

## STORIES FROM THE YEARBOOK

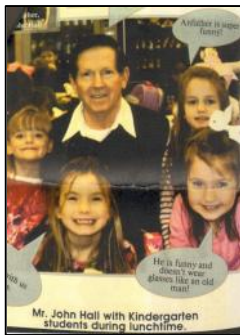
John F. Hall

In 2011, Brette Walsh, was a sophomore student at Heritage Christian Academy (HCA) and the Journalist for the HCA Yearbook. She was given the assignment to interview a long time volunteer in the HCA lunch room for the dedication pages of the 2011 HCA Yearbook. I was that volunteer in the HCA lunchroom. I just assumed that Brette was writing a class paper. I was not aware that I would be in the dedication pages. Though out this story, I am referred to as "AnFather." When my first grandchild, Andrea was a baby, I would rock her to sleep in my rocking chair. I would whisper in her ear: "Grandfather, grandfather, grandfather." I wanted her to call me "Grandfather." One day, when she first learned to talk, she called me "AnFather." I felt that was close enough. That name, that Andrea calls me, followed me into HCA.



This is what Brette Walsh wrote on the dedication pages of the 2011 HCA Yearbook: "AnFather has a familiar face that always has a smile. He does so much for our school but hardly get any credit. He never misses a day of work and is always willing to help out where ever he is needed. It all began with a promise to his granddaughter (Andrea) to come and eat lunch with her everyday. He never would've guessed that promise would land him where he is now. On a routine day, he would come and eat lunch with her but stayed around for a few minutes once lunch was over. He noticed a lunch room worker cleaning the tables all by herself, and that sparked something in him. After he retired from his job, he started volunteering at our school, and he's been here ever since, When asked why he has stuck around for so long, he said, "I believe in this school." Such a simple but powerful statement. Thank you, AnFather, for your years of service. You will be missed at HCA." Brette Walsh, Yearbook Journalist

In 2011, the Future Business Men of America Club at HCA invited me to be in their club. Since I have a Bachelor of Science in Business degree, from Murray State University, the students felt that I would fit right into their club. One day, a HCA Yearbook photographer asked the business club to meet for a formal picture. The club members dressed up. I was standing up with five of the students and looking up at the ceiling. I was given the job title of "AnFather The Elder."



Brette Walsh asked four HCA kindergarten students to pose with me for a picture. She interviewed the students and asked them what they thought about AnFather. The first student said: "He sure does talk a lot, and he says, never fear, AnFather is here!" The second student said, "I like AnFather because he sits with us and he tells us stories." The third student said, "AnFather is super funny." The fourth student said, "He is funny and doesn't wear glasses like an old man." Brette put a small picture of my three grandchildren: Andrea, Heather and John-John, also HCA students, above my picture with the Kindergarten students. On the page with her text, she put in bold letters the statement by

Mother Teresa: “We can do no great things, only small things with great love.” Below those words she put three pictures. One was with Miss Dixie, a lunch room volunteer; the second with the elementary students; the third cleaning tables.

I recall only one time in the HCA lunch room when I was not fast enough to stop a mini food fight. Audrey Barnett was sitting at a table with her older sister. Both students have blonde hair. For some reason, they began to argue. Audrey was eating out of a cup of pink yogurt. She stood up and poured the entire cup of yogurt on top of her sister's head. It made her sister's blonde hair look pink. I rushed over with a roll of paper towels and wiped the yogurt off her sister's hair. I told her sister to go to the girl's locker room and rinse off the remaining yogurt. I told Audrey that she can no longer sit at the same table with her sister.

Some parents stop having birthday parties for their children when they turn 18. The rationale is that their children are now adults and they should no longer celebrate their birthday. Audrey Barnett is very intelligent. She is also a very resourceful student. For what ever her reasons, Audrey's mother always had Audrey share her birthday with Audrey's uncle and the uncle's friends. Audrey wanted to celebrate her birthday separate from her uncle's birthday, and to invite her friends So Audrey decided to create a fictitious birthday party and she invited my granddaughter, Andrea. My wife, Paula purchased a birthday gift for Andrea to give to Audrey. On the day of the fictitious birthday party, we drove to Audrey's house. No other children were there and Audrey's mother was almost speechless. Audrey ran over and gave me a hug.

