

## **STORIES OF A DEGREE, AN ANTIQUE BED, AND A VINTAGE MANTEL**

By John F. Hall

Here I find myself, laying flat on my back, in an antique bed, in my downstairs master bedroom. My legs are bent, supporting a small laptop, that my granddaughter, Heather



gifted me back in 2015. It was too obsolete and too slow for Heather. I was about to take my first online course from the Hopkinsville Community College (HCC). The college was about to celebrate its 50 Anniversary, and it invited me to come to the celebration. I was a member of that first class, but I transferred to Murray State University (MSU) in 1968, before being eligible to receive an AA Degree from HCC. I asked the HCC Registrar to award me an AA Degree, since I had a Masters Degree from MSU. She told me to submit copies of my transcripts from Austin Peay University (APU), MSU, Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), and Kentucky State University (KSU).

The Registrar called me back and said that I would have to take a computer course to demonstrate my computer competency. I said, “You’ve got to be kidding!” I’ve been using computers in the Army Reserve for over 30 years. She then told me that the University of Kentucky has a special scholarship program for students like me. They will pay for my tuition and fees to take the computer course. My oldest granddaughter, Andrea completed the course, and she gave me her computer text book. I passed the course and HCC asked me to “walk in the graduation line.” I asked the HCC President to let me be the last to be presented a degree. As I walked up to receive my degree, I stopped, and walked over to where the first graduating class was sitting. I told those in attendance to join me and clap for this class. As they did, the words of William Shakespeare came to mind: “All the world’s a stage. And all the men and all the women merely players.” I was a 70 year old student on that stage. I was also an actor, cheering for applause for my fellow first graduating class students. I might have stolen the show.

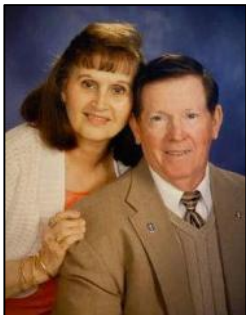
So, why I’m lying on the flat of my back in an antique bed? The answer is simple, several of the discs in my spine have suffered compression and have herniated. And some have resulted in spinal stenosis. I know that parachuting out of helicopters, and perfectly good airplanes, when I was a teenage soldier, did not help my spine, but I had falls working in construction. I was also T-boned by a pickup truck that added insult to my back injury. I put a ¾ inch plywood board and a firm mattress on top of the antique bed frame, to help support my back. As I look over to my left, I see an American Victorian fireplace mantel. It once belonged to my wife’s grandmother, Ivy Lee Oakley. My wife, the former Paula Andree Oakley of Golden Pond, Kentucky, is the reason I saved the mantle from being destroyed by the TVA back in 1967. The mantle measures 44 inches wide by 80 inches in height.

In 1986, Paula and I gutted the walls, and lowered the ceiling in the bedroom where I am writing this story. The mantle was put in this room, after I removed it from Golden Pond. I had the mantle taken to have it refinished, and to have the 36-inch long, by 18-inch high mirror replaced in the center of the mantle.

The mantle was in the “Wilson House” and was constructed in 1905. The first time that I met Paula was on the Wilson House front porch. That was my second rendezvous with destiny. Today, a person can drive to the former site of Golden Pond, in the Land Between the Lakes (LBL). The can walk up a hill to the Golden Pond Overlook, and peer through one of the Visual panels, to see the exact location where the Wilson House once stood. I’m reminded of a song written by Mark Sanders and Tia Sanders called, “I Hope You Dance.” I was driving to Army Reserve duty, north of Chicago, Illinois, in 2002, when that song first became popular. These are just a few of their Lyrics: “I hope you never lose your sense of wonder, you get your fill to eat but always keep that hunger, may you never take one single breath for granted, God forbid love ever leave you empty handed, I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean, whenever one door closes I hope one more opens, promise me that you’ll give faith a fighting chance, and When you get the choice to sit it out or dance, I hope you dance. I hope you dance...”.

Since 1977, I have been writing Christian, nonfiction stories. This is long before Andrea, Heather, John-John, Skyler, Dru, Lexie, and Jade were born. This gift is grace upon grace upon grace from Jesus Christ. It is His Word that inspires me. Country Singer Alan Jackson wrote the song, “Remember When.” It is like, in many ways, the story of my wife, Paula and me. These are some of his lyrics: “Remember when we vowed the vows and walked the walk. Gave our hearts, made the start and it was hard. We lived and learned, life threw curves, there was joy, there was hurt, remember when. Remember when the sound of little feet was the music we danced to week to week. Brought back the love, we found trust, vowed we never give it up, remember when. Remember when thirty seemed so old, now lookin’ back, it’s just a stepping stone to where we are, where we’ve been. Said we’d do it all again, remember when. Remember what we said when we turned gray, when the children grow up and move away? We won’t be said, we’ll be glad, for all the life we’ve had, remember when. Remember when, remember when...”.

My oldest granddaughter, Andrea is getting married this month. My wife, Paula was 18 and I was 19 when we were married at South Chapel, on Fort Campbell, back on April 17, 1965. Army Chaplain Frank Riley performed the marriage ceremony. We had no money for wedding invitations, a rehearsal supper, church flowers, or even a wedding reception. But all of my fellow Honor Guard soldiers came, in semi-



dress uniforms, to the small chapel, to watch us exchange our wedding vows. Alan Jackson wrote another song that mirrors Paula and my life. It is called, “Livin’ on Love,” and these are some of his lyrics: “Two young people without a thing, say some vows and spread their wings. And settle down with just what they need, livin’ on love. She don’t care about what’s in style, she just likes the way he smiles. It takes more than marbles and tile, livin’ on love. Livin’ on love, buying on time, without somebody nothing ain’t worth a dime. Just like an old fashion story book rhyme, livin on love. It sounds simple, that’s what your thinkin’, but love can walk through fire without blinkin’. It doesn’t take much when you got enough, livin’ on love. Two old people without a thing, children gone but they still sing. Side by side of that front porch swing, livin’ on love. He can’t see

anymore, she can barely sweep the floor. Hand in hand they walk through that door, livin' on love.. .”.

Actually, it's Paula who is starting to lose her eye sight. And with my bad back, I can barely sweep the floor. We do enjoy sitting on our front porch swing, and looking at the bright green wheat fields surrounding our house. To some of my older readers, I have a few suggestions that might help them to stay independent, for as long as they can. I removed the old tub in my house, and replaced it with a walk-in shower. The exterior door to my bedroom leads to my covered deck. I built a ramp to that deck, wide enough for a wheelchair. I have a rollator that I use, on doctor orders, to help maintain my balance, and to keep from falling. I'll end this story about a degree, an antique bed, and a vintage mantel, with a few words about giving faith a chance as we all weather the storms of life. Don't give up on Christ, and don't give up on yourself.

John F. Hall

\*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>