

THE CLASSROOM

By
John F. Hall

Nearly everyone may have memories of sitting in a classroom from kindergarten through high school. Many might recall sitting in a classroom at a community college or at a four—year college. Still some others may recall sitting in a classroom to earn a graduate degree. Most students do not develop an attachment for a specific classroom. This story is about one classroom at the Hopkinsville Community College (HCC) and the impact that it had on my success in life.

How I first came to this classroom began in 1966. This was the second year of the establishment of the UK Hopkinsville Community College. In 1965, HCC consisted of



only one building. It had the University of Kentucky (UK) blue brick masonry around the entire building. At that time in its history, HCC was a part of the UK's system of community colleges. In June of 1965, I completed a three-year Army enlistment in the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. I declined a promotion and a very large reenlistment bonus to take my chances in the civilian world. My father-in-law, Andrew C. Oakley of Golden Pond, was being forced off his land by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to create the Land Between the Lakes

(LBL) National Recreation Area. The Senate by a vote of 68 to 10, on May 23, 1963, passed the bill to create the LBL. President John F. Kennedy signed the bill into law on June 4, 1963.

I was salvaging as much barn lumber and cattle fences as I could. It was a day in Golden Pond back in March 1966. I was busy with a staple puller salvaging barbwire from a fence row. I was wearing a long-sleeve red shirt, blue jeans, and a black style cowboy hat. The cattle had been moved to another farm located five miles west of Cadiz. Pastor Randolph Allen came roaring down the gravel road leaving a tail of lime stone white dust. He saw me working near the side of the road and he slammed on his brakes. His car slid side ways on the gravel before coming to a stop. The white dust covered the bright green weeds on the side of the road and made them look like they had just been painted white. I did not know why he was in such a hurry. He was not my Pastor, but he was a very righteous man and he cared about the welfare of everyone that lived in the Land Between the Rivers.

He rolled down the front passenger window and asked me if I needed anything to drink. I stopped working and pulled off my leather gloves. I walked over to the Pastor's car and

we began to talk. He wanted to know where my wife and I planned to live once the TVA makes everyone move out of Golden Pond. I thought about his question. I had been living in my father-in-law's house with my wife, Paula for almost a year. My unemployment insurance had played out. Thankfully, my wife was hired and trained to be a histologist at Jennie Stuart Hospital in Hopkinsville. I told Pastor Allen that we might find a place in Cadiz. I was poor as a church mouse, but I spared telling that to him.

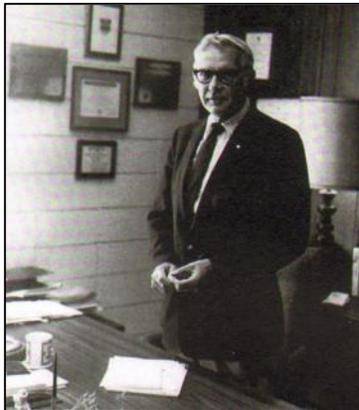
Pastor Allen told me that Congress passed a new GI Bill that would allow me to go to college. He mentioned that Hopkinsville had a new community college that just opened. I told Pastor Allen that I would check it out. He said good bye, rolled up his car window and drove away. I watched as his car kicked up the gravel and made a large cloud of dust. I believe that the Good Lord sends a messenger to help those in need. If He sent Pastor Allen, then He should have mentioned to him that speeding down a gravel road is not a good thing. My father-in-law's right arm was almost useless, so I was working alone. The doctors at the Vanderbilt Hospital in Nashville told my father-in-law that he was a "Million to One" Melanoma cancer survivor. Very few survived the cancer that he had. So much muscle was removed from the under side of his right arm, that driving a tractor using that arm, is the most work that he could do. I asked my father-in-law if I could borrow his 1965 Oldsmobile Cutlass 442. It was bright red and had a four barrel carburetor, four-speed manual transmission and a dual exhaust. It could tear up a quarter mile of black country road with an acceleration of 13 seconds at 103 miles an hour. It was a mean muscle machine. Across Highway 68/80 from the house was the Sunset Inn Restaurant. Attached to that building was a small grocery store managed by Billy Oakley, my wife's uncle. On the outside of the store was a car-lift. I would raise up the 442, change the oil and grease the front steering and suspension system. It was not my car but I washed it a lot.

