

THE STAIRCASE AND THE PROMISE

By John F. Hall

This is a story about a staircase and a promise. The staircase is in a house, that was built in 1861, by John J. Dyer, the sheriff of Trigg County during the American Civil War. The house is located about five miles west of Cadiz, Kentucky. It was built on a hill, in the



middle of a 150-acre farm. This story begins in 1964, as I was dating my future wife, the former Paula Andree Oakley of Golden Pond, Kentucky. We received permission to visit the old house from Paula's grandmother, Miss Iva Lee Oakley. She purchased the Antebellum house and farm from Johnny Downs, in the early 1960's. Miss Iva was forced by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to sell her house (the former 1905, W.R. Wilson house), and her farm in Golden Pond, Kentucky. The TVA would buy a person's house, and let them move it, if that was not possible, the TVA would demolish it. One woman, in the Land Between the Rivers, was not willing to sell her house to the TVA. She was asked to come to the Cadiz restaurant to talk to a TVA representative. She went to the restaurant. While she was waiting to talk to the representative, who did not show up, the TVA burned her house to the ground. The TVA was even meaner to the men who did not want to sell their property. They would have the U.S. Marshall's arrest them, and take them to a jail in Louisville, Kentucky, for five or six weeks, with no bail. If that did not get the land owner's attention to sell, they would just burn their house, with all of its contents, and their barns, and anything else that would burn.

In 1970, I was able to obtain, against the vehement objections of the TVA, a Kentucky Historical Marker for the former town of Golden Pond. So vindictive was the TVA, because I was able to outwit them, that they weaponized the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to put me on that agency's perpetual, annual audit hit list. Even though I was a very poor, and only going to college on the GI. Bill, the IRS began, and still audits me, every year. I worked at the Murray State University Campus Post Office, as a part time student worker, and I worked summer jobs, the IRS would dun me, to pay them, another dollar or two in taxes. I believe, that because of the TVA's despicable acts, to include its trying to eradicate all of the heritage and history of Golden Pond, that it was kicked out of the LBL. In 1998, Congress approved the Land Between the Lakes Protective Act, which transferred administrative responsibility from the TVA to the U.S. Forest Service. The TVA transferred control of the LBL to the U.S. Forest Service in 1999.

In 1964, I was dating Paula. We decided to go visit the Dyer House. To get to the Dyer house, you have to go up a dirt drive way, from Highway 68/80. It is about two tenths of a mile, up a hill to the house. First, you have to open a wide wooden gate at the highway. That gate keeps Miss Iva, and her son, Andrew Oakley's cattle from getting out on the highway. I parked in front of the house.

At that time, there was a white picket fence, around the house, to keep the cattle out. There was a small gate in the front yard. I opened the gate, and Paula and I walked up to the front porch. It would be a year or two before Miss Iva moved from her home in

Golden Pond to the Dyer house. The one-step to the porch simply consisted of three 12-inch concrete blocks, put side by side. The edges of the front porch were dry rotted, and termite damaged. I took a picture I used that picture in a previous story called, "The Old House Memories." The house was vacant and we had Miss Iva's permission to go inside.



As Paula and I walked inside the house, the first thing that caught our attention was the staircase. There was an attractiveness, a charm about that staircase. Part of that due to the fancy stair brackets, under each step, on the staircase stringer. Paula and I walked up the eleven steps to the first landing. Then, we walked up the additional five steps to the second landing. Under the staircase, there is enough room for a desk and a chair. There is also a storage area with an antique door.

On April 17, 1965, when Paula and I were married, we really had nothing, except for the promise that we made to each other. We had no money to mail out wedding invitations, or have a rehearsal dinner, or have a wedding reception. We were married on Fort Campbell, in a small wooden Chapel, that had served its usefulness, and was razed years ago. Paula had no bridesmaids. Her sister, Marsha was her witness. I had no groomsmen. I asked one of the soldiers to be my witness. To my surprise, the entire Fort Campbell Security Platoon, Honor Guard, came to our wedding. We were all dressed in our Army Honor Guard uniforms. Army Chaplain Frank C. Riley had Paula and me, make the promise that my fellow soldiers, all came to hear me make. This is that promise: "I, John Francis Hall, take you, Paula Andree Oakley, to be my wife. 'I promise to be true to you in good times and bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.'" Then it was Paula' turn, to make her promise to me.

When I would make a promise to my oldest granddaughter, Andrea, and might not be able to keep it, she would look up at me, with teary eyes, and say: "But An- Father! You Promised!" On the wall, above the first staircase landing, are three pictures. They were taken on the day of our wedding. I call one of the pictures, our "Promise Picture." Paula and I were holding hands as we made the promise before Chaplain Riley. We were two teenagers who made a promise to each other. Christ knows that we've come so far, and we never gave up on us. One day, after Paula and I have long passed away, someone will take the "Promise Picture," off the foyer wall. At the bottom of that picture, above the frame, I put a little white sticker. I wrote these four words: "WE KEPT THE PROMISE."

John F. Hall

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