

RIVERS, SONGS, AND MEMORIES

When my oldest granddaughter, Andrea was young, she loved to listen to a country song by Charlie Pride titled “Kiss An Angel Good Morning.” I had one of his CD's in my Oldsmobile and we would sing along with him as I drove Andrea to school at Heritage



Christian Academy in Hopkinsville. Andrea did not see color, she saw talent. She heard that Charlie Pride was having a concert in Owensboro, Kentucky and she asked me if I would take her to his concert. I said I would. When we arrived at the concert, I talked to his security person and showed him my retired Kentucky State Police retirement identification. I asked him to tell Charlie Pride that a little girl would like to meet him. I told him that I would be sitting up front with my wife, Paula and Andrea. In about 10 minutes, his security man came back and told me that Charlie would like to meet this little girl. Paula



told me that she did not want to give up our front row seats, and she would stay back and save them. Andrea and I followed the security man back to Charlie Pride's dressing room. Andrea smiled when she met Charlie Pride. He smiled and said, “We both have something in common, we both have a space between our two front teeth.” I asked the security man if he would take our picture with Charlie Pride. Andrea had braces later on to close that space between her two front teeth.

Rivers played an interesting part in my life. Before explaining why, I want to share the lyrics of a song written by Dennis W. Morgan and Rhonda Kye Fleming called “Roll On Mississippi.”

This is a song that I enjoy listening to that Charlie Pride sings. These are some of their lyrics: “Roll on Mississippi, walking along, whistling a song, bare foot and fancy free. A big river boat, passing us by, she's headed for New Orleans. There she goes, disappearing around the bend. Roll on Mississippi, you make me feel like a child again. A cool river breeze, like peppermint leaves, the taste of it takes me back. Chewin' on a straw, and muddy river. Just like a long lost friend. Roll on Mississippi, you make me feel like a child again, roll on Mississippi, big river roll. You're the childhood dream that I grew up on. Roll on Mississippi, carry me home. Now, when the world's spinning too fast for me, and I need a place to dream. So I come to your banks, sit in your shade, relieve the memories, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. Roll on Mississippi, you make me feel like a child again, roll on Mississippi. Big river roll. You're the childhood dream that I grew up on. Roll on Mississippi, carry me home. Now I can see I've been away too long. Roll on, Mississippi, Roll on. Mississippi...”

In 1964, I was dating my future wife, Paula Oakley in the sleepy town of Golden Pond. I was still on active duty in the Army. I had no money or even a car at that time. I would take a Greyhound bus from Fort Campbell to Hopkinsville, Kentucky. I would take a different bus from Hopkinsville to Golden Pond. I would borrow Paula's dad's Plymouth Valiant and take her on a date. The right passenger side door was damaged in an accident and I told Paula that she needs to sit close to me. One time we drove to the Cumberland

River. We sat on the river bank and we would throw stones and watch them skip across the water. I took a picture of the car with the old bridge behind it. Two years later, the TVA impounded the river to create Lake Barkley.

I decided to use lyrics to the song, “Kiss An Angel Good Morning.” The song was written by Ben Peters. These are his lyrics: “Whenever I've a chance to meet some old friends on the street. They wonder how does a man get to be this way. I've always got a smilin' face, any time and any place, and every time they ask me why, I just smile and say. You've got to kiss an angel good mornin' and let her know you think about her when you're gone. And love her like the devil when you get back home. Well, people may try to guess, the secret of happiness, but some of them never learn it's a simple thing. The secret I'm speakin' of is a woman and a man in love. And the answer is in this song that I always sing. You've got to kiss an angel good mornin' and let her know you think about her when you're gone. Kiss an angel good mornin' and love her like the devil when you get back home. Kiss an angel good mornin' and let her know you think about her when you're gone. Kiss an angel good mornin' and love her like the devil when you get back home.”

