Then Jesus came like a stranger in the night. Praise the Lord, I saw the light..."

"I saw the light, no more darkness, no more night. Now I'm so happy no more sorrow in sight. Praise the Lord, I saw the light. Just like a blind man, I wandered along, worries and fears I claimed for my own. Then like the blind man that God gave back his sight, praise the Lord, I saw the light...I was a fool to wander and stay, for straight is the gate

and narrow is the way, Now I have traded the wrong for the right. Praise the Lord, I saw the light...”.

My oldest granddaughter, Andrea, when she was three years old, would sit next to me on



my front porch swing. I would whistle at the birds high up in the maple trees and they would sing back to me. Andrea believed that I could talk to those birds. I came across a picture taken in August of 1999. Andrea had a mischievous look on her face. She knew that she had me wrapped around her little finger. She would stay with us a lot. When her parents would bring her to our house, my wife, Paula would open the front door. Andrea would run around her to get to me. I remember sitting in a padded rocking chair and rocking Andrea to sleep, when she was a little baby. I made up a lullaby that I called “The Little Green Frog Song.” There are three small ponds in the fields in front of my old farm house. In the spring and summer, the frogs would sing their hearts out.

I would softly sing these words to Andrea: “There was a little green frog swimming in the water, a little green frog doing what he oughter. He jumped up onto a Lilly pad, clapped his feet and say gee I'm glad.” Andrea would say: “Sing it again!” I wanted her to call me “Grandfather.” As Andrea was closing her eyes, I would whisper in her ear: “Grandfather, grandfather, grandfather.” Then one day when she came to my house, she said: “An-Father, lets go sit on the swing and you talk to the birds again.” I thought to myself that “An-Father” is as close to 'Grandfather’ as she can say, and that is close enough for me. So all my family and friends started to call me “An-father.”

I came across another old picture dated March 2001. I was supporting Andrea as she was



sitting on top of a step ladder with a paintbrush in her hand. I had really thick black hair 21 years ago. It has thinned out and is turning grayer the older I get. I liked two lyrics in a song called: “Forever and ever, Amen.” It was written by Don Schiltz and Paul L. Overstreet. These are those lyrics: “They say time takes its toll on a body, makes the young girl's brown hair turn gray.” I'm living those words. It's happening to me.

If I recall correctly, I mailed in a funny story to Reader's Digest about Andrea. In the true story, Andrea and I were walking behind my house. I was doing some painting around the dinning room windows. We had to walk around a tall stepladder. It was in the evening and getting dark. I pointed to the North star. I said to Andrea: “See that bright star. It's for you.” She looked at the star, then she looked at the ladder, and then she said to me: “Well! Go get it!” It was hard for me not to laugh at her. She was so serious and she believed that I could climb up that ladder and get her that star. Andrea does not remember, when she was three years old, a few things that she said. I watched her talk to her favorite doll. She would say over and over again: “Babydoll, babydoll, babydoll.” So I began to call her babydoll and I still will call her “Babydoll.” One thing that she insists that she never said involves questions that I would ask her.

When Andrea did not know the answer to a question, she had a cute way of saying: “Not Know. Not know nothing!” Those are a few precious memories that I will not forget.

Jamie O'Hara wrote the song “Grandpa.” These are some of his lyrics: “Grandpa, tell me 'bout the good old days. Sometimes it feels like the world's gone crazy. Grandpa, take me back to yesterday, when the line between right and wrong didn't seem so hazy. Did lovers fall in love to stay, and stand besides each other, come what may? Was a promise really something people kept, not just something they would say. Did families really bow their heads to pray? Did daddies really never go away? Oh, grandpa, tell me 'bout the good old days. Grandpa, everything is changing fast. We call it progress, but I just don't know. And grandpa, let's wander back into the past, and paint me a picture of long ago...”.

The picture of the kerosene lantern takes us wandering back into the past. The rural electrification of Trigg County, Kentucky began in the early 1940s. For most homes in the county, the wiring provided enough electricity for lights and a refrigerator. The house out back was still the bathroom and water was heated on the stove. But it was the kerosene lantern that the farmer used to light the way to the barn. So ends this story about pictures, memories, and lanterns.

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*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:

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