On my way to Hopkinsville, I had to stop at the four-way intersection in Julien, Kentucky. Before it was destroyed in a fire, there was a grocery store at that Highway KY 272 and KY 117 location. It had a wooden front porch and there was a middle-age man sitting on a very large bench on that porch. He was the biggest man that I can ever recall seeing. I would guess that he weighed over 400 pounds. I looked over and noticed that he was dozing off to sleep. I confess that I had a little mischievous streak in me back when I was 21. I put the 442 in first gear, put one foot on the brake, pushed down on the accelerator, built up the RPMs, and laid rubber going across that intersection. I never knew the man's name and I hope that I did not scare him too much. Years later, the man died. He was too big to be buried in a regular casket. They had to bury him in a piano crate. Every time I go down the back roads to that intersection, I think about that old man and the 442.

I continued on towards Hopkinsville and I arrived at the HCC campus. I parked the 442 and went inside. The receptionist sent me to talk to Dr. Brooks Major, Academic Dean. He told me that the Act is called the Veterans Readjustment Act of 1966 (The Vietnam Era GI Bill). Dr. Major said the Act would pay for my tuition, books and fees at HCC. I told him that my wife was pregnant and that I needed to find a part-time job to help with our living expenses. Dr. Major told me about a part-time job on Fort Campbell that was

open to college students. I thanked Dr. Major and told him that I would be enrolling. I drove to the Fort Campbell Post Office which was located at the first traffic light when you come in Gate Four. Few people realized that in 1966, half of the post office was located in Kentucky and the other half was located in Tennessee. Decades later, that wooden post office was torn down and a modern brick post office building was constructed fully inside Kentucky. I went inside and applied for the Postal Assistant part-time job. I had to take a Merit Test. I was given veteran's preference and I was hired the following week.

I had to be at the Fort Campbell Post Office by 4:30 A.M., to unload the large mail truck. Interstate 24 would not be built until the late 1970s. I purchased a used Oldsmobile to make the drive from Golden Pond to Fort Campbell via Highway 68/80, KY 272, KY 117, and 41-A. Every morning that I went to work, I would stop at the intersection in Julien and make the right turn to travel south on KY 117. It was very early in the morning and the big man that I scared was sound asleep. I gave myself two hours to arrive at the post office. My day started at 1:30 A.M. Once I unloaded the mail truck, I would hand-sort letters to the various units. I would do this until 8:30 in the morning. I would then rush to HCC to make my 9:00 A.M. class. Thankfully, that class was in the classroom by the door at the southwest side of the building. I was worn out by the time I went into that classroom. I had a battery-operated tape recorder that I used to record the lectures in that morning class. When I came home, I would listen to those lectures. That classroom would become very significant to my success 11 years later.



In 1967, I was elected to HCC's first student government along with Steve Tribble, currently the Christian County Judge/Executive; Mike Foster, recently appointed as a Special Kentucky Supreme Court Justice, and Mike Herndon, my friend and a retired newspaper journalist. At that time in history, demonstrations and riots on major universities and colleges, against the Vietnam War, were ongoing. Dr. Thomas Riley, the first HCC President, and a Marine Corps veteran with service in the South Pacific during World War II, kept a sword mounted in a shadow box, high on the wall behind his desk.

(Pictured: Dr. Thomas Leslie Riley First President of Hopkinsville Community College. Served from (1965-1990).

He would not allow the elected student government officers to have a student convocation. HCC had about 220 students. I don't know why the student government officers asked me to work with Dr. Riley to get permission to have a convocation. After about six months, Dr. Riley relented and gave his permission for the student government to have a student convocation.

