

W. Eugene Hall

A Remembrance by Anne Hall Adams

March 23, 2024

Thank you all for being here to honor our father. Although we will miss him, today is about celebrating his amazing life, and to honor his wish to share the good news that because Jesus gave his life on the cross for us, if we invite him into our hearts we too can have eternal life. Before I get to that, I will update everyone about our mom, Joan. Gene took amazing care of her, and when he began to get a little sicker 10 or so days before he went to heaven, we began to implement a plan we had all been working on behind the scenes. Right after my dad went to be with Jesus, we took Joan down to Ocean Springs, Mississippi to a great place called The Lighthouse. Mom lives there with seven other ladies who are very similar to her. The Lighthouse is about a 3-minute drive from my sister Tracey, and brother-in-law Eric's house, and they along with the Graham grandchildren are taking great care of her. On a side note, one of the nurses there found out that my mom was from Atlanta, and she said "OH my favorite preacher in the world is from Atlanta. I wonder if you know about him." His name is Dr. Michael Youssef, and he has gotten me through some of the darkest days of my life." We all had a good laugh about that! Anyway, Joan is doing great. She knows that my dad has gone to be with Jesus, and she is very happy he is with Jesus. Happily, she is at peace.

Our dad had originally not wanted a memorial service. He just wanted a very simple graveside service at his ancestral family cemetery in Murphy, North Carolina. However just eight days before he died, before we even knew his death was imminent - he changed his mind. He asked me to text Michael that he decided to have a memorial service. He thought that if even one person in this room needs to hear the gospel message of salvation through the blood of Christ then it is worth having.

As most of you know my father was a Delta captain. Many of you knew him well and you know that he was big-hearted, fun, the absolute life of the party - actually he WAS the WHOLE party. He was a foodie, a world traveler. If you ever saw him in his Pilot's uniform you may have noticed how he looked like a million bucks - many of you may not realize that he had his Pilot uniform hand-tailored by the man who made nearly all his clothes, Aaron Meyers. He always had the plausible excuse of being a little too tall for "off the rack" clothes. He also just really, really, enjoyed nice clothes.

In addition to being well-dressed and good looking, my dad was also smart. In his little school in Elizabethton Tennessee, the students were tested, and back then the teacher would seat the children in order of their scores. My grandmother told me that he was always number 1 in his class. He was probably the only child in the school who "made it in the big city." He and my mother met in New Orleans when they were young adults. My dad, being a connoisseur of fine things, of course wanted a house in the best part of town. It was a house that even on his salary as a Delta copilot he couldn't afford. No problem, he went ahead and rented the house he wanted and he made up the difference by hosting a bi-monthly poker game. He drank dummy drinks and cleaned up just enough to keep his poker buddies coming back.

My dad was wild, and he celebrated every vice there is, but one of the things I really loved about him was he was totally real - what you saw was what you got with him. He shared his real self. If you asked him about your outfit, you'd better be ready to hear the truth. At nine years old my father professed his faith in Jesus. However with the good looks, fabulous

personality, sense of adventure, and unending energy he wandered very far from God, and when Tracey and I were small children he was a total party animal, and probably not suitable for family life. I have some memories of that part of his life. While God was working on my father, though, my very stable and loving mother held our ship steady. One night in January of 1977 my father finally gave his life to Jesus.

Once our dad accepted Jesus everything changed. My dad stayed home with us, we had meals as a family. My dad taught us about the bible. He and my mother had a very active prayer ministry at The Cathedral of St. Philip, and they taught a Sunday school class together called "Renewing Love." It was somewhat exciting to have a front row seat to Gene Hall's life. My sister and I saw God's mercy and power in real time. For us it was easy to follow Jesus because we saw how exciting it was. Life is never boring as a lover of our Lord.

When my father invited Jesus into his heart back in 1977, he didn't keep Jesus in a little corner of his life. He wanted God in his whole life, and over time that is exactly what happened. God poured grace onto my father - it was overflowing grace. And our dad shared that grace generously and often.

In 1981, he published his testimony in the Trim Tab - a newsletter of the fellowship of Christian airline personnel. We had hundreds of them at our house during my childhood. My dad had them in his car, office, briefcase. My dad told people about Jesus wherever he went, and he would often give them this physical copy of his testimony. He loved to hand them out! We found a copy among my dad's papers and had it printed up and it's inside the bulletin. It is very interesting, and we encourage you to read it.

