

AN-FATHER'S LEGACY

By John F. Hall

Several good friends suggested that I put my stories in a book. Forty years ago, I began to write stories about my exploits in the Army and in law enforcement. My legacy rational was to leave the stories in a journal for my oldest granddaughter, Andrea to read after I was gone. She gave me two journals as Christmas presents. I am using glue stick to paste the stories on each of the journal pages. Life has been getting in the way and I am really behind doing this. I believe that we get to keep only what we give away. I am still driving my grandson, John-John to classes. He was late getting his driver's permit and he cannot get a driver's license until January of 2020.

I believe that writing stories has become my passion. It is consuming a lot of my time with an overwhelming urgency to finish a few more stories. It's like being on this train that is slowly running out of steam and running out of track. It reminds me of the lyrics in Daryl Hall and John Oates song, "Out of Touch." A few lyrics that they wrote: "Shake it up is all that we know. Using the bodies up as we go. I'm waking up to fantasy. The shades all around aren't the colors we used to see. Broken ice still melts in the sun. And times that are broken can often be one again. We're soul alone and soul really matters to me. Take a look around. You're out of touch, I'm out of time..." Two years ago, I asked Audrey Lambert, an excellent Tennessee genealogist, to help me with two stories about Cookeville, Tennessee. She provided assistance for the Dipsy Doodle and the Drive-in stories. For helping me, I gave her copies of the stories and told her to share them. I never had the pleasure to meet Audrey in person. We communicated by email. The last times that I sent her an email, she replied. I am happy that she is alive and well.

As most of the readers of my stories know, I don't write for money. The Good Lord knows that I'd go broke if I did. I just give some of my stories to three churches, to my Christian fraternity Brothers, to family and to my friends. I mail my stories to my three surrogate granddaughters, Jade, Skyler, and Lexie. These three motivate me write. My stories are true and not fantasy. I gave Audrey six of my stories and she put them on her home page on the internet. She has me listed under Columnists/Remembrances. My long time friend, Mike Herndon, a retired newspaper reporter and former editor of the Kentucky New Era, continues to encourage me to keep writing. I mention Mike in my story, "The Ole Piano Man."

The title of this story, An-Father's Legacy, more or less sums up the life of this ole writer. My oldest granddaughter, Andrea first called me An-Father when she was about three years old. I just wanted her to call me Grandfather, but when she said An-Father, I felt that was close enough. My first surrogate granddaughter, is Jade Hakes. She always calls me her Mr. John. When I volunteered in the Heritage Christian Academy lunchroom, all the students and the teachers called me An-Father. After being a volunteer there for ten years, I have some very fond memories of Andrea, Heather, John-John, Skyler and Lexie. In the way of remembrances, there was a little girl, I don't recall her name. She would just come up to me and give me a sincere hug. She would not say a word and she would just walk away. I will never know how much that hug meant to her. I believe her dad was

in the military because the following year she was gone. I know from my years in law enforcement that some children grow up in homes where they are starved for affection. That don't receive any hugs or even told that they are loved. My story, "The Surrogate Grandfather by John F. Hall," was posted on the internet by Audrey. It tells about my grandchildren, but the focus is on two of my three surrogate daughters, Skyler and Lexie. I certainly appreciate Audrey Lambert putting my stories on her genealogy website.

My two oldest granddaughters, Andrea and Heather, are now in their early 20s and they graduated from college. Their needs to be mentored by this grandfather are not very great now. Andrea lives in Brentwood, Tennessee and Heather lives in Bowling Green, Kentucky. They do call me for advice and they come for the family gatherings on Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas day. I still have my surrogate granddaughters, Jade, Skyler and Lexie. They still appreciate the approval, acceptance, guidance and love that I can give them. For over 16 years I have been a surrogate grandfather to Jade. She has become very independent. She is in junior ROTC. Like Skyler and Lexie, she is very intelligent for her age. I try to do the same things for Jade that I do for Skyler and Lexie. I encourage them to do their best. In a story that I wrote, "Room In My Heart," I try to express the importance of helping young people. Our secular society bans prayer in public schools and legitimizes killing babies even after they are born. This cheapens life. If you add to the stress on young people to excel in school and to have to deal with too much homework, and bullies and cliques at school, it is no wonder that they feel that they are an island unto themselves. If they find one or two true friends, which is hard to do in the "me first" generation, then they will be lucky. This is one reason why faith and hope in Jesus Christ is vital in their young lives. There is no substitute for having a Christian foundation.