In 1967, the Military Selective Service Act expanded the ages of conscription from 18 to 55. College age students did not want to be drafted and sent to Vietnam to die, should

their lottery number be called or they lost their college deferment. Four Kent State University students were killed and nine were injured when Ohio National Guard members opened fire on a crowd gathered to protest the Vietnam War. The immediate aftermath of that tragedy resulted in student-led strikes that forced the temporary closure of colleges and universities across the country. I guess that Dr. Riley was just holding his ground. I was overjoyed when I broke the news to the student government officers that Dr. Riley had agreed to allow a student convocation. I was then told by the officers that I would open the assembly, then I would announce that the entire student government was resigning in protest over the way Dr. Riley was treating us. When I made that announcement, Dr. Riley was sitting in the front row. In a way he won. All of the student government, except for me, graduated that year. Dr. Riley was my age when he died. I put his picture in this story . He was responsible for the success of so many of his students.

Since I was no longer in student government, I began drawing cartoons that I posted on the HCC student bulletin board. At the HCC's 50th Anniversary, the college held a reception for the graduates of the first class. I was invited to the event. To my surprise, they had a display table and there was a picture of one of my drawings. It was a caricature of the cartoon character, Charlie Brown holding a test paper. The wording on the test paper is, "I'm not an A student or a B student. I am an overworked student." I was amazed that the college kept that drawing.

I was an average undergraduate student when I attended HCC. Francis Thomas was my first HCC English teacher. I was the only male student in her class and there was no place for me to hide. She was a former high school teacher and most of the female students were in her high school honors class. Dr. Riley, when he was forming his first instructor team in 1965, selected Mrs. Thomas to be the first instructors that he hired. One day she asked me to become a Charter Member of HCC's Pennyrile Players Drama Club. Feeling that I was the dumbest student in her class and was struggling in chemistry and algebra, I felt that I better say, "Yes," to keep from failing her class too. I still had not gotten over the memory when I was about 12 years old. I was living in Orlando, Florida at the time. I was walking in a park maintained by the city. A small creek, fed by an underground stream of water, was in the middle of this park. I noticed something shinning in the creek. I went over, reached into the creek, and pulled out an unopened soda bottle. As I was holding the soda bottle, I heard this scream. Then, from on top of a hill, I heard these words, "Get him!! He is stealing our drinks!!" About 20 young Girl Scout Brownies came running down the hill with large sticks in their hands and fire in their eyes. They intended to beat up on me. I threw the soda bottle back into the creek and ran for my life.

Mr. Fred Garner selected me to play the role of one of the brothers in Eugene O'Neill's 1924 play, "Desire Under The Elms." This was an attempt by O'Neill to adapt plot elements of Greek tragedy to a rural New England setting. I was really surprised that he selected this play because it is slightly sexually suggestive. I had a ready made custom. My blue jeans pants legs were tattered and torn from being caught on the barbwire that I had been salvaging in Golden Pond. I had on the same red, long-sleeve shirt and the black

hat the day Pastor Allen came roaring down the dusty road in March of 1966. I put two pictures from that play in this story.

I was a member of HCC's first class, but I did not graduate with the other 26 members in 1967. I enrolled in 1966, the second year after the college opened its doors. I lacked six credit hours necessary to earn an associate degree from HCC. Under the 1966 GI Bill, I was required to take a minimum of 12 semester hours to be considered a full time student. I had to transfer to Murray State University (MSU) to take the required minimum number of credit hours. One semester I signed up for 21 semester hours. I was getting in over my head because I also had a part-time job working at the MSU campus post office. I graduated in 1970 with a BS degree in business administration. I began to work on a graduate degree. I was the first student to obtain student loans from the Trigg County Farmers Bank. The bank wanted me to start repaying those loans once I graduated from MSU. I completed my first graduate semester and dropped out of graduate school. I accepted the position of manager of the Fort Campbell Rod and Gun Club. After one year, I resigned and joined the Kentucky State Police (KSP).