My dad didn't want a eulogy about him, but I have taken that liberty. In thinking about a single snapshot of who my father was as a man, and who he actually was in Jesus, a particular day came to my mind. While there are so many stories that I could tell about my father, this story encapsulates everything about who my dad was.

As most of you know, my dad built a condo building - The Winston. He and my mom had set out to find a condo once they sold their house, but there wasn't anything that my dad really liked. He finally wanted a home with the ceiling height and door height that matched his own proportions. So my dad roped Billy Ivey in as his partner to build The Winston - he literally built an entire building just to have one good condo to call home. Once the building was finished, they hired a decorator to help them finish the condo. She promptly informed my parents that they needed all-new furniture because of the proportions of the building. The decorator had found two matching cream silk down-filled very deep-seated large-scale sofas. They are extremely comfortable. They were absolutely beautiful, and they were a splurge - 25 years ago they were \$10,000 apiece. The day the sofas arrived was a nice sunny day. I was there with my dad - I remember thinking how lucky the movers were that they didn't have any hint of rain - there is no margin of error for cream colored silk. The truck arrived, 2 movers jumped down out of the cab, hoisted up the roller door, and there were the 2 beautiful sofas - the only cargo on the truck. They were partially wrapped. The movers lowered the first sofa and crossed through the still dirty floor of the Winston parking garage. There was at that time still a lot of construction dust and trash down there. As they navigated the sofa through the door it became clear that a third person would be needed to help get these big things through the opening. Sofa number 1 went in fine, so on to sofa number 2. Somehow as the three men were approaching the doorway one of the movers stumbled and fell, and the sofa hit a jagged concrete wall and ripped and stained the fabric. As the man quickly got up and saw the damage, he began to have a panic attack, and then he started crying. He

was saying something about his children. He cried that he couldn't lose this job. We all paused for a moment not knowing what to do. My dad looked at the tear - it was pretty bad. But then he stopped and stood there for a moment. Then my dad walked over to the man who was very upset. He put his hand firmly on the man's shoulder, looked right in his eyes and told him it was OK. "I forgive you. I can forgive you easily. It was just an accident, and it's just a sofa." After a pause he asked, "Do you know Jesus?" The man answered that he didn't know if he did or not. Then my dad continued, "If you are not sure that you know Jesus, would you like to know him for sure?" The man said "Yes I would, but I don't know how." My dad then told the man that if he would like to know Jesus that he could know him right now and he offered to pray for the man. My father reached out his hand and they knelt on the grubby parking deck floor and my father led him in the sinner's prayer. The mover that had dropped and ruined a \$10,000 cream silk sofa had his name written in the book of life that day. It was the best day ever.

Because of a ruined cream silk sofa a man found God! Incidentally, they moved that ruined sofa on in like nothing had ever happened. That sofa never looked quite the same as the other one. Sometimes we would go look at the big rip just to celebrate. My dad would smile really big every time we went to make sure it was still there. It was real, and it was awesome!!!

If this remembrance of our dad were to be just about him, we would be sharing a series of funny and amazing stories about a poker-playing pilot playboy. But this remembrance is mostly about God's amazing grace. No matter what challenge came our dad's way, including given 3 months to live 15 years ago, and a subsequent 15-year battle with a pretty debilitating metastatic cancer, my father was a bottomless pit of joy, grace and strength. ALL of that came from God.

Eight days before he died, Captain Hall gave his final orders. He wanted us to show you how Jesus changed his life. He wanted us to show you the overflowing grace of God - a God who pursued and pursued and pursued my father until my father finally said "Yes Lord."