When I patrolled the “River Counties” of Ballard, Carlisle, Fulton, and Hickman, I would drive down and look at the Mississippi River. I watched the cars going on the Dorena-Hickman ferry. That ferry boat is subsidized with state funding from both Kentucky and Missouri, in addition to passenger fees. The basic fee is \$14.00 for vehicles up to 8 feet Wide and 30 feet long. The fee is half-price on a return trip. The 15 minute trip between Hickman, Kentucky and Dorena, Missouri is like taking a step back in time. Mark Twain called Hickman: “A pretty town perched on a handsome hill.” The ferry's 1.25 miles across the Mississippi River has it going around a sand bar. The ferry runs from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM, except for New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day.

I've crossed over the Mississippi River hundreds of times on the bridge at Wickliffe, in Ballard County, Kentucky on Highway 51, as I patrolled that county. The population of Wickliffe is about 700. It has a paper mill in the town. I disliked the smell that came from that mill. The mill closed and 500 people lost their jobs. A Chinese-owned paper manufacturer open the mill in 2018 and hired 500 workers. I always enjoyed going over that Mississippi River bridge. It is owned and maintained by Kentucky. I had to drive into Illinois to turn around and return to Kentucky. There is an Illinois State Trooper substation on the Illinois side, just as soon as you come off the bridge. I've never observed anyone in the substation.

It is called the “Cario Bridge.” The town of Wickliffe puts out this claim: “The Mississippi River begins in Minnesota, and winds south past Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri. But it does not become the Mighty Mississippi until it is joined by the Ohio River, and that's at Wickliffe! The Great River then flows south to the Gulf of Mexico at New Orleans, so Wickliffe is truly the Birthplace of the Mighty Mississippi. About a mile before going over the bridge is the Wickliffe Mounds State Historic Site. It is the archaeological site of a prehistoric Native American village of the Mississippian mound

builders. It is located on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. The Indian village was occupied from about 1100 AD to 1300 AD.

The Indians built a complex settlement with permanent houses and earthen mounds situated around a central plaza. During one of my patrols, I drove into the site, more out of curiosity, than anything else. The lady at the gate asked me if I had some time, that she would give me a tour. I called Dispatch and told the Dispatcher that I would be taking a lunch break in Wickliffe and I would be on the hand-held radio. The lady at the gate told me that these mound builders farmed the river bottoms and had a vast trade network. They buried their dead in the mounds. The village was abandoned in the 1300s. The site was privately owned by the Colonel Fain King family. They donated the site in 1946 to Western Baptist Hospital in Paducah. In 1983, Baptist Health donated the site to Murray State University. In 2004, Murray State University transferred the site to the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Commerce Cabinet. The Mounds are now operated by the Kentucky Department of Parks.

I liked to drive on the dirt roads when the Mississippi River bottoms are dry. I would look at the crops in the field. I befriended one family that farms over 1,600 acres of river bottom lands in Carlisle County. They have great high yield crops every year, except



when the fields get flooded. From 1976 to 1978, I was befriended by two other families in Carlisle County. They are deeply Christian families. They made this stranger a member of their family. We shared many meals together, and unforgettable River memories. I was invited to come to the retirement reception for the son of one of the families. The retirement reception was held in the Columbus-Belmont State Park in Hickman County. The park overlooks the Mississippi River. My oldest granddaughter, Andrea wanted to come to see the Mississippi River. I had been taking her to school

and we would sing Charlie Pride's Roll On Mississippi song. I took two pictures of Andrea and my wife, Paula with the Mississippi River in the background. I put those pictures with this story.

In Matthew, Chapter 8, Verse 26 are these words: He replied, "You of little faith, why are you afraid?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. If I was in a boat with Jesus Christ, I would be fearless. Before you ask Christ for any favors, first, thank Him for all the favors that He has already given you. Then ask Him for what you need. If it is part of the plan that He has for you, then it will be granted. Floriana Hall (no relation), wrote a short piece called "Nothing is Beyond His Power." These are her words: "When everything turns upside down and our strength seems to flounder, we turn to God to help us out and help our faith grow stronger. Keeping faith in all His power is a goal we need to reach. He helps us out in mind and spirit to go forth with Him and teach. He fills our hearts with love for all creatures, for mankind - an example for future generations to become like Him, soul and mind."

Rivers, songs, and memories are part of my life that I like to share and write about.

John F. Hall