This should have been the end of this story, but the KSP decided to allow its Troopers to participate in the Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP). Congress established the program in 1968 for the purpose of assisting those working in law enforcement to obtain higher education. The grants are canceled without repayment if the recipient works for a publicly supported law enforcement agency. for a five-year period after receiving the degree. Otherwise, the recipient must repay the grant with interest. I had to be in uniform when driving the police car to the college. Once I arrived on campus, I had to change into civilian clothes and then go to the classroom. Once the class was over, I had to change back into my police uniform and drive the police car home. I had been taking graduate



Dr. Brooks Major
First HCC Academic Dean

courses, on and off from 1971 through 1978. The reason I was going after a Master degree had to do with my concern if I was injured on the job. I felt that I could teach business courses at a community college should I be disabled and no longer able to serve in law enforcement. In 1977, I was taking a graduate course and I needed to complete my student teaching at a community college to earn a Master of Arts in College Teaching (MACT) degree. I wanted to do my student teaching at HCC. I drove to the campus and talked to Dr. Brooks Major. I asked him if he would allow me to teach Management 1 during the spring semester. He told me that HCC did not offer that management course in the spring. He said that he would make

an exception if 10 students signed up for the course. To our surprise, 42 students signed up for the management course. Dr. Major assigned me to teach the course in the classroom located in the southwest side of the building. This is the same classroom that, 11 years earlier, I was a new freshman student sitting in that classroom. I walked into that classroom and arranged the student desk chairs.

This would be my first time teaching a full class of college students. Several of my students were twice my age and were managers at manufacturing plants in Hopkinsville.

They had decades of management experience, but they lacked a degree. I had one year of experience as the manager of the Fort Campbell Rod and Gun Club. Most college professors that teach management courses have no business experience. They just teach out of the book.

The final week of the Management 1 course, Dr. Brooks Major came into the classroom. He walked up to the podium and asked me to take a break in the break room. At first, I did not realize what was going on. After about 15 minutes, one of my students came to the break room and told me that Dr. Major wanted me to return to the classroom. Dr. Major, in compliance with Murray State's requirement to evaluate my teaching, handed out evaluation sheets to my 42 students, to evaluate my teaching. I loved teaching those students. I made my lectures interesting. I shared what I experienced with the Campbell job. I was able to bring real world experiences into the classroom and not to just teach out of a management book. The greatest teacher to ever walk the face of this earth is Jesus Christ. He “went about Galilee teaching in their synagogues...” Matthew 4:23.

One week, after the completion of the Management 1 course, Dr. Major called me at home. He offered me a full time teaching position. I had to respectfully decline because of my obligation to remain in law enforcement for five years after I receive the MACT degree. I went on to earn a Specialist in College Teaching (SCT) degree in 1978. In 1979, I was given a Direct Commission in the Kentucky Army National Guard as a First Lieutenant. From 1982 to 1984, I was the Commander of the 614th Military Police Company in Murray, Kentucky. From 1985 to 1993, I served as the Division G-3 Training Officer in the 100th Division in Louisville, Kentucky. From 1993 to 2000, I served as the Assistant Inspector General in the 100th Division. From 2000 to 2003, I was the Inspector General of the 85th Division north of Chicago. From 2003 to 2005, I served as the Army Reserve Adviser to the 198th Military Police Battalion in Louisville.

After I retired from the KSP in 1988, I was an adjunct professor for HCC and I taught law enforcement and management courses on Fort Campbell, at HCC in Hopkinsville and in Princeton. This was, short lived as I began serving 120 and 150 days a year on active duty in the Army Reserves, 100th Division and the 85th Division.

In 2015, HCC celebrated its 50 Anniversary. The college wanted to hear stories from the students in its first class. For several years prior to that anniversary, I considered returning to HCC to obtain an Associate in Arts degree. I wrote the HCC Registrar, Melissa Stevenson. She told me to submit official transcripts from all the colleges that I attended. After compiling all of my courses, she informed me that I would have to take CIT 105 Introduction to Computers to satisfy the digital literacy requirement. She informed me that HCC has a Donovan Scholars program for persons over the age of 65 to take college credit for free. I would be responsible to for the textbook and the online fee. My oldest granddaughter, Andrea gave me her old textbook. My next to the oldest granddaughter, Heather gave me her old, slow laptop computer. I completed the course and the Registrar invited me to participate in the graduation exercise.