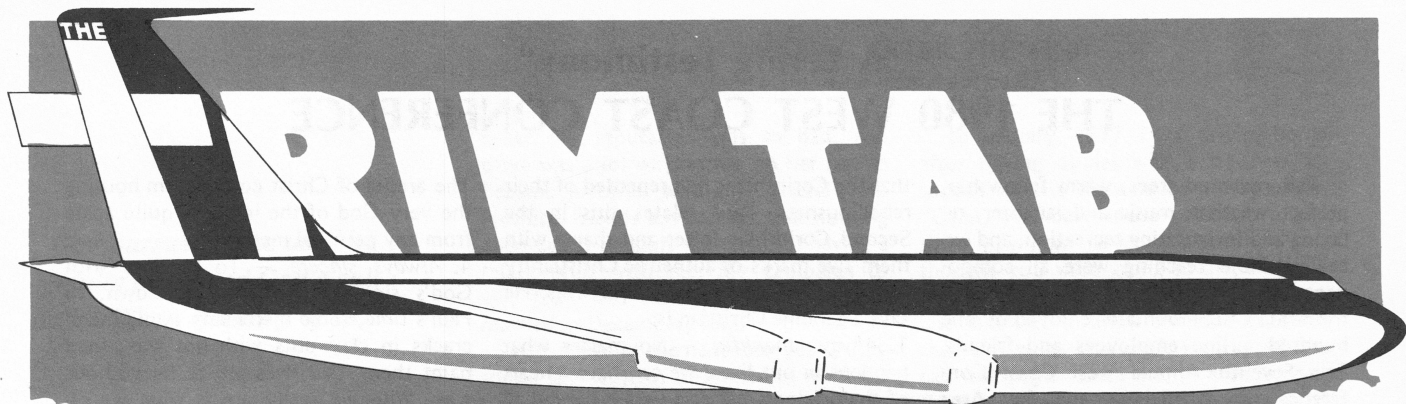
He asked me to give a bolder message today than I myself would give, and this is it: some of you go to church, and you know about God; you respect God but you may not really know him in your heart. He wanted you to know that it is really easy to invite God into your heart. You won't lose your personality – you won't suddenly be boring ... but you will be different. You will finally be free and you will be ensured of eternal life in heaven.

If you want this you can have it right now – starting today. Just tell Jesus that you love him, and that you want him in your heart forever.

My father also wanted to speak to those of us who have invited Jesus into our hearts. Gene told me to profess that that we can pray for more passion for him – we can pray that every day, and God will answer our prayer.

The poker player pilot playboy finally put all his chips at the foot of the cross. He once said that's the ONLY bet we have. He wants all of us to pray every day for a passion for our precious savior. And if we do, God will answer our prayer.

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"If I ride the morning winds to the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, your strength will support me." — Psalm 139

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A CHASING AFTER THE WIND

"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun" (Ecclesiastes

2:10-11). "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22).

At the age of nine I stood before the congregation of my church to profess my faith. If I had been able to comprehend then the words of those three verses of Scripture, the next 32 years of my life would have been extremely different.

My father was employed with the Tennessee Valley Authority and, as a result, my growing-up years were spent in mountain towns with names like Asheville, Murphy, Lenoir City, Chattanooga, and Elizabethtown. My parents are committed Christians and, correspondingly, a full schedule of church activities was required.

Life went smoothly in my family until I was sixteen, with no major ups or downs. My family was traditional. There



Gene and Joan Hall

was a lot of love given and received. I have a younger brother, Don (now a captain with American Airlines), and our activities spanned the gamut of things to do in that area: Boy Scouts, hunting, fishing, and camping out on a whole chain of TVA lakes. The Smokey Mountain National Park was our backyard.

At sixteen things suddenly turned for the worse. While practicing for a high school regional basketball tournament, I became ill and was diagnosed as having acute nephritis (Bright's disease). To compound the dilemma, it was 1952, before the days of kidney dialysis, and transplants were not available. The prognosis: fatal. I was in the hospital for two weeks and bedridden for another five months. During that time, I began to bargain with God. If He would spare me, then I would live my life according to His will.

After my recovery, I chose rebellion

over obedience almost immediately. I became what I liked to think of as a free-spirited playboy. Having fun became my number one priority. I learned to fly in college and decided I wanted to become an airline pilot. Airline flying seemed like an easy, free, happy life with high pay and lots of opportunities for having fun.

In 1959, airline flying jobs were almost as scarce as they are today, but I was persistent, and Delta hired me and assigned me to the New Orleans base.

