

THE FORGOTTEN GARDEN

By John F. Hall

This is a story about a rather insignificant flower garden. It is also about how absolute power corrupts absolutely. Part of this story is told by my wife, Paula. It is also about how good triumphs over evil. In a previous story titled, "The Witness Stand," I wrote about meeting the LBL Director. I mentioned to the Director that I wanted to obtain a historical marker for Golden Pond. He was adamantly against it. His goal was to obliterate the heritage of Golden Pond. My goal was to preserve it. I was not aware of the existence of archived road plans from the 1930s. These plans called for new curbs and an enclosed garden area between the newly-proposed Highway 68 and the buildings in Golden Pond. I only discovered that the flower garden was on state property by asking the two highway workers. The flower garden was not deeded over to the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in the 1960s when the Land Between The Lakes (LBL) was created.



I briefly mentioned in another story, that LBL management treated some residents in a despicable manner. At the October 22, 2016, dedication of the Golden Pond Overlook, Donnie Holland, a former Golden Pond resident and Commissioner of KY parks, told the crowd, "When they had a land owner that refused to sell his land, the TVA would have U.S. Marshals arrest the person, hand cuff him, take him to jail in Louisville and keep him locked up for six months. While the man was in jail, the TVA would burn his house and all of his possessions and bury what ever remained. The TVA would not keep roads accessible in the LBL to allow former residents to visit family cemeteries. I observed this when I tried to visit a historic cemetery south of Golden Pond. This disrespectful conduct lasted for 35 years. In 1998, Congress approved the Land Between the Lakes Protection Act, which transferred administrative responsibility for the LBL from the TVA to the U.S Forest Service. This agency realized the importance of preserving Golden Pond heritage.

The residence of Golden Pond called the flower garden, "The Park." In this story, I provided an old painting and a 1930s picture of the flower garden. Large trucks and buses coming into Golden Pond would drive off the main highway and drive around the flower garden which also served as a highway median. The state highway department paved and maintained the side road and parking area going around the flower garden. By the 1960s, several maple trees had replaced the flowers in the flower garden. Golden Pond was unincorporated and had no water or fire department. About the closest person that the town had for a mayor was the Postmaster, George Bleidt. The post office had a large front window and George could watch the folks coming into and out of the town. The post office had mail box rentals and many folks preferred to make the daily trips to the post office to pick up their mail.

I mentioned in a previous story, "Soldiers In Golden Pond," about coming to the town with six other soldiers. We stopped to eat at the Sun Set Inn restaurant. My future wife, Paula Andree Oakley wrote a story about her recollection of the events in 1964. Her story, her picture and a picture of the Sun Set Inn restaurant was published on page 42 of the Trigg County, Kentucky (The Past 100 Years 1885- 1985) Volume 1 history book. History is best preserved by the people that observed and experienced it.

The title of Paula's story is, "Life in Golden Pond." This is what she wrote, "When I was a little girl going to school in Golden Pond, I would ask Frank Dunn to stop by the Sun Set Inn to buy gum for me, my sister, Marsha and my friend Judy. Mr. Dunn was the school janitor and a friend of the family. He would help us separate plants during tobacco setting time. I would kid him about marrying my grandmother. Their spouses had died. My grandmother lived in a two-story white frame house next to our brick house."

"We lived across the highway from the Sun Set Inn. We shared a well that had good water. It left a blueish stain at the bottom of a sink. When my younger sister went to high school in Cadiz, my mother went to work in Hopkinsville to help with the expenses. I graduated from Trigg County High School and went to college in Murray. My father farmed 300 acres behind our house. We had the best of farm life with the convenience of living in Golden Pond."

"I would look out the window from my bedroom and watch the cars pull into the Sun Set Inn. Conley and Lew Wallace built the Inn in 1947. The restaurant part of the Inn was managed by Mildred Puckett. Billy Oakley managed the grocery part of the Inn. There was a hydraulic lift next to the grocery side of the Inn. I can remember my brothers putting their cars on the lift to change the oil. The grocery side of the Sun Set Inn stocked mainly convenience items. We had Richie's grocery in Aurora deliver groceries once a week by truck. One Fall day in 1964 a group of Honor Guard Soldiers stopped in the Sun Set Inn for supper. They were coming from a military funeral in Benton."

"I was in the Inn with Cathy Underhill and my sister, Marsha waiting for a carry out order. My Murray State College sweat shirt caught the eye of one of the soldiers. He was a part time student at Austin Peay College. He was interested in talking about our schools and we talked shop. We wrote each other after that meeting and he made several trips to Golden Pond by Greyhound bus. I would walk from my house to the Post Office to pick up the mail. We rented box 56. George Bleidt the Postmaster would always kid me about my soldier friend and how we would 'spoon' by the city park while we waited for the bus to carry him back to the Fort."