On the day of my long delayed graduation, I went to the HCC administration building. I then walked over to the blue brick building and went into the classroom where I had my first class as a freshman and where I completed my student teaching. I stood there and realized how critical HCC had been in my life. I wondered what would have happened if Pastor Allen had not been roaring down that dusty road and told me about HCC. That night, my wife Paula; my son John; my grandchildren, Andrea, Heather, John-John, Skyler and Lexie, and their mom, Loretta, came to the graduation ceremony at the Bruce Convention Center. I asked to be the last student to receive a degree. After they announced my name, rather than walk over to the HCC President, I walked over to the invited guests, the first graduates of HCC. I pointed to Mike Herndon and clapped. They stood up and clapped. I walked over to the HCC President to receive my degree.



In 2019, my grandson, John-John enrolled at HCC. In 2020, he has a course in the same classroom where it all began for me back in 1966. Skyler Crisp, my surrogate granddaughter, is also enrolled at HCC. She was in kindergarten with John-John when they were students at HCA. My granddaughters, Andrea and Heather attended HCC before they transferred to Western Kentucky University. Shakespeare wrote, “One man in his time plays many parts.” I went from a student to an adjunct professor and then back to being a student. The classroom in the southwest corner of the HCC building is more than just blue bricks and mortar. The desk chairs have been replaced with full size tables and individual chairs. The interior of the classroom has not changed. The memories that I cherish, sitting in that classroom and then teaching in that classroom, will remain with me all the remaining days of my life. Dr. Brooks Major was more than just the Academic Dean in 1966. He wanted me to be successful just as much as I wanted the students that I taught in that classroom to be successful.

As this story about a classroom in HCC is nearing an end, I will pay homage to all the wonderful instructors at HCC that helped forge my destiny. I shall always be grateful for



my wife, Paula and my son, John; for Andrea, Heather, John-John, Skyler, Lexie and Jade for keeping me young at heart. For Trish Cunningham, Mike Herndon and Dr. Daniel Butler (MD), for finding some merit in my stories. For Pastor Allen for pointing me in the right direction to come to HC; for Dr. Brooks Major, Academic Dean, for all that he did to help me; for Chaplain Meredith and my Christian Brothers, and all those that enjoy reading my stories. Thanks for your kind words.

(Pictured: Andrea Hall, John F. Hall and John A. Hall)

In 1994, Bobby Boyd, Marcus Hummon, and Jeff Hanna co-wrote a song titled, “Bless The Broken Road.” I think about Jesus when I hear Rascal Flatts sing some of the lyrics in that song such as, “I think about the years I spent just passing through. I'd like to have the time I lost and give it back to you. But you just smile and take my hand. You've been there, you understand. It's all part of a grander plan that is coming true. This much I know is true, that God blessed the broken road that led me straight to you...” Time after time, year after year, Christ has given His tender mercies to this unworthy writer. When all is said and done, I can safely say that I traveled that “broken road” with the help from Pastor Allen, Dr. Major, my other friends, and my best friend for all eternity—Jesus Christ. I paint a story using words. Then I show the people involved in my story. Unlike my favorite writer, Jesse Stuart, these people are not a figment of my imagination. The picture below was taken many years ago. I was writing a story sitting on the sands of a beach somewhere in Alabama. The Gulf of Mexico is in the background. I might write a story one day titled, “The Old Writer And The Sea.”

When I began writing stories more than 40 years ago, the purpose was to inspire, motivate or entertain. A few things that I wanted to incorporate in my stories was musical lyrics, pictures and short articles from other writers. The following is an article written by Kay E. Richardson titled, “Teach Children.” This is what she wrote, “What children need most does not cost a thing... They need the security love will bring. Let's tell them we love them every day... So they'll never doubt that we feel that way. The things you say they will say, too... Their precious ears will learn from you... And things they see they will learn, too. Their innocent eyes are watching you... Teach them the difference between right and wrong... And that doing right will keep them strong. Teach them God will always be there...each time they bow their heads in prayer. Let them learn the best of you... Fill them with goodness and set them free... They will live in a time where you cannot be.”

John F. Hall

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