

## MY MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

By John F. Hall

The word magnificent comes from a French word first used around the 1500's. The adjective can describe many things such as a volunteer force, a beautiful or striking person, or even an impressive scene. The movie that I will describe, at the beginning of this story, simply tells a story of seven men who volunteer, for a few dollars, to rid a dirt poor town of bandits that periodically raid the town for food and supplies. The theme of



this story is about seven young people in my life. It tells a few things about each person as seen through my eyes. I use photographs to highlight some of these things. My favorite writer is Jesse Stuart. He created 4,000 characters in his 57 books and short stories. I merely tell about seven magnificent young people who light up my life. Some of the young people in this story I have known all of their lives. Some are related to me. Some became part of my extended family. I consider all of them to be my grandchildren.

(Pictured: John F. Hall)

In 1960, an American Western film, *The Magnificent Seven*, was directed by John Sturges. The movie starred Yul Brynner, Horst Bucholz, Steve McQueen, Charles Bronson, Robert Vaughn, Brad Dexter and James Coburn. In 2013, the film was selected for the United States Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant.” During the last raid on the town, the leader of the bandits kills an unarmed villager. The village leaders decide to fight back. Three of them ride to a town just inside the United States hoping to barter for guns. They are impressed by Chris Adams (played by Yul Brynner) a veteran Cajun gunslinger. They approach him for advice. Chris suggests they hire gunfighters to defend their village. Thus the movie tells an interesting tale. At the end of the movie, Chris and Vin (played by Steve McQueen) bid farewell to the old man (played by Vladimir Sokoloff ). He tells them, “Only the villagers have really won. You're like the wind, blowing over the land and passing on.” ”As Chris and Vin pass the graves of their fallen comrades (four were killed by the bandits), Chris turns to Vin and says, “The old man was right. Only the farmers won. We lost. We'll always lose.” If we think about what the old man said, all of us are like the wind that Christ gives us to breathe. We are here for just a short time and then we pass away.

Chris was only partially right. After the bandits disarmed the seven gunslingers, they made them leave the village. They told them their guns would be given back to them a few miles down the road. The bandits did not do this out of the kindness of their hearts. They were concerned about the reprisals from the US. Army if they killed the gunslingers. It was in their best interest to let them leave. As the gunslingers were picking up their weapons, they had a choice. They could ride back to the United States or ride back to help the villagers, even though the villagers had betrayed them. Only one of the

gunslingers (temporarily) decided to ride back to the states. The rest decided to go back to help the villagers. It was in helping others that they redeemed themselves. I put two pictures from the 1960 movie in this story

This story continues with Andrea, my oldest granddaughter. For what ever reason, when she was three years old, she always wanted to be with me. She would run around her grandmother, Paula, to get to me. We would sit on a double seat rocking chair on the front porch and spend hours just talking and listening to the birds. The birds would be high up in the tall maple trees. I would whistle and the birds would sing back and Andrea believed that I could talk to the birds. One evening as we were walking behind my old farm house, we walked by a step ladder that I was using to paint the trim around a window. I stopped and rested my arm on the ladder. I pointed to the North Star and told Andrea to look at it. I told her that the star belonged to her. She looked at the star, then she looked at the ladder. She turned to me and said, "Well! Go Get it!" She was so serious and I had to try very hard not to laugh.

When Andrea was five years old, her parents let her enroll in Heritage Christian Academy (HCA) in Hopkinsville. I had a high mileage 1984 Oldsmobile Cutlass at the time. She loved to sit upfront with me and she would fasten her own seat belt. She insisted that we drive under the huge American flag at Wildcat Chevrolet east of Cadiz. I was working at the Kentucky Department of Revenue in Hopkinsville at that time. I made a promise to Andrea that I would eat lunch with her every day that I was not in the field or away for Army Reserve duty. The first day that I ate lunch with Andrea, it was in her classroom. I recall sitting in her kindergarten classroom on a tiny plastic chair at a small table shared by five of her classmates. They would look at me in amazement that her grandfather would come almost every day to eat lunch with her. I kept my promise to Andrea for ten years. Christ made promises to us that He will keep for all eternity.

