

BOOKS, CATS, ELVIS, SPOONS, AND WORDS

By John F. Hall

My grandfather, John J. Hall, died during the global flu pandemic of 1918, at the age of 44. He left no stories about his life. The only remnant from his life was given to me by my first cousin, David Hall. It is a sterling silver spoon dated December 17, 1853. It came from my grandfather's estate. I had the spoon mounted in a shadow box with a small metal plate that explains where the spoon came from. It is hanging on the wall in my dinning room. I don't know the real significance of the date on that antique spoon.



Many decades ago, my wife, Paula and I went to Memphis, Tennessee. We went to visit Graceland, the home of the late Elvis Presley. Graceland was part of a 500-acre cattle farm that was once owned by the S.E. Toof family. They raised Hereford cattle. In 1939, Ruth Brown Moore and her husband, Dr. Thomas Moore, built the mansion that became known as Graceland. Mrs. Thomas Moore named the mansion for her Aunt Grace Toof, the original land owners. Elvis Presley, at the age of 22, purchased the Graceland mansion and 13.8 acres for \$102,500. The mansion had 10,266 square feet when Elvis purchased it in 1957. He added 7,286 square feet to the mansion during his life time. Marc Cohn wrote the song, "Walking In Memphis." These are just a few of his lyrics: "Saw the ghost of Elvis on Union Avenue. Followed him up to the gates of Graceland, then I watched him walk right through. Now security did not see him, they just hovered 'round his tomb."

Paula and I went into the Graceland mansion. Paula was disappointed. She felt the interior decorating was too gaudy. We toured the mansion ground and walked by Elvis' tombstone. Back in 1975, we took our son, John to see Elvis, at a concert in Louisville, Kentucky. His face was bloated. His singing was still good, but weak. When the announcer said: "Elvis has left the building," I did not realize that Elvis had only less than two years to live. He died in 1977, as I was patrolling the Mississippi River counties of Ballard, Carlisle, Fulton, and Hickman.

Henry Adams wrote: "No one means all he says, yet very few say all they mean." When I write my stories, I don't use every word that I would like to use. I am trying to put a little more humor in my stories. In 1865, five years after my old house was built, Lewis Carroll wrote the book, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland." My favorite character in his book is the Cheshire cat. This cat told Alice: "Were all mad here." Alice told the cat: "But I don't want to go around mad people." The cat said to Alice: "Oh, you can't help that, we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad." Alice asked the Cheshire cat: "How do you know that I'm mad?" The cat replied: "You must be, or you wouldn't be here?"

In 1605, Francis Bacon wrote: "Here, therefore, is the first distemper of learning, when men study words and not matter; for words are but the images of matter; and except they have life of reason and invention, to fall in love with them is the same as to fall in love with a picture."

It is interesting, when a man has an experience of nearly dying, that he takes on a different perspective of life. On March 2, 2023, I suffered a reaction to an antibiotic that sent me into a death spiral of congestive heart failure and kidney failure. After spending two weeks in critical care, at Baptist Health Hospital in Paducah, Kentucky, I was told a few things. The traveling discharge nurse sat by hospital bed, and nonchalantly said: “Mr. Hall, you almost died. If you had not made it to the emergency room, when you did, you would be dead.” Prior to my two weeks at Baptist Health, I was with my wife, Paula in Dr. Daniel Butler's office. He has been our family physician for the past 24 years. It was her appointment, but when he looked at me, he told me to get to the emergency room, and he called them and told them that I was coming. I was impressed with the four- doctor-team used a Baptist Health Hospital. They stopped my death spiral.

Walter Mosley wrote about a bookcase. These are some of his words: “A man's bookcase will tell you everything you will ever need to know about him. A person with no books is inconsequential in a modern setting. Pictures may sometimes show a person's preference. The absence of certain family pictures, in a person's home or place of business, may tell you many things that you may want to know about that person's preference...”. Paul Auster wrote these words: “The pictures do not lie, but neither do they tell the full story. They are merely a record of time passing, the outward evidence.

I have the same name as one of William Shakespeare's son-in-laws. He must have thought a lot about him, as he left him a lot in his last will and testament dated March 25, 1616. These are a few of his words: “In the name of God, Amen. I, William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon in the great county of Warwickshire gent, in perfect health and memory, God be praised, do make and ordain this my last will and testament in manner and form following. That is to say, first I commend my soul into the hands of God my Creator, hoping and assuredly believing, through the merits of Jesus Christ my Savior, to be made partaker of life everlasting, and my body to the whereof it is made.” One of Shakespeare's Bequests, attached to his will, shows he left his son-in-law, John Hall, the following: “goods, chattels, leases, plate, jewels, and household stuff whatsoever.”

Clay Harrison wrote a short piece called, “Somewhere God Is Watching.” These are his words: “Somewhere God is watching the things we say and do as we write our life's story and try to make it through. He sees the things we try to hide but we can't run away, for Jesus is the Good Shepherd who finds when we stray. Somewhere God is listening and hears us when we pray. He hears us each time we praise Him and sends blessings our way. He hears each hymn and anthem we sing on Sunday morn and the old- fashioned carols telling us Jesus is born! He put perfume in the roses, wrote songs the robin sing; He taught the bees to make honey when nectar flows each Spring. All the earth is His creation filled with beauty and love and, somehow, I know He's watching from somewhere above.” I'll end the story about books, cats, Elvis, and words, with a question. It is the same question that the Caterpillar asked Alice. Tell me, who are you?

John F. Hall

*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>