

THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF MY DAD

By John F. Hall

Everyone is a product of their past. They can rise above it, grow from it, or let it be a constant “Ground Hog Day,” where the same things seem to happen, day after day, over and over again. Life, at times, is not fair or easy. Living in the past, with regrets about poor decision made, or foolish choices taken, makes it harder and harder to climb out of the abyss.

C. David Hay wrote a short piece called “Reflections.” These are his words: “We are but scholars of our past, mirrors of the lesson of age, reflecting the smiles and sighs upon a twilight page. There is no turning back, the moment passes on; we have a choice but once and then time is gone. We could have gifted flowers, been quicker with a hand, shared more tears of grief to show that we understand. We learn most from our errors. In the trails of don’t and do and the Master tallies all when the final course is through. So forgive mistakes of youth, and care not about the score, we meant to do our best - no one can ask for more.”



When I was seven years old, I felt abandoned, forgotten, and lost in a world that I had absolutely no control over. In the 1950's, my dad, Charles Joseph Hall worked for Harry Reed, the President of Standard Sanitary and American Radiator, a world-wide plumbing corporation. Mr. Reed began to eliminate jobs. One day, he called my dad into his office. He told him that researchers, like my dad, did not contribute to corporate profits. In a mean spirited way, he told my dad that he was a useless employee. He fired my dad and did not give him any severance pay. The old saying, “when it rains, it pours” happened that week. The house that dad was renting, caught on fire, and burned to the ground. We lost everything but the clothes we were wearing. My dad had no renter's insurance. My dad did not own a car and he had no savings. My mom was gone.

One kind person gave me a small, used suit case. Someone else gave me a used pair of shoes and one set of clothes. My dad did not want me, and my younger sister to become wards of the state. Foster homes, at that time, were not well regulated, and many children were physically and emotional abused. It was a strange feeling to be homeless and not know what my dad could do. I was standing on a street corner, as a city bus drove by. The diesel exhaust fumes from the bus, polluted the air where I was standing. Even today, 70 years later, when I'm on a sidewalk in Nashville, Tennessee, and a bus drives by, the exhaust fumes will bring back that childhood memory.

My dad decided to put me and my sister in an orphanage. I remember that dark night when Dad took us, by Greyhound bus, to the orphanage. The bus pulled up in front of a five-story building. He asked the bus driver to wait as he turned us over to the person in charge. He told this person that he would send money as soon as he found work in Galveston, Texas. Dad gave me a peppermint candy. He did not give us a hug or say good bye. I watched as he got back on the bus, and the tail lights faded away.

When my dad was 10 years old, his dad, John J. Hall, died during the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918. It was as if Dad just died inside and buried his emotions. He was distant. The name of the orphanage where Dad put me and my sister, is Saint Michael's Orphanage Asylum and Industrial School. It first opened its doors in 1898. A gymnasium was built in 1922, and the boy's building was constructed in 1931. The original home was expanded to a five story, 450 child capacity, stone building, on 500 acres of land. It had a dairy farm with 60 cows, 45 sheep, and 4,000 chickens. The boys were on one side of the orphanage, and the girls were on the other side. One of the teachers favored me. I would clean off the classroom blackboards, collect the school books and sweep the classroom floor. The teacher would wrap cookies and candy, in a paper napkin, and give it to me after I finished cleaning the classroom.

One day, a young couple named Voygang came to the orphanage with their son, Johnny. The mother could only have one child. The son wanted a brother. No one owned the toys in the play room, and I was playing with a toy. Johnny came over and we started playing with the toys. He took an instant liking to me. The Voygang's came back several times and informed the orphanage administrator that they wanted to adopt me. I had no way of knowing if my Dad was alive or dead in Galveston, Texas. I had not heard from him in over three years. The administrator contacted him about the Voygang's offer to adopt me.

I would have enjoyed being adopted, and living a normal life, and having a new brother. I thought that my Dad would be happy to just let the Voygang's adopt me and relieve him of that responsibility. For what ever Dad's reasons, he denied the Voygang's request to adopt me, the following month, my sister and I were on a commercial airliner bound for Miami, Florida. During the flight, one of Flight Attendants took me into the cockpit to talk to the pilots. One of them pinned a plastic wing on my shirt. That would never happened today, because of the hijacked planes that crashed into the twin towers in New York City. One thing that I wished I had asked my Dad, is why he left me in the orphanage and never sent me a card or a letter.

The Voygang's came to the orphanage one last time to say good bye to me. I was in the infirmary with a high fever. They got word to me to see if they could get me anything. I was delirious and out of my mind, I asked for a Bible. My reason shall only be shared with Christ. I did not expect them to honor my request. One week later, a box came by regular mail. It contained a Bible. Inside the Bible they wrote: "To John Hall, from his friends Mr. & Mrs. Voygang & Johnny April 1955".