The other employees at the Kentucky Department of Revenue worked out a schedule where I would go to lunch first. I would drive the few miles to HCA, I would cover the office when I got back to allow the others to take their lunch hour. HCA has aftercare, so I would get Andrea after I got off work. I would take her for ice cream at McDonald's before taking her home. She thought she was in "hog heaven" having her grandfather all to herself. Country singer Alan Jackson wrote a song about his daughter learning to drive a jeep. The song is called Drive and here are some lyrics from that song, "Just an old worn-out jeep, rusty old floorboard, hot on my feet. A young girl two hands on the wheel, I can't replace the way it made me feel. And he'd say, turn it left and steer it right. Straighten up girl now you are doing fine. Just a little valley by the river where we would ride. But I was high on a mountain when Daddy let me drive."

Paula's dad gave her an old 1989 Ford Ranger pickup truck. It had not been used for five years. The tires had dry rotted and the gas tank was full of water. The brakes and motor had locked up. But Paula wanted me to get it running. I knew a mechanic in the south end of the county. He drug it to his shop and after two months, managed to get it running. Andrea was 10 at the time. She just wanted to drive that old truck. She would stand up behind the wheel. I would have to work the gas and brake pedals. Her brother John-John

would sit on the middle pull down arm rest. Her sister, Heather always wanted to ride “shotgun” at the passenger side door. Andrea drove on the dirt, field roads of her great grandfather's farm. They would laugh every time Andrea hit a pot hole. I still have that old truck. I run it a few times a year to keep it from rusting up.

Andrea went on to become a talented volleyball player for HCA and Trigg County High School (TCHS). I wore out a 2005 Dodge Grand Caravan following the HCA school bus to other Christian schools in Kentucky and Tennessee and to public schools in Kentucky. I video taped many of the volleyball games. Andrea wanted to transfer to TCHS to join the Arrowcats Archery Program. She was a member of the team that won two World Championships. She was an honor student and worked as a pharmacy tech and she earned a CNA certification. After graduating from Hopkinsville Community College (HCC), she earned a BS degree in Business (Marketing) from Western Kentucky University. As a college student, she worked in restaurants and retail stores and she completed an internship program. She is currently in a training program for a large corporation in Tennessee.

The second young person in this story is Andrea's sister, Heather. When she was a little girl, she was very independent. One time, as she was staying at our house, she was misbehaving. I told her that I was going to take her home. She put her hands against the door trim to try to stop me from picking her up to take her home. It was so comical that I just had to laugh. She was so tiny and thought she could stop her big grandfather. But you had to really watch her when we went shopping. She always wanted to wonder off. She would join her sister and her little brother, John—John as they drove in separate electric toy cars up and down the two tenths of a mile, chip and seal Dyers Hill Road leading to my house. At one time, we had a round vinyl swimming pool in the backyard that the the kids played in. I built a large sand box and filled it with white sand. They kids loved the trampoline and the swing set. I would take Heather and Andrea to their piano teacher in Hopkinsville after school. And I did the same for their dance and gymnastics. Heather followed in Andrea's steps playing volleyball for HCA and TCHS. She was also a fearless cheerleader for HCA and TCHS. While in high school, she worked at the Lake Barkley State Resort Park Marina and worked in an insurance office in Hopkinsville in the coop program. She completed courses at HCC and, as a college student, she worked at various restaurants. She earned a BS degree in Business (International Business) from Western Kentucky University. She is currently in an internship in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

The third young person in this story is Cole. He is my step grandson. His dad died about seven years ago. He was a senior at Marshall County High School in 2018, when his mother became engaged to my son, John, who had been a single parent for about five years. There was a shooting at the school and two students were killed and 14 were wounded. Cole is so much like my grandson that one would believe they are brothers. Cole is a freshman at Murray State University. Like John-John, he does not like to have his picture taken, so I only have two pictures with his story.

The fourth young person in this story is Skyler Crisp. She was in John-John's kindergarten class at HCA. I would go with this class on field trips through the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. When her dad, Jason was deployed in Iraq, I would volunteer in the HCA lunchroom and spend time with her each school day to ensure that she ate her lunch. I would bring her a treat to encourage her to eat. I've known the Crisp family for a very long time. I became her grandfather. I would go to her volleyball games and be there on Grandparent's Day for Skyler and her younger sister Lexie. Yet in troubled times, I stood with her to see her through the dark storms and sad times in her young life. Just her ole An-Father who tries to be there for her. She is an honor student. She earned almost two dozen AP college courses while a student at HCA. Skyler loves to scuba dive and recently, she made her first parachute jump. She works at the Prizer Boat Marina in Lyon County and at Chick-fil—A restaurant in Hopkinsville. She will enroll at HCC this fall. She will also do a Youth Minister internship this fall in Hopkinsville. She is one of the three young persons that receive my stories in the mail.

