

THE SOUNDS OF SUMMER

By John F. Hall

During the past winter months, not a sound could be heard coming from the three ponds in the front of my house. The pond water, as the temperature dropped, froze around the pond's banks. The crickets were not chirping and the frogs were not croaking in the frozen ground. There was no serenade of bird songs or a chorus of calling insects. There was not a single crackle from the burn pile in my back lot. The weather forecast of brutal heat and high humidity, for the next week, is keeping me hibernating in my living room. I have not heard the sound of the sizzle of my barbecue grill since last spring's cook-out.



The fireflies have now emerged from the ground in my front yard. One landed on my front door. Now the birds, the crickets, and the frogs have come alive with their sounds of music. The rabbits that inhabit my back yard just love to feast on the clover and chase each other. Oscar Hammerstein and Richard Rogers wrote the song, "The Sound of Music." These are their lyrics: "The hills are alive with the sound of music, with songs that have been sung for a thousand years. The hills fill my heart with the sounds of music. My heart wants to beat like the wings of a bird, that rise from the lakes to the trees. My heart wants to sigh like a chime that flies from a church on a breeze. To laugh like a brook when it trips and falls over stones on its way. To sing through the night like a lark who is learning to pray. I go to the hills when my heart is lonely. I know I will hear what I have heard before. My heart will be blessed with the sound of music, and I will sing once more."

It has been a decade since I have walked in the hills behind my house. I remember, many years ago, when I drove my father-in-law, Andrew Oakley's International tractor and mowed the fields behind my house. In the hills there is a large pond that was constructed with a conservation grant. There is a levy on one side of the pond. At one time, about 20 feet below the pond, there was a watering trough for the cattle. A few feet below the levy, in the pond, is a six-inch steel overflow pipe that allows the water to flow out of the pond. There is a smaller pipe that feeds water into the watering trough. This fall, the Good Lord willing, and I'm still able to walk any distance, I want to walk to that pond and across its levy. I want to see if the watering trough has stood the test of time. The pond is deep enough to bury a school bus.

I purchased a tractor radio to mount on the International tractor. I liked to listen to music as I was bush-hogging (mowing) down the sassafras trees and sage grass in the field by that back pond. I have always felt that those who work the land, even if just for a brief moment in time, own that land. In the end, the land will own all of us.

Charles L. Johnson and J.R. Shannon wrote the song, "In the Hills of Old Kentucky." These are their lyrics: "There's a rose that grows in old Kentucky, she's the sweetest girl I know, with eyes of blue, and manner, too, that have made me love her. Where the lonely mountain trail is winding 'round my old Kentucky home, to a simple old log cabin, that is

where I soon will roam. In my dreams I see the blue grass weaving, and the meadow larks at play; they seem to call me back again to the hills so far away, where the winding trail is filled with sunshine, and the Rhododendron grows, where the birds are ever singing to my old dear Mountain Rose. In the hills of old Kentucky where the birds sing merrily, and the Southern breeze is playing thru the trees, that is where I belong to be. O'er the mountain trail I'm going, where my sweet wild flower grows, in the hills of old Kentucky to my Mountain Rose.”

It was 9:00 o'clock in the evening on the 4th of July, as my wife, Paula and I looked out one of the foyer windows. That glass has a blue tint as it was made back in 1860. It has some lead in it, I guess to make it strong. The Lake Barkley State Resort Park was having its traditional Independence Day fireworks event. Our house is on a high hill, and we could see, west of the maple tree in the front yard, the fireworks exploding above the Lodge. It was too hot and too humid to go outside and sit on the front porch swing, and watch the fireworks that night. When the grandchildren, Andrea, Heather, and John-John were little, we would all sit on the front porch and watch the fireworks exploding in the night sky.

The late Kentucky poet and short story writer, Jesse Stuart wrote 460 short stories and gave them to Murray State University. They were mainly fictional stories of the 4,000 characters that he invented, and about the people in eastern Kentucky. I only write nonfiction stories about western Kentucky. Country singer Tom. T. Hall wrote the song, “Its Got to Be Kentucky for Me.” In one of the song's lyrics he wrote: “My flesh and my blood is buried there.” My parents have never been to Cadiz or Trigg County. I wanted their final resting place to be in Kentucky. When they died, I had them buried in Trigg Memory Acres Cemetery, which is located on the east side of Cadiz off Highway 68. They are buried next to a tall cross in the middle of that cemetery. When I travel to Hopkinsville, I drive past that cemetery, and I look over at that cross. I think of my parents and I remember that Christ died on a cross to redeem us from our sins.

