

Memories about my father, H. Tracy Hall, Sr., by Sherlene H. Bartholomew

I am glad for this opportunity to say more about my father, for this memorial book, than time allowed, in thoughts I presented at his funeral.

I think I am grateful, most of all, for the good name Dad left us, his descendants. Dad never got translated, but growing up, I thought he was close to it. Those who knew him best recognized him as a person with unusual gifts and, even better, a gentle sense of caring that motivated him to share whatever he could with whomever he met. I grew up hearing neighbors and friends express constant appreciation for his humble, kind ways. Dad cared about those around him and did what he could to alleviate suffering of which he became aware. On several occasions, persons I hardly knew took me aside to tell about how Dad had helped financially, or in other ways, through a crisis. I never heard it first from Dad, who really believed that you don't let your right hand know what your left does, in such matters.

At the height of his career success, Dad did not think he was too important to join with fellow neighbors, weeding dandelions from the lawn of our chapel—even when it was a last-minute call, and he had exciting plans for an experiment at his lab that day. I gained my desire to serve not from hearing Dad preach, but by watching his actions. It was clear, early on, that service in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was a privilege Dad honored as a very high priority in his life. He paid attention to the comparatively little things—for example, he could be counted on to be a faithful home teacher and to do it early in the month. Mom and Dad were true pioneers there in early Schenectady, New York (appropriate, when you stop to think that his second great-grandmother, Nancy Naomi Alexander Tracy, first heard the gospel preached by David W. Patton, not far from there). Whenever they could, Mom and Dad made us a part of their church service. We were part of helping raise money and actually building our first branch chapel. It was a real heart-breaker when I learned the Church had sold MY chapel, as part of building a new, larger one.

Dad was one to grapple with ideas to the point that he lost sleep over it. He kept a notebook by the bed, lest he forget an idea that came in the night. We even caught him noting and sketching at church, in the middle of the sacrament (when he said he got some of his best scientific revelations). Yet he was also very much a practical, hands-on person. Once Dad took Mom with him to India, where he planned to help install, demonstrate, and monitor one of his presses. Mom laughed, telling about Dad's frustration

that scientists there refused to put their elite muscle to work, moving that press. Instead, they chose to sit around until help of another caste could be recruited, even if it took days! Not so, with Dad, who finally got them to move when they saw his determination to move it himself, if need be. When scientists came here to consult, they saw him do it all—he did not evade mundane labor and actually seemed to enjoy getting his hands dirty, while working up a sweat.

Dad's innate curiosity helped him find delight in things most of us might overlook. I remember coming home from classes at BYU one day to find Dad carrying out an intense scientific experiment involving one of Mom's flowering plants. I can't remember the name of this plant, but it was some sort of cactus that occasionally produced a pink flower that, when in full bloom, oozed sticky fluid from its center. Dad was amazed at the viscosity of this substance and was sure it could be put to practical application. He dipped his finger in it and then proceeded to see how far he could stretch it across the room. He had out his notebook and, with his usual intensity, detailed each extension and how the properties of this substance responded to heat, cold, or whatever else he could subject it to. I was more amused at Dad than interested in his experiment, so did not stick around for long. What I do remember is that I returned nearly an hour later, and there he was, still stretching out that natural goop, with that amazed look he so often got, observing God's creations.

Dad pretty much left the raising of us children to Mom, but we should not take for granted that it took Dad's support to give us a full-time mother. As oldest child, I especially appreciate this blessing. Mom told me that she got terrible eczema on her hands from cleaning-up, as part of the managerial job she worked herself up to, at Woolworth's cafeteria. One day, while she was pregnant with me, she complained about it, and Dad told her she should quit her job, arguing that they could now handle it financially, and he would rather I have a full-time mother. Mom said she didn't need to think twice—'went right to the phone and just quit!' Dad took on a second job to make this possible, while still carrying a heavy graduate school load, at the University of Utah. Mom did not tell me until years later that under the strain of all this, Dad suffered what she called a "nervous breakdown." She told me about it in hushed tones, as though this was something they both had kept very private—and I guess they did. Dad always did have fragile health—I remember his spending a lot of time in bed, sick, while I was growing up, and during the twenty-three years Dan and I lived in Illinois, New York, and New Jersey, Mom called on several occasions to let us know

of her fear that he was on his death-bed. I think it's possible that what Dad called his "nerves" was a carry-over from that emotional and physical breakdown. Dad may have suffered from some depression, though I'm not sure on that point—I just know that he was often ill, and I appreciate more what he went through, now that I seem to have inherited his low tolerance for fighting infection.

