

THE PLAQUE

By John F. Hall

My dad, Charles Joseph Hall, had a plaque hanging in his living in his small house in Edgewater, Florida. He never mentioned anything about it. I inherited that plaque. I knew that one day I would pass that plaque on to my son, John A. Hall. This is the story behind the mystery of that plaque.

There is that child in each adult's subconscious that sometimes comes to the surface. It may be triggered by a song or an event. This has been a very deadly flu season. Yet it pales in comparison to a flu season one hundred years ago. In 1918 a flu pandemic infected an estimated 500 million people worldwide and killed an estimated 20 to 50 million victims. More than 25 percent of the U.S. population became sick. Some 675,000 died during the pandemic. Many of the flu victims were young, otherwise healthy adults. At that time, there were no effective drugs or vaccines to treat this killer flu strain or prevent its spread. Researchers later discovered that what made this flu so deadly in that the flu virus invaded the lungs and caused pneumonia.



My grandfather, John J. Hall, age 43 was a victim of that pandemic. My dad, Charles J. Hall was ten years old when his dad died. It was a tradition in Irish families that if the father died, the oldest son would take over to support the family. My dad's oldest brother is John "Jack" Hall Jr. In our last conversation before Uncle Jack died, he told me a few things about the family. Uncle Jack was an excellent salesman. He rose up in the corporate ranks in American

Standard. He realized that my dad was very smart. Since Uncle Jack could not, in his dad's tuition to go to MIT. My dad graduated from MIT, Class of 1928, with a degree in mechanical engineering.

My dad's first job when he graduated from MIT was working for the DuPont Corporation. The corporation had him working on a very explosive formula. It exploded and nearly killed him. He was still 20 years old at the time. He also suffered a nervous break down. Uncle Jack was promoted to Vice President of European sales and lived in Paris, France. He flew my dad to Paris to recover. Several years later, they returned to the states where Uncle Jack hired my dad as a researcher for American Standard. The President of American Standard decided to clean house. He sent Uncle Jack to work in the War Department. The U.S. paid Uncle Jack a One Dollar annual salary and American Standard paid the rest of his salary. This was during World War II. After the war, this corporation fired Uncle Jack and my dad.

One tragedy led to another tragedy. When I was seven years old, my mom was gone. The house we were renting was totally destroyed by fire. We lost everything but the clothes we were wearing. My dad was unemployed. He had no money and no car. I experienced what it feels like to be homeless and dirt poor. Rather than allow the state to put me and my sister Barbara in a foster home, my dad put us in an orphanage. He told the person in charge that as soon as he could find a job he would send money. Uncle Jack, who once had a large yacht, large house, and an annual salary of \$40,000 during the years of the Great Depression (1929-1939), found himself out of a job. It is true that fame and fortune can be fleeting.

In John, Chapter 14, verse 18, Jesus said, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you."

One of my teachers at the orphanage, after school would have me clean the blackboards and straighten the books. When I finished this she would give me a napkin. Inside the napkin was cookies and candy. It was her way of showing me love. I had a good friend. He would let me read the letters that his mother sent him. When his mother would come to visit him once or twice a month, he would share his mother with me. She would hug me like I belonged to her. One day a young couple named Vorgang came to the orphanage with their son. His name was Johnny and he wanted a brother because his mom could not have any other children. Johnny came over to me and found what he wanted. He told his parents that he wanted me to be his brother. The orphanage contacted my dad and told him about the Vorgang adoption offer. My dad said, "No."

The last time the Vorgang family came to visit me, I was very sick and not able to see anyone. I left word that if I needed anything, to let them know. I was burning up with a fever and thought I would die. I got word to them that I would like a Bible. Shortly thereafter, I was given a Bible. Inside the front cover they wrote, "John Hall from his friends Mr. & Mrs. Vorgang & Johnny April 1955." This Bible became my most cherished possession.

On a winter day, the person in charge of the orphanage told me and my sister to pack our belongings and report to the front office. Then a car came to take us to a house located near an airport. The next day, during a snow storm, my sister and I boarded an American Airlines plane. This was my first time to fly. The pilot let me come into the cockpit. He pinned a plastic set of wings on my shirt. This was in the days when hijackings were not a problem. The plane landed at Miami International Airport. It was a shock to go from a snow storm to Miami, Florida. I thought I had arrived in paradise.

When my dad was working at the corporation in Galveston, Texas, one of his coworkers called his attention to a flyer on the company's bulletin board. The flyer indicated that the U.S. government was looking for research engineers. My dad told me that it was just a fluke that he mailed off an application. To his surprise, he was hired as a research engineer at the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama. He became a member of the Explorer 1 Lance team. He was present when several missiles exploded on the launch pad. However, he was in the protective dug out and was not injured. When President

John F. Kennedy made the decision that U.S. should put a man on the moon and return him safely to earth, my dad was selected to be a member of the Apollo 11 Launch Team.

Like the mythical Phoenix rising out of the ashes, my dad over came adversity to help advance the U.S. capabilities in aeronautics and space. He did not accept the opinion of one man who labeled him as being a useless researcher. My dad was a member of the team responsible for mans first landing on the moon July 20, 1969. Shortly after the successful moon mission my dad retired. He told me that the U.S. did not have the technology to land a man on mars during his life time. He said there was no further challenge for him. He was not going to sit behind a desk and draw a pay check for doing nothing. My dad never gave up in the face of adversity. It was his faith that sustained him.

It is my faith that has sustained me through trials and tribulation This is the first time that I wrote about being in an orphanage. This is what my dad wanted to protect me and my sister from foster homes that were not good at that time. I may have been in an orphanage but was no orphan I was blessed to have strangers who loved me. I some times wonder what my life would have been like if the Vorgang family had adopted me. Johnny would have been a wonderful brother.

Now on to the mystery of the plaque. It is made of wood with a large metal medallion. I wanted to discover who gave that plaque to my dad. I realized that MIT, being a private university, has some rules that may be considered unusual. The college does not award honorary degrees. It does not recognize Honor Graduates. Its philosophy is that if a student graduates, that is honor enough. Knowing this, I went ahead a sent a letter to the CEO of MIT's Alumni Association and nominated my dad as a distinguished alumnus of MIT. I think my dad is laughing in Heaven at my audacity. The most important thing, is that I wanted MIT to solve the mystery of the plaque. I made their response a part of this story. The only person, in my opinion, who could afford to give my dad that plaque, was my Uncle Jack. I decided to have a metal inscription put on the plaque to read:

PRESENTED TO:
CHARLES J. HALL
MIT CLASS OF 1928
A GIFT FROM HIS BROTHER
JOHN "JACK" HALL JR.

Uncle Jack loved his brother Charles. We all need to know that we are loved. In John, Chapter 21, verse 15, Jesus asked Peter this question, "Do you love me?" Jesus will love us even if no one else will. Let your cup runneth over with love Say the three most important words that even Jesus wants to hear, "I Love You."

John F. Hall

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