

THE WEEK BEFORE THANKSGIVING

By John F. Hall

The week before Thanksgiving is a busy time at my old house on Dyers Hill. I've been watering the five potted mums at the Harvest Display in my front yard. I put the mums on the ground behind the bales of straw. This helps to protect them from the strong and cold north winds. It also allows the sun to shine on the mums from sunrise to sunset. On Thanksgiving Day I will put the mums on my front porch. When I sit on my front porch swing, I have an unobstructed view of the lush green wheat field in front of my house. I can turn and see the two metal, antique milk cans on the sides of my front door. On top of each milk lid can I put an artificial orange pumpkin. Strapped to one handle of each milk can, are two child-size scarecrows with name tags of the four grandchildren. At the base of one of the milk cans, I put a baked clay pumpkin. It is thin China that was broken twice. I glued it back together, twice. There are two front porch lights. Behind each light fixture I mounted a flat board in the shape of a pumpkin, with the words, "Welcome."



In front of the Harvest Display, that my son, John gave me, at the straw base, are three real pumpkins. There are three small child-size flat scarecrows attached to the straw." On the top bale are three six-inch tall scarecrows. Behind those tiny scarecrows is a baked clay pumpkin. For Halloween, some people will cut off the top of a pumpkin. They will clean out the inside of the pumpkin, and carve a face into the skin of the pumpkin. It is when they put a candle inside the pumpkin that it becomes a jack-o'-lantern. Ann Thompson wrote a story called, "Pumpkin Story." At the end of her stew, she compares us to a pumpkin. These are some of her words: "We are a little like a pumpkin (some of us even look a bit like pumpkins! But that isn't what I mean). We have gunky stuff inside, and God is like the farmer, and cleans it all out. Sometimes that is uncomfortable, and sometimes it takes a long time. But it is necessary to stop the rot. Then God carves a face on us. We become something different, something special. This can be painful, and sometimes life, as the face is carved, is hurtful. But it's necessary, and it changes us. Finally, God will put his own light inside of us, so we become a part of His plan, we have a purpose, and we can shine out to show others the way to go. We have part of God, living right inside us, and nothing can take that away...".



Pumpkins and scarecrows decorate the front of my old house. Kristin Riley wrote a poem called, "Scarecrow." Like the antique milk cans by my front door, scarecrows are no longer used. These are Kristin's words: "A giant scarecrow stuffed with straw sits in my garden bed. He has patches on his elbows and a big

hat on his head. His pants are frayed and tattered, sewn from old potato bags. His shirt is worn and shabby, made of torn-up, threadbare rags. He sits along the haystacks and among the growing seeds. He protects our crops each season, he's what a farmer needs. The crows do not come near him, he scares them all away. He guards our Autumn harvest each and every day." This is the week before Thanksgiving. It is that special time of the year when my old mansion on the hill hosts a grand feast. It will be held in a former dilapidated old kitchen, that once upon a time had the meals cooked in the kitchen fireplace.

In 1990, I demolished the kitchen fireplace and tore down the exterior kitchen chimney. In its place, I installed three, side by side, double-hung windows. Each window was given



a storm window. I mounted 2-inch by 4-inch ceiling beams to strengthen the former kitchen ceiling to hold drywall. My wife, Paula painted the walls and put down laminate flooring. She put ceiling-to-floor drapes at each side of the tri-windows. She turned the former kitchen, where they once slaughtered hogs, and made sausage, into a formal dining room. She purchased a large dining table and padded chairs, and other furniture, to make it look like something out of a home decorating magazine. The large dining room table can accommodate 14 people. It became, as my oldest granddaughter, Andrea said, a Hall tradition to celebrate birthdays and holidays at that table. My next to the oldest granddaughter, Heather always sits to my left, She has

been doing that for the past two decades. It began when I tutored Heather, when she was in kindergarten. She always will sit there.