My grandchildren, Andrea, Heather, and John-John transferred to Trigg County schools in 2011. Some of the students make some comments on the front and back pages of the



2011 HCA Yearbook. On the back page of that Yearbook, Audrey Barnett wrote: “AnFather, what to say? You have been many things to me: my friend, my adopted grandfather, and my mint-giver. You took Andrea to the birthday party I never had, ate lunch with me for years and years and years! I will never forget lunchtimes and field trips with you and all you did for me. I already miss you!

:) Love, Audrey Barnett”

On October 22, 2022, I went to a wedding Celebration for Skyler Crisp and Kendall Lancaster. The reception was held in the War Memorial Building in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. I met with Skyler before the reception began. The first time that I met Skyler, she was in the HCA kindergarten class with my grandson, John-John. When her dad, Jason was deployed to Iraq, I filled the role of grandfather to Skyler and her sister, Lexie. As a volunteer in the HCA lunch room, I noticed that Skyler would not eat her lunch. So as I made my rounds to the tables, I would sit down and talk to Skyler. I would bring her treats that I would not let her eat until she ate half of her lunch that was prepared by her mother. Her sister, Lexie did not need any persuasion to eat her lunch.

At the wedding celebration, I noticed Rachel Brown, a 2009 graduate of HCA. She was the reception's DJ. She set the tone at the reception by playing the right songs at the right times and by reading the crowd accordingly. She added to the songs by playing her violin. I walked over and gave her a hug. The last time I saw Rachel was at her mother's funeral. Every school day, I would see her mother, Karen Brown in the HCA lunch room and we would engage in daily conversations. She was very proud of Rachael.

Karen Brown was an elementary school teacher at HCA. I was truly fond of her and I was very sad at her unexpected death. Rachel told me that she got married last year and her married name is Crick. She said that her husband is in the National Guard.



John Doone wrote: "Every man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; and therefore never send (ask) to know for whom the bells tolls, it tolls for thee." George Eliot wrote: "Our dead are never dead to us, until we have forgotten them." Aaron Siskind wrote: "Photography is a way of feeling, of touching, of loving. What you have caught on film is captured forever...it remembers little things, long after you have forgotten everything. I found a picture of Karen Brown in the 2011 HCA Yearbook that I will use with this story. It's my way of keeping her memory alive. Steven Spielberg wrote: "People have forgotten how to tell a story. Stories don't have a middle or an end anymore. They usually have a beginning that never stops beginning."

The day after Skyler's wedding celebration, I met Audrey and Mike Lambert at the Lake



Barkley State Resort Park east of Cadiz for lunch. Half of the rooms at the lodge are being renovated. After lunch, we walked around the resort. About four years ago I began mailing my stories to Audrey. She puts them on her web page at [ajlambert.com](http://ajlambert.com). This past Wednesday, Paula and I drove down to Nashville for an appointment with my dermatologist, Dr. Natalie Curcio. She is vigilant to keep my skin cancer at bay. We took our granddaughter, Andrea to lunch at Puckett's restaurant which is located in-downtown Nashville, next to the building where she works. She told me that she is a Facebook friend of Rachel Crick. It is amazing how connected young adults are to each other. Rachel sings and plays music at the General Jackson Showboat in Nashville.

lunch at Puckett's restaurant which is located in-downtown Nashville, next to the building



I received an email from Melanie Brooks at the College of Education and Human Services. She invited me to celebrate Murray State's Centennial Homecoming Breakfast at the Murray Middle School Cafeteria, and then to watch the Homecoming Parade from the school lawn on Saturday,

October 29, 2022. I accepted the invitation.

When I was a volunteer in the HCA lunch room, I considered all the students to be my grandchildren. I would give them a peppermint only after they recited their favorite Bible verse. I will end this yearbook story with a short piece by Jeanne Dunaway, called "The Search for Happiness." These are her words: "Jesus knows our every thought of material things for which we've sought. For man believes that happiness is measured by what we possess. But if we look into "His Word," we'll find that this is most absurd; for any promise He has made makes no note of money paid. True happiness is free of charge in measurements of small or large; for we receive what we give out pound for pound, the same amount... The secret of true happiness is not to seek our every quest; but to give to others who have less of all those things that are the best. True happiness comes from the heart; so, if you wish to do your part, don't look inside your pocketbook... It's in your heart you need to look!"

John F. Hall (also known as AnFather, AnFather The Elder, and Mr. John)

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

<http://www.ajlambert.com>