These are Tom T. Hall's lyrics: “Georgia, I love your big magnolia trees. Texas, I love to feel the prairie breeze. Tennessee, you made me what I am today, but it's got to be Kentucky for me. She loves me and she knows where I am Kentucky; you are my motherland. Say hello to the rivers and the trees. Oh, it's got to be Kentucky for me. New York, that's a fine place to go. Colorado, my it's pretty covered with snow...”. “California, sunshine just brings me to my knees, oh, but it's got to be Kentucky for me. My flesh and blood is buried there. I believed that Jesus blessed the briar. Big world I have seen your mastery, but it's got to be Kentucky for me. But it's got to be Kentucky for me.”

In my stories, I give honor and gratitude to Jesus Christ for the grace and the inspiration that he has lovingly given to me. Songs are a very important part of the sounds of summer. In 1964, Paul Simon wrote the song, “The Sound of Silence.” These are his lyrics: “Hello darkness, my old friend, I've come to talk with you again. Because a vision softly creeping left its seeds while I was sleeping. And the vision that was planted in my brain, still remains, within the sound of silence. In restless dreams, I walked along narrow streets and cobblestones, 'neath the halo of a street lamp. I turned my collar to the cold

and damp. When my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light, that split the night, and touched the sound of silence. And in the naked light, I saw ten thousand people, maybe more. People talking without speaking. People hearing without listening. People writing songs that voices never shared. And no one dared disturb the sound of silence. 'Fools' said I, 'You do not know silence like cancer grows. Hear my words that I might teach you. Take my arms that I might reach you.' But my words, like silent raindrops fell, and echoed in the wells of silence. And the people bowed and prayed to the neon god they made. And the sign flashed out its warning in the words that it was forming. Then the sign said, 'The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls in tenement halls.' And whispered in the sound of silence."

Art Garfunkel sang the song, "The Sound of Silence," with Paul Simon. Garfunkel made this comment about that song: "The song's meaning is about the inability of people to communicate with each other, not particularly, intentionally but especially emotionally, so what you see around you are people unable to love each other." In John, Chapter 13, Verse 34, are these words: "A new commandment I give you; love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

I cherish being a grandfather to my three grandchildren and my three surrogate granddaughters. Some grandfathers play a very important role in the lives of their grandchildren. It has been very disheartening, to me, that I know grandfathers that intentionally abdicate that responsibility. They may not realize, or even care about the emotional harm they have caused to their grandchildren by ignoring or rejecting them. Christ gives us a free will to make our own decisions. In the end, we will be judged by the things we did and the decisions that we made in this life. I feel that the angel assigned to watch over me, is worn out trying to keep me safe from the risks that I take.

In writing this story, not everything about enjoying the sounds of summer was happy. One time I was enjoying listening to the tractor radio as I was bush-hogging a pasture on the east side of the farm. Billy Joel was singing his song, "The Piano Man." I looked over at the big right tractor tire. The tractor was pulling to the left and I realized that the four wheel nuts that lock the right wheel had come loose from the axle. I was going down a hill. I knew that I could not pump the tractor brakes and risk the tractor losing the right wheel and turning over. I pushed the throttle back to slow the engine's rpm's. I turned off the tractor's ignition. The power take off shaft, that comes out of the back of the tractor, and is connected to the bush-hog's gear box, brought the tractor to a stop. The next day, I drove to Mayfield, Kentucky in my father-in-laws old pickup truck. I purchase a roll-over bar for the tractor. I was a friend to a farmer that was accidentally killed as he was working on his bush-hog. His tractor was running and it jumped into gear. I knew another farmer that was killed when his tractor turned over. The roll-over bar was my gift to my father-in-law.

In addition to the levy on the back pond, there is a very short boat dock on the south side of that pond. My oldest granddaughter, Andrea, when she was nine years old, loved to drive on the dirt roads leading to that pond. She would stand up behind the wheel of my 1989 Ford Ranger, short bed pickup truck. She would steer the truck and I would work

the gas and brake pedals. Her younger sister, Heather would ride “shotgun” (passenger side door), and their younger brother, John-John would sit on the seat console. Every time she would drive over a bump or hole in the dirt road, they would all laugh. I remember one time that we were all sitting on that boat dock. Their uncle Roger Garner came by and talked to them. Alan Jackson wrote the country song, “Drive.” These are just a very few of his lyrics: “It was just an old worn out jeep, rusty old floor boards, hot on my feet. A young girl, two hands on the wheel, I can't replace the way it made me feel. And he'd say turn it left, and steer it right. Straighten up girl now, you're doing just fine...”.

Time after time, I believe that Christ is keeping me around to write my stories, for reasons only He knows. I'll end this story with a short piece by Mary Ann Jameson called “A Simple Lesson Learned.” These are her words: “The lightning bugs come flashing by one star-filled Summer's night. Watching them in wonder made my heart delight. They blink and flash their color, a lovely yellow hue. And as they flew around me, I knew one thing was true. These tiny little creatures, created by God's hands, twinkle bright with splendor, thus obeying God's command. We can take a simple lesson from the lightning bugs so bright - to live our lives as God designs and point others to the 'light'.”

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