

## ANGELS OF MERCY

By John F. Hall

When I wrote my first story for the Journal in 1977, I never expected that I would still be writing my nonfiction life stories to this day. The Journal's final publication was in 2023.



The Between The Rivers magazine ceased publication more than a decade ago. As the title of this story implies, I will be writing about angels of mercy in my life. My life stories are about my experiences and observations. In 2016, I was transported by ambulance from the Trigg County Hospital to the Saint Thomas West Hospital in Nashville, Tennessee. I had suffered three minor strokes. As I was signing the registration forms, to be admitted to Saint Thomas, I suffered a fourth stroke. Usually the fourth stroke is a prelude to a fifth and fatal stroke. I was taken to the stroke ward for intensive critical care, and I was assigned a one on one nurse. A couple of days in the hospital, one of the nurses told me that I was given “the one million dollar treatment.” But I was not told just exactly what all that entailed.

The first day that I was a patient at Saint Thomas, a traveling neurologist on duty, came to my bedside. After reading my chart, he said to me: “Mr. Hall, your prognosis is rather grim.” A traveling neurologist is a contract physician, hired for short term employment, usually for three to six months. After I was discharged, I returned to Saint Thomas for a follow-up visit. I was assigned to see Dr. Brett Parker. The traveling neurologist, who first treated me was no longer there. His short term contract was not renewed. I think he skipped his “proper bedside manner class.” You never tell a patient that their prognosis is grim. You give them hope for a recovery. Dr. Parker told me that I have a very small aneurysm, in an inoperable part of my brain, and not to worry about it. My inpatient experience, at Saint Thomas Hospital, was the first time that I received 24-hour care by an Angel of Mercy.

Going back into history, I read about a nurse named Violet Constance Jessop. She had a very hard and interesting life. She was on the R.M.S. Titanic when it hit a massive iceberg. According to a historian, nurse Violet watched as the Titanic crew loaded the lifeboats. She was ordered into lifeboat 16. As that lifeboat was being lowered, one of the Titanic's officers gave her a baby to look after. The next day, nurse Violet and the rest of the Titanic's survivors were rescued by the R.M.S. Carpathia. She was given the nickname, “Miss Unsinkable.”

Nurse Violet Jessop served as nurse and stewardess aboard three sister ships of the Star Line Britannic, Olympic, and Titanic. She was on the British ocean liner R.M.S. Britannic, that was outfitted as a hospital ship. While cruising the Aegean Sea, the R.M.S. Britannic struck a German mine, and began to rapidly sink. She was ordered to the lifeboats, as the ship sank in less than an hour. This was three times faster than the time for the sinking of the Titanic. Nurse Violet Jessop was in the lifeboat when it was drawn into the R.M.S. Britannic's still churning propellers. The passengers and the lifeboat were

chopped to pieces. Nurse Violet jumped into the sea and escaped death, but she suffered a severe skull fracture and a deeply gashed leg.

Nurse Violet Jessop was also on the R.M.S. Olympic. That passenger ship collided with the British cruiser H.M.S. Hawk. The R.M.S. Olympic suffered a major rip below the waterline, but managed to make it back to England. A friend asked nurse Violet what gave her the grit to overcome whatever life hurled at her. She said, "Just the will-to live, and a huge chunk of faith in divine intervention." Like nurse Violet Jessop, I also have a huge chunk of faith in divine intervention. Nurse Violet was also remembered as the "Queen of sinking ships." She had a lot of adversity as a child, but she overcame it with a rock solid faith in Christ.

On March 2, 2023, I was strapped down in an ambulance, speeding from the Murray Calloway County Hospital to Baptist Health Hospital in Paducah, Kentucky. The ambulance was racked with high speed gusts of wind, and hard driving rain, the entire trip. Had it not been for the quick thinking of my family physician, Dr. Daniel Butler, who told me to get to the emergency room as quickly as possible, I would have died within an hour, after leaving his office. I was an inpatient at Baptist Health for two weeks, in the critical cardiac care floor. I had a four-doctor team, under the leadership of Dr. Hancock. My discharge nurse was very matter of fact, and to the point. She pulled a chair to the side of my hospital bed, and said, "Mr. Hall, you almost died. If you had not arrived at the emergency room in Murray, when you did, you would be dead." I realized that my congestive heart failure, kidney failure, and lung failure were working against my chances of survival. I had been given an antibiotic in Cadiz, that nearly killed me.

