

STORIES FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE

By John F. Hall

Reaching back more than a half century ago, I can tell about a flying “Pumpkin Man” that I created, and a “Black Widow” cat, and tearing down an old house on Sam Armstrong’s farm. I found a lot that was for sale about four and a half miles from Cadiz, Kentucky. At that time, 1969, the only bank in Trigg County was Trigg County Farmers Bank. I went to the bank to borrow money to purchase the lot. I did not realize that the person I was talking to at the bank was dishonest. That person went behind my back and purchased the lot. I had made arrangements to purchase a small mobile home to put on the lot that I wanted to buy. Now I had to find a place for the mobile home.

I was a college student at Murray State University. My wife, Paula was employed as a clerk typist on Fort Campbell. Her



brother was living in a mobile home on her dad’s farm. Actually, the farm belonged to Paula’s grandmother, Ivy Oakley. She lived alone in the two story farm house. Paula’s brother, Grover had a mobile home between his dad and his grandmother’s house. I drove down Maple Grove Road one day and noticed a dilapidated, vacant tenant house on Sam Armstrong’s farm. It

adjoins the Oakley farm. I stopped and walked around the tiny house. It had a cistern, disconnected electric service, and a septic system.

I drove over to Sam Armstrong’s house and talked to Sam. I explained what happened at the bank and I asked if I could park my mobile home next to the old tenant house. Sam said that he had a proposal. If I would tear down the old house, that he considered to be a fire hazard, he would allow me to park my mobile home where the house once stood, and not charge me rent. It was a lot of work, but I demolished the house. I purchase a mobile home utility pole and paid for a water meter. I had the mobile home transported from Benton, Kentucky and set up on blocks. It was 45 feet long and 12 feet wide.

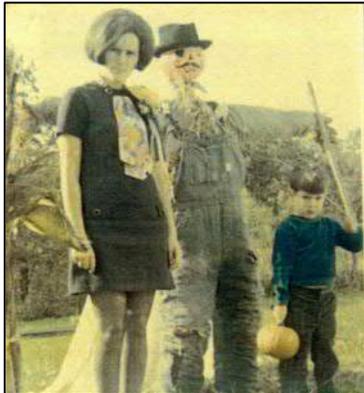
It was summer time and I had a summer job working as a laborer for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in the Land Between the Rivers. The TVA calls it the Land Between the Lakes (LBL). But it will always be the Land Between the Rivers to me. I was the last active duty soldier to live in Golden Pond. One of my fellow workers convinced me to buy a baby Yorkshire pig. He claimed that it would be a good investment. He said I could feed it table scraps and, when it got big, I could sell it and triple my investment. I agreed to buy the baby pig. He brought it to work in a wooden lettuce crate. I put the pig in the trunk of my Chevy II; parked the car under a tree, and left the trunk open to give the baby pig fresh air.

Next to my mobile home is a small tool shed and a small fenced—in dog pen that is attached to the tool shed. There is a mighty tall oak tree with branches that hang over the dog pen and provide shade in the summer time. I cut an entrance into the tool shed, and purchased some straw so the baby pig had a warm place to get out of the rain. We decided to call the baby pig “Arnold.” My son, John called the baby pig “Narnold.”

Anyone driving up or down the Maple Grove Road could see the little pig in his pen. I was amazed at how clean Arnold was. The pig only messed in one spot in the pen. I’m not exactly sure when it started, but when no one was home, people would drop off food for Arnold. Some of it was commodity food like rice or oatmeal that I guess they did not like to eat. I fed Arnold corn. He was such a good pet. He was always excited when I came home from my commute to college or Paula came home from work. He got so big for his pen, that we had to sell him at the livestock auction in Hopkinsville, Kentucky.

The person that sold me the pig mentioned that the TVA crew, that we were on, was being offered Fall work in Tennessee. My foreman, N.C. Hooks, a friend and neighbor, who lived three miles from my mobile home, told me that we could be getting over time pay. The union wages were high, more money than I ever made in one week in my life, up to that time. I thought about dropping out of college for one semester. But that night, call it Divine Intervention, I had a dream and I decided to work until college started in the Fall. It was a fateful decision. The man that replaced me was killed when a large steel crane fell over. I’ve written this before, that Christ does not speak to us directly. He speaks to us through others and events that happen to us in our lives.