By 1963, I had acquired everything that my favorite manual for living, *Playboy* magazine, told me was necessary for bachelor happiness. I had a nice apartment, good stereo equipment, a sports car, lots of attractive dates, and many opportunities to travel. I was working hard at living up to the *Playboy* image, but even with all those necessary trappings, there was still a void in my life.

It was in early 1963 that my wife, Joan, and I started dating. Eastern still had a crew base in New Orleans in those days, and Joan was a stewardess (that's right, they were still called stewardesses in 1963) supervisor. Joan was very reluctant to date me in the beginning be-

God pursued Gene until he finally answered God's call on his life in January of 1977.

This is Gene's testimony of his faith in Jesus Christ, published in 1981.

It was his final wish that everyone he knew will truly surrender their lives to our loving God, so that all of us will join him in heaven.

The TRIM TAB is the monthly publication of the Fellowship of Christian Airline Personnel. Its purpose is to encourage Christians in the airline industry and to challenge them to live for Christ where they work. In addition, the NOTAMS section contains a list of Christians and Bible study groups located on airline systems around the world. The FCAP collects no dues, and subscriptions to the TRIM TAB are free by written request. For further information about the FCAP or the TRIM TAB, please address correspondence to: 225 McBride Road, Fayetteville, Georgia 30214. Phone: (404) 461-9320.

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A CHASING AFTER THE WIND

(Continued from front page)

cause my reputation was so bad, and there was a lot of pressure on her not to become involved with me. Several well-meaning friends advised her that nothing good could possibly come out of having a relationship with me. My campaign to win Joan was successful and we were married in December, 1963.

As I think of the next four years, they sound idyllic. Joan continued to work for Eastern, I checked out as captain in 1965, and we took advantage of travel privileges on two airlines and saw the world until our first daughter, Anne, was born in the fall of 1967. By 1969, we had transferred to Atlanta, were living in a new home, and our second daughter, Tracey, had arrived. It sounds like the great American dream. I was a DC-9 captain, I had a beautiful, loving wife and two healthy daughters. We lived in a nice home on the north side of Atlanta, and we belonged to a country club, but there was still a void in my life.

I soon found what I thought to be the solution—money! I went into the real estate business, first as an agent, then as a developer. I began to develop apartments and started to collect boats, cars, airplanes, and all the material possessions that I thought would fill this void. Even though that void refused to be filled, I became convinced that the key to happiness was in having just a few more possessions and just a little more wealth. My marriage had started to deteriorate because I was neglecting my family almost completely. I was flying weekend trips and working out of town most of the week. I gave Joan every opportunity to divorce me, but the void in her life had been filled and she had become a Christian. She was determined to keep her family together and she joined my mother in a prayer campaign for me that had already been going on for 25 years.

In 1974, with several million dollars of apartment construction underway, I was very impressed with my importance and ability. I seriously considered giving up my job with the airline to concentrate on business activities. Fortunately, Joan was able to convince me otherwise because shortly thereafter the great real estate crunch of 1974 and 1975 totally wiped out my business.

I started to rebuild the business from scratch in 1976 and, businesswise, things were going very well. I continued to work all week and fly weekend trips. This accomplished two things. It allowed me to work in real estate during the week and make money, and it kept me out of Atlanta on Sunday to avoid Joan's pressure to go to church.

In January, 1977, I was driving home after having dinner with a business associate when a voice called me by name. "Gene, you have made promises to me since you were 16 years old, when you thought you were going to die, and you haven't kept any of them. Tonight is your last chance." I knew without question that the voice was God. I accepted His call that night. Since then, I have learned there is no weapon against the power of intercessory prayer. Intercessory prayer was answered that night. What He was saying to me was not that He was giving up on me, but that my heart was almost hardened to the point where there was no possibility that I would ever be able to hear Him again.

For the first time since I had felt that void in my soul, it began to be filled. I now know that the longing in man's soul can only be filled by Jesus Christ.

My priorities have changed. God is number one in my life now, and Joan and my girls are number two. As I have continued to grow as a Christian over the past four years, I have discovered that what Paul wrote to the Galatians in the fifth chapter about the fruits of the Spirit is true.

by Gene Hall

Editor's Note: Gene Hall is a B-727 Captain for Delta Airlines, and a partner in Hall/Ivey Associates, an Atlanta real estate development firm.