There are two young adults in my life, Andrea Hall and Dru Thomas, who have enrolled in a fast track nursing program. I found a few things, that others have written about being a nurse that might be helpful to them. Ruth Wheeler wrote, "A Nurse's Prayer." These are her words: "Because the day that stresses out for me is full of busy hours, I come to thee to ask thee Lord, that Thou wilt see me through the many things that I have to do. Help me make my beds the smoothest way, help me to make more tempting every tray, help me to serve when pain must have relief, help me to deal with those borne down by grief, help me to take to every patient's room the light of life to brighten up the gloom, help me to bring to every soul in fear the sure and steadfast thought that Thou art near, and if today, or if tonight, maybe, some patients in my care set out to sea to face the great adventure we call death, sustain them, Father, in their parting breath. Help them to live throughout this lives-long day as one who thee well, dear Lord, I pray; and when the day is done, and evening stars shine through the dark above sunset bars, when weary quite, I turn to seek my rest, Lord, may I truly know I did my best."

About the fourth day, that I was a patient at Baptist Health Hospital, the nurses and staff were in a fright. WPSD TV radar was showing the path of a tornado heading towards the hospital. All of the patients in the hospital, near any windows, were put in wheelchairs, and taken out of their rooms, and put in the hospital hallways. I was taken off oxygen and the IV treatment was moved with me. For two hours, I wondered what was going to happen, as did my wife, Paula, who stayed with me the entire two weeks.

Back in the early 1980's, I was invited to a nurse graduation "Pinning" ceremony in Owensboro, Kentucky. I don't recall if that nurse graduation class recited the "Florence Nightingale Pledge." Lystra Eggert Gretter is the "moving spirit behind the creation of that pledge." It's an oath of ethics that many graduating nursing students still make today. These are the words of that pledge: "I solemnly pledge myself before God and in the presence of this assembly, to pass my life in purity and to practice my profession faithfully. I shall abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous, and shall not take or knowingly administer any harmful drug. I shall do all in my power to maintain and elevate the standard of my profession and will hold in confidence all personal matters committed to my keeping and all family affairs coming to my knowledge in the practice of my calling."

My dear friend, James "Jim" Etheridge has great faith that has sustained him for the past 95 years. He is a combat veteran of World War II. He called me at home and told me about his prognosis. He is blessed in that his daughter, Jamie is a nurse. She is treating Jim at his home in Cadiz, Kentucky. His granddaughter, and his great granddaughter, are also there to help. Jim is also receiving hospice care. It is incredibly helpful during end-of-life stages by providing comfort and support to patients and their families. The average stay on hospice care tends to be around 70 days. During Jim's call to me, he said: "God pick the day of our arrival and the day of our departure from this life."

An Angel of Mercy is affectionately a nickname for a nurse. An Angel of Mercy, in Islamic, Jewish, and Christian traditions is a messenger from God, especially the archangel Michael. Melodie Chenevert wrote a poem called, "Being a Nurse Means..." These are her words: "You will never be bored. You will always be frustrated. You will be surrounded by challenges, so much to do and so little time. You will carry immense responsibility and very little authority. You will step into people's lives and you will make a difference. Some people will bless you. Some people will curse you. You will see people at their worse - and at their best. You will never cease to be amazed at people's capacity for love, I courage, and endurance. You will see and experience resounding triumphs and devastating failures. You will cry a lot. You will know what it means to be human and to be humane." In ending this story, in addition to my prayers for Jim, I hope to live long enough to see Andrea and Dru become Angels of Mercy.

John F. Hall

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

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