

A Good Word for John Hall

December 17, 2016

Let me give you the official word on John Lyttton Hall, who attended Edwards and Georgia Military Academies and pledged the Phi Kappa Pi fraternity at UNC Chapel Hill. As a young man, John was pretty good sitting behind a 5-piece drum kit. Just ask Stan Kenton, Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, Lawrence Welk, Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey – all, whose bands John played with when they toured this area. He was the drummer with the original Dukes of Dixieland in New Orleans. John would have gone to New York, was poised for a career there, but his mother disapproved, so an obedient son stayed and found his success at home.

John built a successful career in the insurance industry over four decades, winning numerous sales and management awards with the MetLife and Sentry companies. He was an officer of the Charlotte Association of Life Underwriters and a member of the National Association of Securities Dealers.

He excelled in business and music – and in serving his community. He was an active member and past Master of Keystone Lodge #726 and Excelsior Lodge, a member of York Rite bodies and Oasis Shrine Headquarters. John served as Chair of the Temple Paper Sale, the 100 Million Dollar Club, the Oasis Candy Sale, Membership Committee and the Shrine Mart. He also served as the Monarch of the Azusa Grotto here in Charlotte.

John enjoyed the game of golf, “sometimes good and sometimes bad,” he said, and he served as President of the Oasis Golf Club. “Mr. Hall had the pleasure of being a member of the Royal Order of Jesters and served the Court as Director. He went on to serve the South Atlantic Jesters Association as President.” Those last two sentences are a direct quotation from the obituary John wrote for himself, and left in an envelope to be found by his family. His handwriting scratched on the envelope betrays his jester’s heart. It says: “Instructions... Have Fun!”

John was the first president of the Huntingtowne Farms PTA and he continued to serve at Quail Hollow Junior High and South Meck High School. He was the president of the Southern Dance Club and the Spring Valley Swim Club...

Wow... Was John Hall ever a member of an organization that he didn’t eventually lead!? This pedigree speaks not just of his capable spirit, a God-given leadership that comes from a keen mind, an expansive vision, a charismatic personality, it also speaks of John’s charitable heart. John was capable. And John was willing. And that winning combination is hard to find. Some who are willing aren’t capable; too many who are capable aren’t willing. John Hall was both.

John was an honorary Kentucky Colonel, a service award recipient by Oasis Shrine and was honored with a life membership in that organization. And “recognizing active involvement in outstanding activities contributing to the betterment of North Carolina and her citizens,” John L. Hall was presented “The State of the Hearts Award” by Governor James G. Martin in October of 1992.

That’s the official word on John Lyttton Hall, accolades fit for a printed obituary. But that State of the Hearts Award... speaks not of some official John Hall, but of the John Hall that everyone knew and loved. Everyone loved John Hall – because of his heart.

Did you ever know a man who loved to laugh and love and live any more than John Hall?

John was a jester, and always had a joke to tell. He loved to find me on Sunday mornings and say, "I've got a joke... this one's clean." The truth is that I can't tell most of them here, but I could always count on one good laugh on a Sunday morning!

As a mischievous youth, he and some friends carried a Volkswagen bug up the high school steps and left it at the front door, and, driving to the beach one summer, he decided to take his mother's brand new car on a spin around the track at Darlington. Apparently mama's car would go, and John and his buddies actually qualified for the race – without officially registering. Mama found out about her famous car when she saw the picture in a newspaper and read the headline: "Mystery driver takes pole!" It was John!

John loved the out of doors, and most weekends of their growing up years Julie and Laurie found themselves exploring a new camp ground, loving life, family style. Not everyone camps – but everyone should. They camped because John knew and appreciated the values that can be learned sitting around a fire pit or crowded into a pop-up camper. They took one great trip every summer, and every Friday night the rest of the year, he grilled out for the family. Every Friday night, rain or shine. If he had to cook under an umbrella, that was fine... it was Friday night!

John and Gayle insisted that their kids go to school, and they were appropriately involved every step of the way. When Julie was applying for college, John bought a bottle of wine and delivered it along with her application to UNC Charlotte... where she was admitted! They had the means to travel more or enjoy a little more life for themselves, they put their kids first, and paid for three under-graduate and two graduate degrees so their children would not be saddled with school debt.

John Hall worked hard. Saved hard. And never complained. He was polite and professional. He always shook your hand with a smile. He was always grateful and gracious. "How are you, John?" He would always say, "Peachy!" "See you later, John," you'd say... "Toodles!" he'd reply. I'd always tell him to "behave," and John would say, "At my age... that's easy!"

There was a lot of heart in that home, and a lot of love. It started more than 60 years ago... When John was a Company Adjutant at Fort Jackson, he first saw her. Gayle Kendrick was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen, but she had a boyfriend who was also in the service. But the Lord works in mysterious ways, and soon after John first laid eyes on Gayle her boyfriend got transfer orders to ship out to Korea. John paid a visit, to console the beautiful girl whose boyfriend was no on the other side of the world... and low and behold, she fell in love with John, and they lived happily ever after. The Lord works in mysterious ways... and through mischievous hearts. I wonder when John finally told Gayle that as the Company Adjutant, he was responsible for making all the transfer orders for military personnel?

The State of the Hearts Award is absolutely right... John laughed and loved and lived. He was a man of great heart and a confident, unpretentious faith. You would never have known it, but John had known a great many sorrows in his life... the struggles of a simple, meager childhood, the trials of war, the loss of a beloved son... but John took these all to heart, and in a wisdom that few learn as well as John did, they became part of a deepening joy, filling his life with meaning and strengthened his faith.

When Israel was looking for a king, God gave them Saul and then David, of whom God said, “I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes.”

The State of the Hearts Award is absolutely right, because John Hall deserved the accolades of his friends and peers, his state and his nation, and because he, too, was a man after God’s own heart, John now knows the eternal accolade that God offers to all who are faithful.

For John Lytton Hall, a man after God’s own heart... Thanks be to God.