If I make a difference in their lives, by letting them know that their lives matter and that they are loved, then I leave behind some important stepping stones in their path of life. I told Skyler and Lexie and their mom that Audrey Lambert posted my Surrogate story on the internet. Lexie texted me and wrote, "That is so cool!!!. Have a good day. Love you" Lexie is 16 and just had the braces off her teeth. Last year, Lexie was standing on the gym floor with me during Grandparents Volleyball Night at Heritage Christian Academy (HCA). This is when the volleyball players introduce their grandparents to the people sitting in the bleachers. Lexie was given a wireless microphone and she said, "Hi! I'm Lexie Crisp. And this is my grandfather, John Hall. I call him An-Father." As she was handing the mic back to Coach Rogers, she was smiling and laughing with joy. Her mother videoed that event and I extracted one picture from that video. I use the picture in this story to make a point. Lexie had someone standing with her who cares about and loves her and that is good for her self image. Last week, Skyler was sitting with me and watching the banquet for Lexie and the other volleyball players held in the lunchroom at HCA. After the program, one of the middle school players came over to talk to Skyler. She observed a card addressed to Skyler on the table and she asked Skyler who gave her that letter. Skyler pointed to me and said, "He did. He is my grandfather." The little girl said, "Oh."

I'm 74 and I may never fully realized the difference that I have made in Jade's, Skyler's and Lexie's lives. My Pastor told me that these young people are my gifts from God and they are my ministry. I believe Christ is in charge of my life and He put these young people in my life for a reason. In 1621, John Doone, in one of his sermons said, "No man is an island unto himself." His words are as relevant today as they were almost 400 years ago. To those of my age, I can assure you that just being there for these young people really matters to them. Reach out, if you can, and stand by someone that has no one to stand by them, just as I did with Lexie. John Doone also said, "Never send (ask) for whom the bells toll; they toll for thee." You will not hear the funeral bells toll for you when Christ calls you home. Don't leave this life with any regrets. Make your grandchildren a big part of your life. You may want to remember the words of Jesus Christ, "Love one another; as I have loved you." John 15:12. Prayerfully, consider what you can still do in the time you may have left, in this life, to be a part of your grandchildren's lives.

Nancy Watson Dodrill wrote a short piece titled, "Tapestry." She wrote: " God has made a tapestry of happy times and bad, from moments of exuberance, to moments that were sad. Each new stitch upon the cloth, a woven thread of gold, the Lord has sewn fine memories that never will grow old. From Summer day to Winter's way, God's needle made His art, designed a landscape on my soul, a joy that claims my heart. With greening of the countryside, the morning bird that sings, He's sewn a need that burns within to cherish what life brings. Each embroidered tapestry brings new meaning to the old, like pieces of a patchwork quilt, the stories over fold. Each new thread secures the whole, these blessings will hold true, for God has stitched His masterpiece to last a whole life through."

Nancy uses the parts of a tapestry to tell about God's love for us and the memories that never will grow old. The picture below captures a memory of this writer with his granddaughter, Lexie standing on the HCA gym floor one year ago. We come into this world with nothing and we will leave this world with nothing. Memories cannot be held in a baby's fist at birth or in the open hand at the time of one's death. Perhaps the memories that we make in this life, like God's tapestry, can be stitched to our souls and become something that we can keep for all eternity.

John F. Hall

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