

THE LONG DELAYED 50-YEAR DEGREE

By John F. Hall

In 1966, I enrolled in the Hopkinsville Community College (HCC). This college opened its doors for the first time in May of 1965. I was part of the first class, as was Christian County Judge Executive Steve Tribble, and Christian County Mike Foster, and my friend, Hopkinsville New Era Editor Mike Herndon. I was a member of the first HCC Student Council. I drew cartoons for the student newspaper. I played the role of one of the brothers, in the HCC's drama club (Pennyrile Players) play, "Desire Under The Elms," by Eugene O'Neill. The play is a study of the complexity of individuals' desires and how they play out in various relationships. It also uses the themes of nature and religion as backdrops to these dramas: the presence of God is a powerful concept that motivates and informs characters' feelings and actions.



Unlike my dad, Charles J. Hall, who was brilliant in chemistry and math, those two subjects were the only ones that I failed to pass at HCC. I was going to HCC under the G I Bill that Congress passed on March 3, 1966. I did not get to graduate with the first HCC class. I transferred to Murray State University (MSU) in 1968. As a trained community college instructor, I'm of the opinion that a good part of my failure was due to the instructors' not being able to teach to all the students in their class. I had to re-take those two subjects at MSU. I signed up for the chemistry class, and I was shocked to see about 90 students, in the large circular classroom, where the course was taught. The first day, that the instructor walked into the classroom, he asked the question: "How many of you do not like chemistry?" Everyone raised their hands. He then said: "That is a good place to start. And by the time we finish this course, you will all love chemistry." He was right, and I learned to love chemistry, I made a "B" for the course. As for algebra, my brain is not wired to compute. I made a "C" in that course.

In 2016, HCC celebrated its 50th Anniversary. I received an invitation to be with the first graduating class. I was asked to talk about my experience at HCC. I called the HCC Registrar and suggested that I do more than just talk. I proposed, that HCC award me an Associate of Arts degree, as part of the celebration. The Registrar told me that she had my HCC college transcripts, but I would need to provide her with college transcripts from Murray State, Austin Peay, Eastern Kentucky, and Kentucky State. In 1972, when I was in the Kentucky State Police (KSP) Academy, as part of that training, the cadet class spent some time on the Eastern Kentucky University campus, taking law enforcement training courses. Kentucky State University sent instructors to the KSP Academy, for several courses. I provided the Registrar with the requested college transcripts. A week went by and I received a call from the Registrar.

She said: "Mr. Hall, we are not able to award you the Associate of Arts degree because you have not demonstrated computer competency." I replied: "You have to be kidding. I've been using computers, in my military service, for the past 40 years." She replied: "I believe you, but you have not provided any proof that you completed a required computer

course.” In 1965, HCC was one of the colleges associated with the University of Kentucky. It was a two-year college feeding students to a four-year college. I remember buying a sticker at the HCC book store. It had large UK letters on the top, and smaller HCC letters on the bottom of the sticker. We thought that we were University of Kentucky students. In 1997, Governor Paul E. Patton signed House Bill 1. It created a new institution (KCTCS) to replace the University of Kentucky’s Community College Systems and the Kentucky Department of Education’s network of technical schools. The change did not impact a scholarship fund set up by the University of Kentucky.

The HCC Registrar told me that the University of Kentucky has a scholarship program, for students like me, who just need a course or two to be awarded an Associate of Arts degree. She said the scholarship will pay for my tuition and fees. I agreed to take the online computer course. My oldest granddaughter, Andrea, gave me her old HCC computer text book. My next to the oldest granddaughter, Heather, gave me her old and slow laptop computer. She had a much updated computer. Her old laptop had software that allowed her to take online courses from HCC. Just as I started the course, the instructor’s husband was unexpectedly transferred to Knoxville, Tennessee. She had to move with him, so HCC allowed her to continue to teach the online course, from Knoxville. I communicated with the instructor by email. The test exams were graded, online by a company in Chicago, Illinois. This company had problems with their software. It was a convoluted mess, and I had health issues. I stayed the course and I earned a “B” grade for the computer course.

As the spring semester at HCC was coming to an end, The HCC Registrar called me at home. I’m guessing that the HCC President Jay Allen, wanted to present me with the associate of Associate of Arts degree, with the other students. I was requested to walk the line in a cap and gown, at the graduation ceremony that was held in the Bruce Convention Center. I think that my dad, Charles J. Hall, had he been alive, would have smiled to see receiving that 4th degree. Zac Brown, Nico Moon, and Ben Simonetti wrote the country song, “My Old Man.” These are their lyrics: “He was a giant and I was just a kid. I was always trying to do everything he did. I can still remember every lesson he taught me. Growing up learning how to be like my old man. He was a lion, we were our father’s pride. But I was defiant, when he made me walk the line. He knew how to lift me up, and when to let me fall...”. “... Looking back, he always had a plan, my old man. My old man, feel the callous on his hand, and dusty overalls. My old man, now I fully understand. I have a lot to learn from my old man. Now I’m a giant, got a son of my own. He’s always trying to go everywhere I go. Do the best I can to rise him up the right way. Hoping that he someday wants to be like his old man. My old man, I know one day we’ll meet again. As he’s looking down, my old man. I hope he’s proud of who I am. I’m trying to fill the boots of my old man.”

Dr. Thomas Riley was the first president of HCC. In 1965, the college had 220 students. The HCC student council wanted to have a student assembly to talk to the students. Dr. Riley denied their request. I guess, because I was an Army Veteran, that I was asked to try to get Dr. Riley to change his mind. For six months, I would Visit his office and talk to him. One day, I went to his office, and he agreed to allow the student assembly. I told

the student council that we won. They told me to MC the assembly, and to tell the students, that the entire student council is resigning, in protest, over the way they were being treated by Dr. Riley. I'm sure that Dr. Riley was not happy with me. I was in the Class of 1966.

I asked the Master of Ceremonies (MC) at the graduation ceremony, held at the Bruce Convention Center, on May 6, 2016, to let me be the last student to receive a degree. After my name was called, I came up on the stage. I was halfway to HCC President Jay Allen, and I stopped. I walked back, and over to the side of the stage, to where the first HCC graduating class of 1966 was sitting. I looked down at them and pointed to them. I said: "This is for you!" I began clapping my hands. Soon, everyone in the Convention Center was clapping! I walked back to Dr. Allen. He presented me with my "Long Delayed Fifty-Year Degree." Looking back, HCC has played a role in the Hall family. My wife, Paula; my son, John; my granddaughter, Andrea; my granddaughter, Heather; and my grandson, John, all had taken classes at HCC. My grandson, John, after he graduated from Trigg County High School, did not own a car. He did not get a driver's license until he turned 20. For two years, I drove him from his home to HCC in the morning. After classes, I drove him home from HCC, in the afternoon. We would stop at the Sonic drive-in restaurant in Cadiz, for a treat.

In Mark, Chapter 12, Verses 30-31, are these words: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." I believe in helping my neighbor, but not in letting my neighbor take unfair advantage of me. Everyone is responsible for their own salvation, and for their own happiness, by keeping Christ as their Guide.

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

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