Today, my Bible is worn and torn. It is coming apart as some pages have pulled lose from the binding. Time and travel have also taken their toll on that Bible. All of us bring nothing with us when we are born. And we will take nothing with us when we die. I was concerned that someone, not knowing the significance of that Bible to me, would take one look at it, and toss it. I told John Mark, at the funeral home, to put my Bible in my coffin. The family that gave it to me was willing to love me unconditionally.

My Dad was a 1929 graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. His first job was being a researcher for the Dow

Chemical Company. He was working on a very unstable munitions formula. It exploded and my dad was injured. Then he suffered a nervous breakdown. His oldest brother, John "Jack" Hall Jr., paid for my dad to go to MIT. Uncle Jack was Vice President in charge of European sales in France. He took my dad to live with him in Paris, France, to recover. My dad could speak and write in German. This is one reason why the German scientist taken from Germany liked him.

My dad wanted me to make an Army career. He wanted me to quit the State Police because that he felt they getting expert help, dirt cheap. In the end, I accomplished what he wanted me to do. In 1979, I was assigned to patrol Trigg County. I was dispatched to the Lake Barkley State Resort Park airport, to pick up the Kentucky State Police Commissioner, Billy G. Wellman, and his pilot. I was then instructed to take them to the Nichols Cabin, a few miles from the park. Actually, the Cabin has 12 bedrooms, pool and tennis courts. It was built by the man who invented lady's pantyhose. John Y. Brown Jr., was in the Cabin with his pilot. He was running for Kentucky Governor.

I live about seven miles from the Cabin. I was put on security detail and told to take the Commissioner where ever he needed to go. A lot of VIPs came to and from the Cabin. I drove the Commissioner to the Convention Center. I was never afraid of my job and I told Commissioner Wellman what the KSP needed to do to improve the force. John Y. Brown Jr., was elected Governor. I was dispatched to Lexington to be security and the driver for Larry Townsend, Governor Brown's top advisor. It was time for the Kentucky Derby. Governor Brown appointed Billy G. Wellman the new Adjutant General of the Kentucky National Guard, and kept him as the Commissioner of the Kentucky State Police. When I submitted my packet for a Direct Commission in the Kentucky National Guard, General Wellman approved it the day it came across his desk.

The day of the Derby, I picked up Larry Townsend at Governor Brown's home in Lexington, Kentucky. I had to get Larry to dozens of Derby parties. When Larry spent too much at one party, I would hold up my arm and point to my wristwatch. This let Larry know that we were running late. At a Convention Center in Louisville, Larry was really running late. I began searching for him. Suddenly, a door opened and singer Glen Campbell came out. He looked tired. I did not have any time to chat. I said to Glen: "How are you Glen?" He replied that he was a little tired. I told him to take it easy. I continued my search for Larry Townsend.

Glen Campbell recorded a song written by Jimmy Webb called "Galveston." It reminds me of the Vietnam War Era soldiers, in the 3rd Platoon, B Company, 101st Airborne Division, that I served with in the 1960's. Most of their names can be found on that black Memorial Wall in Washington DC. That song about Galveston, brings back so many memories. I've watched Glen Campbell on YouTube sing that song dozens of times. It reminds me of my dad, and the times that I would clean my machine gun.

These are some of Jimmy Webb's lyrics: "Galveston, oh Galveston, I still hear your sea winds blowing. I still see her dark eyes glowing. She was 21 when I left Galveston. Galveston, oh Galveston, I still hear your sea waves crashing. While I watch the cannons

flashing, I check my gun and dream of Galveston. I still see her standing by the water, standing there looking out to sea. And is she waiting there for me? On the beach where we use to run. Galveston, oh Galveston, I am so afraid of dying. Before I dry the tears she's crying, before I watch your sea birds flying in the sun, at Galveston, at Galveston...”.

It was mean spirited when Standard President Harry Reed fired my dad and told him that he was a useless employee. Our Nation thought differently. My dad saved the space program, involving the movement of the Saturn space rocket, \$500,000 in 1969. That amount is equivalent to \$4.6 million in purchasing power today. My dad received an award from NASA. This is the wording on that award: “The National Aeronautics and Space Administration presents the Apollo Achievement Award to Charles J. Hall, in appreciation of dedicated service to the nation as a member of the team which has advanced the nation's capabilities in aeronautics and space, demonstrating them in many outstanding accomplishments culminating in Apollo 11's successful achievement of man's first landing on the moon, July 20, 1969.” I love my dad. I miss our long talks into the late night, while my wife and son were asleep in the next room. I know that NASA took advantage of my dad's brilliant mind. We became closer near the end of his life. I was very proud of my dad.

W. Gold wrote the song, “Look Homeward Angel.” These are some of his lyrics: “Look homeward, angel, tell me what you see. Do the folks that I use to know remember me? Look homeward, eye my lady fair. Does she dream about the love we used to share? So she'll know how very I miss her Angel, while she's dreaming, won't you kiss her? Look homeward, angel, one thing I must know. Do her empty arms still yearn for me alone?...”

John F. Hall

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

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