Looking back to that time in 1964, I was 19 and did not own a car. My Army pay was \$85 a month (\$1,092 in today's purchasing value). I had to be 21 to sign a contract to purchase a used car. The only way that I could visit Paula was by bus. To travel to Golden Pond, I would take the Greyhound bus from Fort Campbell to Hopkinsville. I would then have to take a different bus from Hopkinsville to Golden Pond. The bus would pull off the highway near the flower garden by the Post Office. I would get off the bus and walk about two blocks to visit Paula. She would drive her dad's tan Plymouth

Valiant to take me back to the flower garden to wait for the bus to arrive from Murray. The bus would then go on to Cadiz and Hopkinsville.

The First Sergeant of my unit was Master Sergeant William Teeters. He was from Benton, Kentucky. Any time I wanted a three-day pass, he would always grant it. I would leave Fort Campbell Saturday morning and return Monday. I would sleep on the couch when I visited Paula. Cathy Underhill was Paula's and Marsha's friend. She started to call me "Frawn swa" which is her French pronunciation of my middle name of Francis. One day, Paula and I drove down to the Cumberland River. This was two years before the US. Corp of Engineers impounded the "bottom lands" to make Lake Barkley. Paula and I walked down to look at the river. I turned around and took a picture of her car with the Highway 68/80 bridge "in the background. I remember standing with my future wife, Paula on the banks of the Cumberland River in 1964. We were throwing stones in the river and watching them bounce and skim across the surface until they sank.

Little did I know that two months after looking at the hillside across from the calm Cumberland River, I would find myself halfway around the world in a Merchant Marine ship being tossed about on the high seas. Ronnie Hinson wrote a hymn titled, "Jesus Is The Lighthouse." I've always been fascinated with lighthouses. I've been in a few. These are some of his lyrics, "There's a lighthouse on the hillside that overlooks life's sea. When I'm tossed it sends out a light that I might see. And the light that shines in the darkness now will safely lead us home. If it wasn't for the lighthouse my ship will be no more. It seems that everybody about says 'tear that old lighthouse down. The big ships just don't pass this way anymore, so there's no use in standing around.' Then my mind goes back to that one dark stormy night, when just in time, I saw the light. Yes, it was the light from that old lighthouse that stands up there on the hill. And I thank God for the lighthouse. I owe my life to Him. Jesus is the lighthouse and from the rocks of sin. He has shown the light around me that I might clearly see. If it wasn't for the lighthouse (tell me) where would this ship be?..."

With this story I put a picture of Paula and me standing with George Bleidt, the last



Postmaster of Golden Pond. He published a book with Jim Wallace titled, "Lest We Forget: Between the Rivers, Trigg County, Kentucky: a pictorial history." I let George Bleidt use the picture that I took of Paula standing by the Golden Pond highway sign. I put a picture of Billy Oakley and me sitting in the grocery side of the Sun Set Inn. His little daughter is sitting in front of us. One other picture that I put with this story

shows Paula getting something out of the trunk of our first car. It was an Oldsmobile. Standing in front of the house are Paula's parents Pauline and Andrew Oakley. By the car is Paula's sister Marsha and her friend Cathy Underhill.

In 1970, Paula and I participated in the unveiling of the Golden Pond Historical Marker that was installed by the Kentucky highway department in the flower garden. I took a picture of my pickup truck that was used for the ceremony speakers. I put an American flag on the side of the truck. In his speech that day, William Miller of Golden Pond, told the crowd of over 200 people that we should tell our children and our children's children about this land. Who knew, that 46 years after that speech, that history could be brought to life?

On October 22, 2019, the Forest Service helped with the dedication of the Golden Pond Interpretive Overlook. On a tall hill, west of the former site of the town was created an overlook with six interpretive panels. One color mural titled, "The Community of Golden Pond," lists the last names of all the people that lived there. Below the list of names is an amazing watercolor painting etched in glass. It shows Paula's brick house; her grandmother's two-story white frame house; the Golden Pond School; the Sun Set Inn, and the other buildings that once existed in the town. That mural brings Paula's story to life. Above the mural is an etched glass panel that you can look through and see the former locations of the buildings.

In 1964, Paula and I were teenagers and we roamed the hills over looking Golden Pond. We were in love with each other and in love with the people that lived in that town. One day, I hope that the people who read this story, especially my grandchildren: Andrea, Heather, John-John, Jade, Skyler and Lexie, will drive over and visit the Golden Pond Interpretive Overlook. The Trigg County Fiscal Court is looking into funding a road up to the Overlook. Until that happens, a gravel laid trail leads up to the Overlook. One should have on walking shoes going up the winding trail to reach the Overlook. The flower garden that played such a pivotal roll in this story was covered over with several feet of dirt and gravel as the highway was raised. I give Christ the honor and the glory for allowing this insignificant soul to be able to write about "The Forgotten Garden."

John F. Hall

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