I enjoy giving the blessing for the food at that table. I also enjoy listening to the family, guests, and in-laws as they tell their stories. Being 78 years old, I realize that someday, my son, John will replace me at the head of the table. Society does not expect a person my age to be productive and useful. Society does not appreciate the elderly until they are gone. I came across a poem written by Frank Sonnenberg called, "The Gift of Giving." My way of giving back, to others, is through my stories. These are Frank's words: "Give out of love, not obligation. Give when it's least expected. Give without strings attached. Give from your heart. Give of yourself. Give to show that you care. Give help without causing helplessness. Give something that takes personal sacrifice. Give to make a difference. Give without keeping score. Give for no reason at all. Give a little if you cannot give a lot. Give without attracting attention to yourself. Give without being asked. Give of your experience. Give to those who need it most." I would add to Frank's poem, to give to Christ some of your time, everyday, in a prayer of your choice. Show your gratitude for all of the blessings that you have been given. And, if can spare a few seconds, please say a prayer for this old writer. Thanks, 'cause I need all the prayers that I can get.

Unlike the Kentucky poet, Jesse Stuart, I write about real people in my home town. I went to Hancock's Market in Cadiz, the other day to buy some grocery's I always say hello to Mallory Hancock, the owner. I asked if her niece, Dru Thomas was in the back

part of the store. Mallory said that she would call and have Dru meet me at the employee door. Dru is a fellow alumni of Murray State University (MSU). I started giving her a copy of my stories. She plans to go after a BS in Nursing Degree. My oldest granddaughter, Andrea plans to do the same thing. Dru's grandfather is in his 80's. She is very fond of him. I told Dru that the story, "The Rush Against Time," is about the two weeks that I was a patient in Baptist Health Hospital in Paducah. I mentioned that if she ever needed to go to a hospital, to go to Baptist. She smiled and said that she was born there. Dru is Mallory's "right hand girl," she acts as her chief assistant and helps and supports Mallory in her work. I was getting a quart of milk out of the cooler and the open door was blocking Jack Tomalewicz. He was pushing a shopping cart.

There was a food display on his right, and the open glass door on his left, prevented him from going forward. Jack goes to the same small church that I attend, and he sings in the church choir. I was kidding Jack that I could not let him go forward. I told Dru that Jack is a former Marine. We are members of the local American Legion Post. Jack donates a lot of his time to provide military honors at deceased veterans funerals. A few days later, I called Mallory and placed an order for four pounds of sliced, wafer-thin county ham. I told her that I would pick it up on Wednesday, the day before Thanksgiving. My son, John also called Mallory and placed an order for chicken and baked beans. They will be served at the Thanksgiving dinner that we will have at my house. I was buying a small table at Walmart and Jason Crisp and his wife, Laura were there. In our conversation, Jason lamented that his dad, and his grandfather passed away without leaving any stories, just photographs. Christ has given me more grace, more inspiration, and more talent than I deserve. I do enjoy taking photographs of people that I know, and things that are meaningful to me. In a fraction of a second, I capture a memory that lives on when I am gone. With this story, I included three pictures. Two pictures are of my dining room table. In the picture, one can see the Thanksgiving plates, the turkey napkins, the turkey table cloth, and the turkey center-piece. The third picture shows the Harvest Display with the mums, the pumpkins, the scarecrows, and the straw. In front of the largest flat scarecrow is the word "Welcome."

The driver of a UPS delivery truck, left a package on my front porch. He put it between the open storm door and the front door. I opened the box in my kitchen. It was a book that celebrates the 75th Anniversary of the Kentucky State Police (KSP), 1948 to 2023. I retired from that organization back in October of 1988. Last November, I drove over to the KSP Post One in Mayfield, Kentucky to have my picture taken, for the retired Trooper's section of the book. I'm thankful that I survived that time in my life. I recall coming on the night shift, and asking the KSP Dispatcher, "Who else is on duty with me?" The dispatcher would replay, "It's just you." From Trigg County to the Mississippi River; from the Tennessee state line, to the Illinois state line. All eleven counties in Post One were all mine to patrol. I felt like the TV character, Marshal Matt Dillon. He rode a horse, I drove a police car. He had a rifle attached to his horse saddle. I had a shotgun under my legs. I also had an unauthorized sniper rifle in the trunk of the police car. My supervisor told me that if I pulled it out, that I would be suspended for a week. I told him that if I ever had to use it to defend myself, that I'd take the suspension. I was thankful Jesus Christ was always by my side during those perilous days. Loise Pinkerton Fritz

wrote, "A Thanksgiving Prayer." These are her words: "Father, Giver of life and breath, creator of us all, Showerer of every blessing, no matter how great or small. .. to Thee we bow in humble thanks this glad Thanksgiving Day; for all we have and are, Dear Lord, accept our thanks, we pray. - Amen"

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

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