

## THE ROAD TO MY FRONT DOOR

By John F. Hall

There is a road that leads straight to my front door. From 1859 to 1986 it was a private driveway. In the winter of 1965, there was a wide wooden gate that blocked the access to the driveway. In the middle of the gate, on the top rail, was a small metal sign. Two words were on that sign: "NO TRESPASSING." I was 21 years old at the time and



making some repairs to the gate. I developed an interest in photography and I used an inexpensive camera and 35mm film. I stopped working on the gate. I backed up so I could get a wide picture of the gate. I never thought that 55 years later, I would use that picture in this story. The reason for the gate was to keep the cattle in the pasture behind the gate. It was a cold day and there was a

light dusting of snow on the drive way when I took the picture.

The farm, at that time belonged to my wife's grandmother, Iva Oakley. She was a widow. Her son, Andrew operated the farm. He was in his 50s. He had survived melanoma cancer in his right arm. His doctors told him that he was "one in a million" to survive after two surgeries. The surgeries limited what he could do with that arm. He died several years ago at the age of 85. I was a college student in 1966, and in addition to maintaining the barbwire fences, I would feed the cattle hay and corn during the winter months. I was a cowboy without a horse. I would bush hog (mow) the pasture fields. Iva Oakley lived in two rooms in the old Dyer house from 1965 until she died in 1977, at the age of 90. My wife, Paula, my son, John Andrea, and I moved into the old house in 1978. Farming got hit with falling prices for cattle, so Andrew changed over to row cropping and growing corn, soybeans, and wheat. From 1982 to 1985, a severe drought hit, the crops failed and many farmers lost their farms. I continued to bush hog some of the fields that were in the crop set-a-side program. This was a government program where the farmer was paid not to grow crops, but the land had to be mowed.

I removed the large wooden gate at the entrance to the driveway once all the cattle were sold. I missed being able to call the cattle up. I would call out: "Sukk! Sukk! Sukk!" and they would come a-running. To me they were just big pets. But life is one constant change. Across the road from the driveway was Andrew's mail box. This was a very dangerous location because there is a steep drop off where his mail box was located. There is no shoulder or pull-off for the mail carrier. The carrier would stop on Highway 68/80 to put the mail in Andrew's mail box. The reason for this situation is due to a steel reinforced culvert that runs under the highway. The culvert is massive and a standard size car can drive through it. The culvert allows a large amount of creek water to flow under the highway. One day, Andrew told me that he was almost run over trying to get the mail out of his mail box. He said that the driver of a car was intentionally trying to hit him.

In 1986, I drove to Cadiz and went inside the Cadiz Post Office. I asked to speak to the Cadiz Postmaster. I asked what I needed to do to have the mail delivered to where I lived on the top of Dyers Hill.

I explained to the Postmaster that vehicle traffic was increasing significantly on highway 68 and it was becoming too dangerous for my father-in-law, who was losing his eye sight and was having trouble walking, to have to dodge cars to retrieve his mail. I explained the incident where Andrew was almost hit going across the highway to his mail box. The Postmaster told me there was nothing that could be done to have the mail delivered up the hill. I explained that three families lived on that hill and that it was two-tenths of a mile from their homes to the mail boxes on the main highway. I don't recall if that Postmaster cared what I said. But I got his attention when I requested the name and the address of the Postmaster General in Washington DC. I told him that I would send a petition along with pictures to show the serious location of the mail boxes.

I cannot say that the Cadiz Postmaster was afraid of his job or if he did not want to receive any scrutiny from the Postmaster General. It seemed to me like he had a change of heart in a nano second. He said that there might be a way to extend the mail route up the hill if certain conditions are met. He said there would have to be a place for the mail carrier to turn around without backing up. He wanted to know who was going to maintain the two-tenths of a mile driveway and keep it pothole free and drive able. And who was going to keep the driveway open in the winter months when the driveway was covered over in snow. I'm guessing that he thought that telling me all these required conditions would make me change my mind about contacting the Postmaster General. So I stood up and gave him a steely eyed look and he knew that I had enough of his bureaucratic nonsense. I told him there was a turn-a-round by the fuel tanks in front of my house; that I had been maintaining the driveway and filling in the potholes for the past 8 years and that I use a tractor and grader to keep the driveway level and free from snow drifts. The Postmaster came out the next day to inspect the driveway. The mail was delivered up the hill the following week.

