

THE GENTLEMAN FARMER

By John F. Hall

I have lived in the middle of this farm for the past 44 years. Gone, but for the memories, are my days of fixing fences, feeding corn to my father-in-law's cattle, and raising an acre of tobacco for my son, John's 4H school project. I miss feeding the cattle the most. I considered them to be my big pets. I sit on my front porch swing, when the weather allows, and write stories. It's when the temperature and the humidity gets so high that I have to retreat to my second floor room. I look out the front window at the fields in front of my house, and continue to write my stories. I watch satellite TV, channel 370 on Dish TV. The program is called "Coffee, Country & Cody." It airs Monday thru Friday from 7:00 am to 10:00 am. It is country music and interviews with country singers. I mute the commercials.



Gone are the days when I would put square bales of hay in the old stock barn next to my house. The hayloft can hold about 300 bales of hay. In the winter time, I would back my father-in-law, Andrew Oakley's beat-up, four-wheel drive, Chevrolet pickup truck, in front of the stock barn. I would throw down about ten bales of hay from the hayloft into the back of the truck. I would drive into the pasture fields. The cattle would see me coming, and they would come a-runnin'. I would cut the two strings holding the square bale together and spread the hay for the cattle to eat. I would bring a pile of hard field corn and let the cattle take it from my hand. I could call them up, if they were in a distant pasture, by yelling out loud: "Sook! Sook! Sook!" The cattle knew it was corn time.

I remember, from several decades ago, that I used hydraulic jacks to raise one small section of the stock barn, at a time. I would raise it just enough to slip a six-inch solid concrete block under the horizontal ground log on that section of the stock barn. The repairs helped to increase the life of the stock barn. I estimate that the stock barn was built around the same time as my old house, in 1861. When my father-in-law stopped raising cattle, and switched to row cropping, he let me use the Stock barn for storage. It became too much of a hassle to climb up into the hay-less hayloft to retrieve my stored item. I built a large storage building behind my house and moved what I had stored in the stock barn.

Today, my great nephew, Pastor Corey Harrison stores his building materials in the stock barn. His house is about 900 feet from my house down Dyers Hill Road. I pass his house, which he built, every time I go up and down Dyers Hill Road. One time, I stopped in front of his house. One of his daughter's Katie was playing in the front yard. I rolled my window down and called out: "Hi Katie!"

We began a conversation and I asked Katie: "How old are you now and what grade are you in?" She answered: "I'm seven years old and in the second grade." I told her goodbye and drove off. Her grandmother lives a little further down the road. Katie decided to run

after my car until she became tired. I looked in my rear view mirror. She stopped in the middle of the one-lane chip and seal road. I thought about her mother, Michelle. She cannot hear or speak. Katie communicates with her mother by sign language. Katie has no problem hearing or speaking. Katie's dad, Pastor Harrison has a Cochlear implant that allows him to hear. I have trouble understanding him when he speaks. On Sundays, he pastors a church for the deaf in Clarksville, Tennessee.



My wife, Paula asked me to purchase supper from Kentucky Fried Chicken near Interstate-24. There is a man in his 80s, that goes to the church that I attend. He could pass for Colonel Sanders who started that business with his “secret recipe.” On the way to the restaurant, I looked at two fields of rolled bales of hay on both sides of the



Highway 68 Bypass. I decided to write a story about those bales of hay. Christ gave me the grace upon grace upon grace and the inspiration to write stories, and this story would be no exception. As I am typing this story, today is my 77th birthday. I'm two years older than my dad, Charles J. Hall, when he died at

the age of 75. I miss him even as so many years have passed.

I received a text and a birthday card from my brother-in-law, Bruce Oakley. He lives in Murray, Kentucky with his wife Brenda. He is disabled from a fall and he is one week younger than me. I also received a birthday text from my sister-in-law, Marsha Garner. She lives next door with her husband, Roger. He owns Harley, the horse that I wrote about several months ago. My third oldest granddaughter, Skyler Crisp moved to Hopkinsville, Kentucky from Trigg County. I mail her a letter along with a recent story. She told me that she had to get her driver's license renewed and the clerk required that she bring mail as proof of her address in Hopkinsville. She was stressing out until she remembered the box that I gave her to store the stories and letters that I mailed her. My letters were all she had to show the clerk. She calls them her “An-father letter box.”

Will Gilmer wrote the song, “The Baler Rolls.” These are some of his lyrics: “Three thirty in the evening, the sun is shining bright. The hayfield's ready for bailing, the windows are raked up tight. Veil of dust on the windshield from the hay that's going in. The tractor runs across the field then turns and comes again. And the baler rolls. And the baler rolls. The baler rolls the hay up tight. There won't be no mold 'cause we cured it right. As the year goes on and the days turn cold, our cows'll eat the hay the baler rolls...”.