It was getting close to Halloween on the Sam Armstrong farm. My son, John was four



years old at the time. I decided to make a Halloween decoration of a flying “Pumpkin Man.” It was just a made up and a pretend thing. To create the Pumpkin Man, I found an old pair of worn out work bib overalls that I filled the bib with straw. I took a plastic pumpkin and painted a face. I put a patch over one eye and gave the Pumpkin Man a long mustache. I used two pieces of 2 inch by 2 inch wood inside the bib legs that I drove into the ground to make the Pumpkin Man stand up. I used two tobacco sticks for the arms and a short stick for the neck. I put a black top hat over the pumpkin face. For a cape, I used an old white sheet. I told my son that because he was good, the Pumpkin Man flew out of Charlie Brown’s pumpkin patch to give him a pumpkin.

One day, a stray black cat came to the mobile home. My son wanted us to keep the cat as a pet. I said he could, but it had to stay outside. I told him to be careful and not let the black cat scratch or bite him. It might give him cat scratch fever (also called lymphoreticulosis). I called the cat “The Black Widow.” When she had a litter of kittens, she would go lay on the road as she was nursing them. She would wait until the last moment as a car was approaching. The she would run off and leave the unexpected

kittens to be run over. She killed all of her litter that way. Then one day the Black Widow cat was gone. I suspect that she got her due and a coyote, that lived in the nearby woods, had a Halloween feast as it ate the cat.

In the winter of 1978, during a snow storm, I was given two days off from coal strike duty in Hopkins County. I moved Paula and my son, John into the old farm house on Dyers Hill Road. Paula's grandmother, Ivy Oakley passed away in 1977 and the house was vacant for a year. The years rolled on and grand kids came and then were gone. Andrea lives and works in Nashville, Tennessee. Heather lives and works in Louisville.



John—John is still in college and lives at home. Skyler lives in Hopkinsville and works in Christian County. Jade is a high school senior and lives in Russelleville, Kentucky. Lexie is a high school senior and lives at home in Trigg County.

Paula and I still decorate for Halloween. This time it's for my great, great nieces Katie and Lilly Harrison. They live about one tenth of a mile down Dyers Hill Road from my house. Their dad, Corey is a preacher for the deaf in Clarksville, Tennessee. The corporate farmer, that rents the farm from the widow lady, completed the picking of the fields of corn. The combines stir up dust and dirt that blows with the wind onto my front porch. My son, John came over and pressure sprayed the dirt and dust off my old house.



J. Hampden Gurney wrote the harvest hymn, "Fair Waved The Golden Corn." These are his lyrics: "Fair waved the golden corn in Canaan's pleasant land, when full of joy, some shinning morn, went forth the reaper-band. To God so good and great their cheerful thanks they pour; then carry to his temple-gate the choicest of their store. Like Israel, Lord we give our earliest fruits to Thee, and pray that, as long as we shall live, we may Thy children be. Thine is our youthful prime, and life and all its powers; be with us in our morning time, and bless our evening hours. In wisdom let us grow, as years and strength are given, that we may serve the church below, and join the Saints in heaven."

One would not think that a fictitious "Pumpkin Man" would still be around in 2021. Yet, 47 years after my "Pumpkin Man" paid a visit to my four year old son, I would be surprised when my son came to visit me with his pumpkin man. He assembled it in my living room. It had slick

turned up buckle shoes, stripped pants, a green bow tie, a gold and black cape, a large orange bowl, and a fancy black top hat. But the “piece de resistance” of his Pumpkin Man, are the lights around the top hat, the cape, and the bowl. I filled the bowl with candy for the trick or treaters soon to come.

I'll end this story with a harvest hymn written by Stuart Townend, Keith Getty and Matt Bronleewe titled “For The Gifts of Heaven.” These are their lyrics: “For the gifts of heaven in the fields of earth, my soul will sing to the Lord. For the fruitful lands as they yield their worth, my heart gives thanks to Him. We may plough the soil, we may plant the seed, but God will make it grow, and the harvest comes from the tender goodness of the Father’s hand. As the trade winds blow over thirsty plains, my soul will sing to the Lord, and the storm clouds pour with reviving rains, my heart gives thanks to Him. Every season whispers the mystery, the glorious rhythm of life, till the harvest comes the boundless goodness of the Father’s hand. When the crops have failed and fields are bare, my soul will cry to the Lord. When the hungry know only death’s despair, my heart will look to Him. For the call goes out from the heart of God to share with those in need; as we feed the world we reflect the goodness of the Father’s hand.” I’ve watched the fields in good times and failed times. My day starts in His hands. For it is only through His grace upon grace that I continue to write stories from the countryside.

John F. Hall

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