

## A Blessing

As we rounded a curve on the little dirt road leading to our Crooked Creek home, we were greeted by the warm smile of Mr. Hill. He was standing by the road as if he were expecting us.

We had a list of things to do for the day lying on the seat between us. Only a few of the items were marked off, but our day was only half gone.

Lewis rolled down the driver's window and called out in greeting. Mr. Hill beamed even brighter as he realized we were stopping. Leaning forward with a gentle hand on the car door as if to hold us for just a moment, he gave us a hearty greeting.

It was early spring. The earth was just beginning to coming to life after a long winter. The day in the sunshine was warm and a sure sign of things to come.

*"All my friends have died,"* he announced.

Such a conversation starter meant Mr. Hill had been deep in thought about his own life. We shared a brief visit before waving goodbye.

Later, our thoughts wandered back to Mr. Hill and how he was now living in a world without so many of his own peers. His candid sharing had stirred a new wonder in our thinking.

In the next few days we framed art for the annual Cherry Blossom Festival. Clothes needed to be packed, dozens of postcards had been mailed to long time collectors reminding them we would be at the festival in our usual space. The 2 day show would be filled with hugs and warm greetings as all our friends strolled the beautiful avenue of cherry trees filled with soft pink blossoms. Our world would continue as it had for dozens of years.

Summer soon arrived. Mr. Hill had borrowed a small plot of dirt across the little road for planting a "junk Garden" or as the French call it a *potager*, meaning nothing more than a small "*kitchen garden*."

As we rounded the curve for home, Mr. Hill was waiting beside the road. Leaning on his hoe, he seemed to appear a bit thinner than usual, but his wide smile was big as usual. We slowed the car and he leaned down to greet us.

*"I have planted you a garden,"* he said.

*"I know ya'll stay on the run all the time, but we all have to eat so I borrowed this patch to plant a small junk garden. Since you come in so late at night I figure it needed to be close to the road so you can see it with the car lights."*

In the weeks that followed we enjoyed big red tomatoes and other treats of Mr. Hill's generous gift. We shared more short visits with him and he never failed to remind us of how blessed he was to have lived such a long a productive life.

Mr. Hill lived a simple life filled with great wealth because he knew how to find purpose and happiness with very little money. The glow of his smile was sunshine in our days and the fresh veggies were more fruits of his blessings.

The summer passed as usual on Crooked Creek. We all fought to keep the grass mowed and the lights on working our own schedules. Soon the Fall season rolled around and we began the new season of art shows across the South. Once again we lunged into the madness of running from one deadline to another. Each week we traveled to a new location where a family of friends and collectors would enjoy a day celebrating their own community and heritage. How blessed we were to know so many worlds filled with blessings and friendship.

It was late one chilly fall evening as we rounded the last big curve of the dirt road home. Our headlights fell across the little garden beside the road. The early frost had wilted the once strong plants and now they hung like wet brown string over the wire cages that once supported the fruit heavy limbs.

Lewis stopped the car and we sat in a moment of silence.

Mr. Hill had passed two months earlier, but here on a full moon night, with the frost sparkling on the old plants, were green tomatoes.

In the moonlight, I slipped from the car to gather the tomatoes.

With tears in our eyes we continued to the end of the road to rest the night back in our own home.

The next evening we enjoyed our favorite meal of friend pork chops, baked sweet potatoes and best of all, fried green tomatoes.

There have been Many "Mr. Hills" in Crane Hill, Al.

Quietly they live a good life and serve out the days as God has planned.

Learning to give to others is magical.

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