My brother-in-law, Roger Garner buys about 100 bales of hay for his horse, Harley to eat during the winter months. He pulls a farm wagon with his old pickup truck. The farm wagon has a tall back rack to keep the bales of hay from falling off. He drives to a farm east of town where he buys the hay from the field after it is bailed. He helps the farmer stack the bales on hay onto the farm wagon. I believe the farmer charges \$5.00 for each

bale of hay. The hay is a very good mixture of orchard grass, tall fescue and alfalfa. Roger will then drive back to the farm and unload the hay in a small stable that he built for Harley. He will also buy sacks of grain to supplement Harley's diet during the winter months.

James Cochran wrote a poem called, "Haymaking." These are his words: "Make hay while the sun shines they say, and we do, circling the field while swallows dive and swoop to feast on insects we kick up, inhaling the mingled sweetness of diesel fuel and honeysuckle. We cut, rake and bale till the sun goes down and dew settles on the fields. Then start again next morning when the dew burns off, almost finishing as dark clouds build on the horizon and drops of rain cut the dust on the baler. There's the part no one says... Make hay while the sun shines, but stop when it starts to rain."

It's the beginning of summer as I'm writing this story. Hay played a role in the early years of my adult life. If one thinks about it, hay played a role in all of our lives as best expressed in a hymn written by Michael Perry called, "See Him Lying on a Bed of Straw." These are some of his lyrics. "See Him lying on a bed of straw, a droughty stable with an open door. Mary cradling the babe she bore, the Prince of Glory is His name... Star of Glory sweep across the skies, show where Jesus in the manger lies. Shepherds swiftly from your stupor rise to see the Savior rise. Angels sing the song that You began. Bring God's glory to the heart of man. Sing that Beth'lem's little baby be salvation to the soul. Mine are riches from Your poverty, from Your innocence eternity. Mine forgiveness by Your death for me, Child of sorrow for my joy... Oh now carry me to Bethlehem to see the Lord appear to men. Just as poor as was the stable then, The Prince of Glory when He came..."

I checked my mailbox in front of my house for mail. I received a birthday card from Maria Brezewski. She goes to the church that I attend with her husband Don. Maria sings in the church choir. Several months ago, I started giving her a copy of some of my stories. In the birthday card Maria wrote: "Best wishes for many more healthy & happy years writing lots more stories." Maria is part of the church ministry that sends out postcards to church members that are in poor health. The Postal Service will increase the price of a postcard stamp to 44 cents on July 10th. The price of a First-Class stamp will increase from 58 cents to 60 cents.

Frances Culp Wolfe wrote a short piece called, "Don't Think of Tomorrow." These are her words: "Don't think of tomorrow, just live day by day; rely on God's promise, don't turn Him away. Believe that He'll help you, whatever you may need; His love is unfailing, trust Him to succeed. His eyes are upon you, His ears hear your call; His hands will direct you, with His strength you won't fail. Don't think of tomorrow, just live day by day, and walk in His footprints, each step of the way."

Several years ago, I became friends with Audrey and Mike Lambert. Speaking of postcards, they sent me a postcard from Amalfi, Italy. It's a city south of Naples. In a text, they mentioned that they were departing the settlement of Svalbard on a polar ship. It has a population of 2,200. It is in the Norwegian group of islands located in the Arctic Ocean

north of Norway, and about 650 miles from the North Pole. It is the northernmost year-round settlement on earth. They hope to see polar bears. Audrey mentioned that the temperature is 35 degrees and sunny. The ship has no internet, but they were able to wish me a happy birthday by cellphone text.

My oldest granddaughter, Andrea called me from Nashville, Tennessee, to wish me a happy birthday. She just got back from a vacation in Mexico with her boyfriend, Andrew, and his family. They went horseback riding up some mountain. I was just happy that she was back and safe. My next to the oldest granddaughter, Heather texted me and wished, me a happy birthday. My niece, Gabby sent me a video with a birthday wish. She has a single wing pilot license and the video involves that flight. My thanks to Marsha Garner and Trish Cunningham for their birthday wishes.

I will end this story with a little prayer: I am grateful for those who motivate me to write, to include Audrey, Jade, Trish, Lexie, Maria, Skyler, Daniel, my Christian Fraternity Brothers, and all the other dear hearts and gentle people that I share my life with. I'm just a gentleman farmer that only owns one acre of land in the middle of a farm. I call it God's green acre where I'm living one day at a time. Amen.

John F. Hall

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