The fifth young person in this story is my grandson, John-John. Most of his life I have driven him to and from school at HCA and TCHS. He does not want to get a driver's license. If he wants to go visit a girl friend, he will ask his dad or me to take him. When they had a public singing at HCA, back when he was in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, he would put his hands in his pockets, look down and never sing a word. He is very shy and very polite and he will talk if he knows you. He loves his four lab dogs. One thing that I did when he and his sisters were students at HCA was to sign them up for Kentucky's Affordable Prepaid Tuition (KAPT) program when it was open to the public. It basically locked in the tuition from 15 years ago. He has 64 semester hours paid for in advance. He will be a freshman at HCC this fall with a major in computer technology. He can assemble and disassemble a computer. The on-line college courses at HCC fit him perfectly. I put a picture of the 1989 Ford Ranger with his pictures.

The sixth young person in this story is Jade Hakes. Sixteen years ago, her godmother, Trish Cunningham, brought Jade to church. She was a “miracle” baby who weighed two pounds and four ounces at birth. She bravely fought through cerebral palsy that affects how she walks. As her mom, Maryann told me, “God puts other people in our life for a reason.” Sunday after Sunday, Jade would sit with me as Trish sang in the choir. She is the only young person that calls me, “Mr. John.” Jade has been on Mission Trips with her church. She is a honor student. I was absolutely amazed and thankful for the UpWard Bound Program that allowed Jade to be in a dorm at WKU during the month of June. She completed six AP college courses. She did this as a high school freshman. At this rate, she will be a sophomore when she enrolls at WKU after she graduates from high school. Jade is the second person who receives my stories in the mail.

The seventh and youngest person in this story is Lexie Crisp. She is an honor student going into the 10<sup>th</sup> grade at HCA. She spent a week this summer going on a Mission Trip. She is a very gifted and talented volleyball player at HCA. On September 14, 2017, HCA held its first Grandparent's Volleyball Night. The players would introduce their grandparents and stand next to them on the HCA gym floor. Lexie's mom, Loretta videotaped the eight seconds of Lexie introducing me. This is what Lexie said, “Hi! I'm

Lexie Crisp. This is my grandfather, John Hall. And I call him An-Father. Recently, Lexie texted me that the next Grandparent's Volleyball Night is September 10, 2019. I texted her back that I would come, the Good Lord willing. Because I believe that Christ is in charge of our lives. Lexie is the third person that I mail my stories to. For their birthdays, I gave Skyler, Lexie and Jade a box to hold the stories that I mail them. To them I say, "Thanks for the memories."

As I bring this story to a close, I will write a few things about my grandfathers, Adelbert Race and John J. Hall. They died in their early 40s before I was born. They never experienced the joy of having grandchildren. My dad, Charles J. Hall was 75 when he died. He never met the seven young people in this story. So what I write about them would be the same things that I would tell him if he were alive today. At the age of 74, I take nothing for granted as I walk on this land. The Good Lord put these people in my life for a reason. If the older generation wants to stay connected and relevant to the younger generation, they might consider giving them some time. Just in the month of July, Paula and I drove down to Nashville to visit Andrea. My son, John, Lori, Cole and John-John came over. Trish brought Jade to Church. We sang in the choir. Heather and I talked about celebrating her birthday in September. I talked to Skyler, Lexie and their mom at the Cadiz Post Office. I stay connected to all my grandchildren by cell phone. All of my seven grandchildren have the same goal to better themselves through a college education. That is just another reason why I love them and I am proud of them. They are My Magnificent Seven.

Clay Harrison wrote these words, "There's something to be thankful for each and every day, despite the sorrows and failures that sometimes come our way. However dire our circumstance, it could always be worse until we take that long, slow ride in the back of a hearse. What doesn't kill us makes us stronger I heard somebody say. And we know that God answers prayers each time His children pray. Like rolling tides, pains ebb and flow before they go away. And God gives us strength to hear them a little more each day. Broken hearts can still be mended there at the potter's wheel. And there's no wound this side of Heaven our Savior cannot heal! Miracles are faith in action whenever Christians pray. There's something to be thankful for each and every day."

John F. Hall

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