

## MEMORIES OF A PERPETUAL STUDENT

By John F. Hall

Being a perpetual student, on and off for more than 50 years was not something that I planned to be. I can begin this story with my first college course at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee in 1964, at the age of 18. I can end this story with



my last college course at Hopkinsville Community College in Hopkinsville, Kentucky in 2015, at the age of 70. In my first college course, I was exposed to the writings of William Shakespeare and the writings of F. Scott Fitzgerald. I pondered what Shakespeare meant when he said: "To be or not to be." It means to live or not to live. In his play, Hamlet discusses how miserable and painful human life is, but the fearful uncertainty of what comes after death, keeps him from taking his own life. Maybe Shakespeare had no strong religious belief. On the other hand, I enjoyed reading F. Scott Fitzgerald's letters to his

daughter when she was off in summer camp. He was telling her what to and not to worry about. I think his novel, "The Great Gatsby," is over rated. But I like the last line of the novel: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

Perhaps most of my stories find me ceaselessly going back into my past. It's what I know best. It's my odyssey of a long journey full of adventures that are true and that I tell best. Christ enters into this odyssey with inspiration far beyond what I am capable to express. Once or twice, it humbled me that He would give this unworthy soul such a unique talent. In the scheme of things, I acknowledge that in giving Christ the honor and the glory, he can use me as an instrument of His peace.

Thus, I begin this story about my first college course. I was in a foxhole with my assistant gunner and my ammo bearer. I let them sleep at night as I watched behind my M-60 machine gun. I realized that I would be stuck in that foxhole if I did not get a college education. On another occasion, the new West Point Platoon Leader got our platoon destroyed in a field training exercise (FTX). The FTX empire put us in a reserve status. I felt that new Platoon Leader was reckless, and in combat, his recklessness would, in fact, get the platoon killed for real. The Army, at that time, put a very low priority on infantry soldiers going to college. During a night parachute jump in Recondo School (a pre-Ranger training), I crashed into some trees, It was only by the grace of Christ that I was not killed. I decided to transfer to a different unit. I overheard two soldiers talking about a platoon size special unit called the Security Platoon. It was attached to a Military Police company, and it also serviced as the Fort Campbell Honor Guard. One day, I walked over to that unit and asked to be interviewed by the unit commander. I was accepted and told to report once I cleared B Company, 327th Infantry. I notified my Platoon Leader. He told me that I would be losing the \$50 a monthly jump pay. I asked him if money was the only reason why he wanted me to remain in the 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon. He said that it was. What he failed to realize is that even back then, I did not do things just for money.

I arrived at the Fort Campbell Security Platoon and had to be processed for a “Secret” security clearance.

Until my background investigation was completed, I could only go on Honor Guard assignment. I was detailed to the 101<sup>st</sup> Division Headquarters as the driver for the Chief of Staff. I asked his permission to take a night college course at Austin Peay College in Clarksville, Tennessee. He granted my request. The year was 1964 and I did not own a car. I would take a Greyhound bus from the bus station on Fort Campbell to the bus station in Clarksville. It was just a few blocks from the Austin Peay campus. The only available night course was a Literature course. The course is taken after a student has completed English 101 and English 102. The college let me take it anyway. So I was digging out of another foxhole and the course was over my head.

I had to read almost the entire Literature book. What helped save me is the Chief of Staff let me read the textbook and do my homework as I sat at a chair outside his office. My English professor’s tests were, in my opinion, brutal. I enjoyed reading F. Scott Fitzgerald’s letters to his daughter. He was a good mentor. My final exam in the Literature class was painful. I was the last student to finish the test. I really thought that I failed. I turned in my test paper, and as I was about to go out the door, the Professor said: “John, don’t give up.” I replied that I won’t. To my surprise, I passed the course. I still have the textbook.

