

## FOOTPRINTS OF OUR LIVES

By John F. Hall

The other day, I was in the auto parts store to purchase an air filter for my 2016 Ford Escape. The sales associate behind the counter located the air filter that I needed. He noticed the Retired Army, front license plate on my vehicle. He thanked me for my service. We engaged in a conversation and he told me that he was a retired Army Master Sergeant. I thanked him for his service.



He told me that he served four tours in Iraq and three tours in Afghanistan. He said that he served in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and that he had to retire after 27 years of military service. He told me his story that he was among 50 soldiers that went to Somalia. Twenty of them came down with a disease called P. vivax malaria that is caused by an infective Anopheles mosquito. The disease, should it turn into severe malaria, can cause serious organ failures and abnormalities in a person's blood.

He said that he was among the 20 soldiers that had to medically retire. I shared with him that I served in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. He said that he had no regrets. He has two daughters that are students at Murray State University and a son in law school. I mentioned that only three soldiers in my former platoon in the 101<sup>st</sup> made it home from Vietnam. And those three soldiers were in very bad shape. The auto parts sales associate said to me: "We all leave footprints."

That retired Master Sergeant made me think about his words about leaving footprints. Writing literally, I've left my footprints on many American beaches on the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific Ocean. I remember walking bare footed on a beach in the Bahamas, and a beach in the British Virgin Island of Tortola where I did some snorkeling. Three times I left my footprints on the sands of Waikiki in Hawaii. One time I left ten miles of my boot prints in the hot sands of the Mohave Desert, in California. I remember, as a child, watching my foot prints in the wet beach sands disappear as the waves washed ashore. The retired soldier, at the auto parts store, is correct that we all leave footprints, but some prints are not left on beach sands.

Footprints symbolize what we leave behind. They indicate that someone has been here before. They reference the past, absence, and spirit rather than corporeal presence. My unseen friends, Audrey and Mike Lambert, created a digital footprint for me by posting my stories on Audrey's web page: "ajlambert.com." I mail Audrey a copy of the stories that I mail to Jade, Lexie, Skyler, Trish, Mike, and Daniel. Mike Herndon and I have been friends for over a half century. Today, he is fighting for his life. He left his footprints as a former editor of the Kentucky New Era newspaper.

This old, absent minded professor is the adopted grandfather to Jade, Lexie, and Skyler. I guess, that at the age of 76, I still have a few gems of wisdom that I can pass on to them. My Pastor told me that they are gifts from God. He is right, as usual, and that Christ is in control of our lives.

Linda Grazulis wrote a piece called “Strolling Along With My Savior.” These are her words” “When I’m strolling along with my savior, there’s hope within my beating heart. From the time I placed my faith in Him - yes, from the very start, I feel His outstretched hands and tender mercy when I fail to do my best. He’ll see me through each raging battle - in my Lord, my soul can rest. It’s a blessing to have somebody who cares for my every need, and when I’m lonely and forlorn, He plants a friendship seed. Jesus remains closer than a brother - no matter where we’re called to roam. Whether it be in the blazing heat of the desert or the sea with waves of billowy foam. Walking with my precious Savior, each step I confidently take; even when my gaits unsteady and my heart’s about to break. For I know He won’t forsake me like some folks often tend to do; He’ll even carry me to the finish line when my life on earth is through. Oh Savior, stroll besides me, for on You I can depend, even when the final curtain is called and Heaven’s ‘round the bend.”

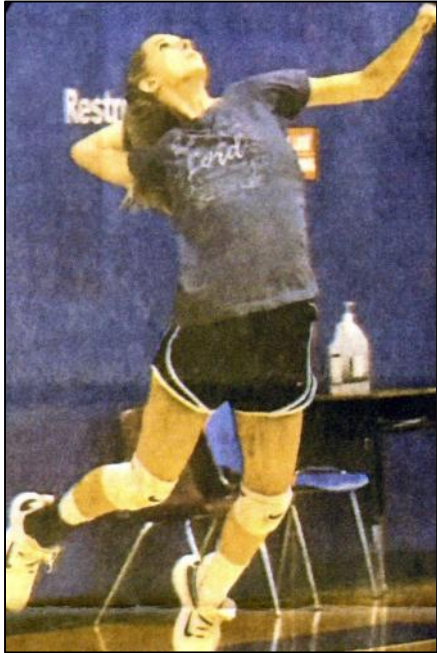
Sometimes, when I write a story, like editing a movie, some parts get cut and wind up on the editing floor. The other Sunday, after church services, I talked to a fellow Army Veteran, and a Christian Fraternity Brother, Jim Ethridge. He enlisted in the Army at the tender age of 15. He fought in World War II and the Korean War. He was an Army Ranger and assigned to 147<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. He fought alongside the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions during the Battle of Iwo Jima. The purpose of the battle was to capture the island with its two airfields. The casualties on the American side were 6,821 killed and 19,217 wounded. Joe Rosenthal’s Associated Press photograph of the rising of the U.S. flag at the top of Mount Suribachi by six Marines became an iconic image of the battle and the American war effort in the Pacific in World War II.

The things that Jim Ethridge experienced, and the horrors of war that he witnessed, would make anyone cringe. He is part of that “Greatest Generation.” He is 90 years old and a friend indeed. He told me that he liked the story that I mailed him. That made this old writer feel good. I decided that I needed Jim in a picture with me. I like to show pictures of the people that I write about and show them with me. When I’m gone, the picture will help them remember me.

Jade Hakes is a high school senior this year, as is Lexie Crisp. I put a picture of her in her ROTC uniform. Patriotism is still alive in this country. I put a picture of Lexie Crisp that



was taken by Bryan Edwards, a sports reporter for the Kentucky New Era. She is a gifted volleyball player. As for my footprints in the sands of time, I just hope that the tasks Christ has given and blessed me with, are completed to His satisfaction. I pray that I have not wasted the grace upon grace upon grace that He has freely bestowed on me. And when I stand alone,



before Him, that He will show me His mercy. And I hope that I left good footprints in the lives of those that read my stories and in the lives of those that my soul has touched.

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