Several accidents have occurred on Highway 68/80 in front of the Dyers Hill driveway. There is a 15-foot slope from the highway to the creek bottom at the culvert. My brother-



in-law, Roger Garner lives next to me. His parents were turning onto the driveway to come visit him. Their car was hit in the rear and knocked into the creek. The car was totaled and they were hospitalized. Some time in 1990, the Trigg County Road Department erected a sign for Dyers Hill Road. This was in compliance for the 911 system that called for roads to be identified for first responders. Since my old house is located in the middle of the Oakley farm, I have legal right of way up the driveway from the highway to my house as shown in the deed to the house.

It has been ten years since the county road department chipped and sealed the driveway. This is October 2020, and I heard a dump truck unloading crushed limestone on the driveway in front of my house. I went out on to my front porch and watched as a grader backed up to my mail box. The grader operator carefully looked to be sure that he did not hit my mail box. He lowered the grader blade and leveled the aggregate/stone (chips), as he slowly drove down the hill. I watched as he graded the entire two-tenths of a mile road all the way to old Highway 68/80.

After the grader drove onto the highway, the asphalt distributor truck started up the road. The truck operator began spraying the 190 degree Fahrenheit hot liquid asphalt on top of



the aggregate chips that had just been graded. I was at the top of the hill and I noticed some autumn leaves, from a nearby maple tree, fall on top of the liquid asphalt. They became entombed in the liquid asphalt. Within a minute, the chip spreader followed the asphalt distributor truck and put down a second chip application. This was followed by a rubber-tire roller that sets the chips into the liquid asphalt. It takes two to four passes

of the roller to set the chips. I was able to take a few pictures of this process for this story.

I like John Lennon's and Paul McCartney's song, "The Long and Winding Road." These



are some of their lyrics in that song: "The long and winding road that leads to your door will never disappear. I've seen that road before. It always leads me here. Lead me to your door. The wild and windy night that the rain has washed away has left a pool of tears. Crying for the day, why leave me standing here? Let me know the way. Many times I've been alone and many times I've cried. Anyway, you'll never know the many ways I've tried. And still they lead me back to that long and winding road. You left me standing here a long, long time

ago. Don't leave me waiting here, lead me to your door...".

In addition to filling the potholes and grading the road, I would mow the grass on both sides of the road. The side of the road that has all the cedar trees, near the top of the hill, has slopes going down three to four feet to the road. I would use a push mower around the cedar trees and down the slopes. It's a young man's job, and my great nephew, Corey Harrison, who built a new house on that side of the road that has all the cedar trees, now mows the grass on both sides of the road. Time has taken a toll on this old writer. But I have out lived Earnest Hemingway, who died at age 62, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, who died at age 44. My favorite writer, Jesse Stuart, died at age 77. I'm over the age of 75 and only Christ knows when it will be my time to put my pen down. I have three young people,

Jade, Lexie, and Skyler that enjoy getting stories and snail mail from me. I tell my friends to have young people and old people in their lives. The young people will keep you young at heart. The older people will keep you honest.

I enjoy driving up the hill to my front door. There is also a road that leads to heaven and it leads to Christ's front door. But many souls get distracted, by the evil one, and they run off that road and crash and burn. They may never make it to Christ's front door. Nicky Gumbel in his book, "Questions of Life," wrote: "In other words, we have to open the door to let Christ into our lives. Jesus will never force His way in. He gives us the freedom to choose. It is up to us whether or not we open the door to Him. If we do, He promises, 'I will come in and eat with them and they with Me.' Eating together is a sign of friendship which Jesus offers to all those who open the door of their lives to Him."

On Saturday, October 17, 2020, I was doing some maintenance on the front storm windows on the second floor of my old house. I removed the glass and screen and looked out at the distant soybean field. I could see two John Deere combines at work.

There was rain in the forecast and the combine operators were not wasting any time. I also heard a third combine in the field behind my house. I went down stairs and onto the front porch. I sat on the front porch swing and watched the combines at work. The combines were creating a lot of dust. Thankfully, a southern breeze kept the dust away from my house. The Good Lord created a bountiful yield.

I had work to do on the windows in my writing studio on the second floor. This was a stressful year with the pandemic. This is the first time that my wife and I voted by absentee ballot in a Presidential election. I've written several stories about the road that leads to my front door. My long time friend, Mike Herndon, is right, the best part of my stories is when I give credit to Christ, the real writer behind my stories. I hope that I can be a worthy instrument of His Peace. Everyday, I look out my front door and I look down that familiar road. Someday, I will open my front door and see Christ waiting for me at the end of that road.



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