I went on and spent decades taking college courses and military courses. I was part of the first class when the Hopkinsville Community College (HCC) opened in 1965. I transferred to Murray State University in 1968 and did not receive a degree from HCC. For the 50th Anniversary of HCC, the college invited students from the first class for a reception. It would be held just before graduation ceremonies at the Convention Center. I contacted the HCC’s Registrar and provided transcripts from all of the colleges that I had attended. I asked if I was qualified to be awarded an Associate of Arts degree. The Registrar told me that I lacked a computer course, a basic core requirement. I first thought she was joking since computers were not in use when I was a full time student at HCC. I thought she could “grandfather” me in.

The Registrar told me that I would have to demonstrate computer competency. She said the University of Kentucky has a Scholarship Program for people my age that want to complete their degree. The program would pay for my tuition and fees. My oldest granddaughter gave me her old computer text book. Another granddaughter, Heather gave me her old laptop computer that she no longer used. I completed the course online. At graduation, the granddaughters, to include Skyler and Lexie and family and friends came. It would be the last time that Mike Herndon and I shared in-person conversations.

I included a page with 1969 pictures of my business fraternity brothers and a story about the President of Murray State University. I attended a 50th Anniversary of the Class of 1970-71 this year. I believe in Christ’s Divine Intervention and His inspiration and His grace upon grace upon grace that allows me to continue to write these true stories. Christmas is near and I need to mail out my Christmas cards.

**Alma Mater**

In the heart of Jackson's Purchase,  
'Neath the sun's warm glow,  
Is the home of Murray State,  
Finest place we know.

Chorus

May we cherish thy traditions,  
Hold thy banner high.  
Ever guard thy name and glory,  
Live and do or die.

Though we leave thy walls forever  
Many miles go hence,  
May our love for alma mater  
Only have commenced.





**MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY**

**Golden Anniversary Dinner**  
Honoring the Class of 1969

**Emcee**  
Carrie McGinnis, Director  
Alumni Relations

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**DR. HARRY SPARKS**  
**PRESIDENT OF MURRAY STATE 1969**

Just a very short story. In 1969, Murray State College's name was changed to Murray State University. I was initiated into Alpha Kappa Psi, a national professional business fraternity that year. We were not a Greek fraternity, but they accepted us as one of their own. I was required to wear a bow tie for the initiation. Not having one, I walked over to the President of the college, Dr. Harry Sparks and asked if I could borrow one of his bow ties. He invited me into his residence and let me use a new one. That is the kind of administration, professors and staff that I truly came to admire. I became the Vice President of the fraternity in 1970, but I identify with the class of 1969. I went to the 50th Anniversary Dinner on October 18, 2019. In the words of our Alma Mater, "Murray State, finest place we know." Because of my education at Murray State, I was able to have successful careers in the military, law enforcement, and state revenue. This is what I tell my grandchildren, "Get your college education first and enjoy your college years."

The Eta Eta Chapter of Alpha Kappa Psi, a national professional business fraternity, was installed at Murray State University on February 20, 1966. Alpha Kappa Psi seeks male business majors who recognize the importance of a brotherhood of men with common interests; have proved themselves capable of accepting responsibility related to their field of study; and desire to develop the growth of the fraternity through their personal contributions.



**First Row:**  
Edward Alford  
Berry Beighman  
Kent Bradley  
Allen Kephart  
Sam Kellum  
Tom Kowalski  
Dale Goshart  
  
**Second Row:**  
John Hall  
Richard Jones  
Jack Ketcher  
David King  
Gary Kowalski  
Bobby Martin  
Tom Marsh  
  
**Third Row:**  
Ken McIlwain  
Bill Parker  
Carlton Parker  
Stanley Poe  
Rickey Poe  
Bob Felt  
Pat Rice  
  
**Fourth Row:**  
Bob Bentley  
Charles Lamborn  
Clode McDonald, Advisor



**JOHN HALL, VICE PRESIDENT  
ALPHA KAPPA PSI  
FRONT ROW, SEATED  
SECOND FROM LEFT**

**ALPHA KAPPA PSI 1969**

**JOHN F. HALL**

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