Dad's work and studies did not prevent his doting on us children. Dad made some of our toys. At about age five I saw a girl in Stadium Village who had a little parasol that she could put up and down. I must have told my father how wonderful I thought that was, because he made me one that was even more intricate and beautiful. Did I ever think I was Queen of the May with that addition to my wardrobe! ('Wish I had a photo of me with it.) I remember his making four child-size chairs that he covered with blue vinyl, to go with a little square table. He must have been thinking ahead, because at that point, they still only had their three oldest—Tracy, David, and me.

As I started to say, Dad left most of the child-raising to Mom, but I do remember a few special alone-times with Dad and the many times when I took for granted that Dad would join Mom, supporting me from the audience when I was in a play, concert, or giving a talk. I never doubted that I was a priority in Dad's life.

I shared Dad's fascination with rocks and minerals. My friend Suzanne Greer and I displayed some of our collection, winning an "Honorary Mention" at a local science fair. Dad was there to see us claim our purple ribbon—it felt so good to feel his pride in my effort. One weekend Dad decided he would take me on a trip to explore caves and find rocks on the other side of Utah Lake. He made it a fun adventure I'll never forget. To my horror, I returned from my mission to learn that Mom threw out my rock collection. I can empathize with her need to make space in their limited carport storage, but I was especially sad to have lost some of the rocks Dad and I found that day and my memories of Dad describing each find. I was glad that when we children chose various household artifacts, as part of our inheritance, I was able to glean some of the neat rocks Dad kept on his desk.

Once, when I was a teen, Dad invited me to come with him to the local Republican political caucus. He was a stalwart conservative and had very strong opinions about government (though I think he only expressed those at the dinner table or through his financial donations to certain candidates—John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson NOT among them). I was active

on the debate team, all through high school, so took an interest in seeing both sides of a question and sometimes argued with Dad, playing devil's advocate. I don't remember ever changing Dad's mind about anything! He could be stubborn enough, but he did not seem to mind if I disagreed with him and at least pretended to be impressed by my reading and thinking.

Years later I minored in political science, while at BYU—I don't doubt that interest was influenced by Dad's (though Mom's influence made me an English major). Anyway, I remember going to that caucus, attended by so many neighbors I recognized and admired. I could have popped a button when someone nominated Dad to represent them as a delegate, and to see him elected from among several prominent citizens. Years later, Dan and I both served as county and state delegates from our neighborhoods, no doubt an outcrop of Dad's influence, inviting me to come with him to that caucus.

It was meaningful to grow up, hearing good things about Dad from those who knew him or had heard about him. I could always expect an enthusiastic, warm response when someone learned that H. Tracy Hall was my father. Mom perpetuated this, as she had an almost reverential respect for the man she married and did not hesitate to share her feelings about him with us children.

For example, when I was in my late teens, Mom took me aside one day when Dad was away at a scientific convention. She wanted me to know what it meant for her to know her husband was a man with a pure heart and would keep his covenants. "I never have to wonder if my husband is faithful to me, while he's out in the world, mingling with others who have different values," she said. "I hope you can find someone to marry who has a pure heart like your father" (I did).

On several other occasions, Mom confirmed to me her opinion that my father was an absolute genius. "Your father can envision an apparatus and see it in 3-D in his head, before he ever tries to diagram it," she told me more than once. "He not only knows the electricity and chemistry, but he can design the physical apparatus. How many men in this world can do it all, like he does!" Sometimes she quoted other scientists who lauded Dad's gifts, as if I needed more than the opinion of my in-different-ways brilliant mother. I do remember the time when a Dr. Abelson of the Smithsonian visited us in our Niskayuna, New York home, having come to work out some kind of grant for Dad's research. This man took me aside privately, during his stay, to say: "Young lady, do you have any idea what a genius

your father is?” Was I supposed to be surprised? The father I knew seemed to have infinite knowledge and wisdom and for sure could fix anything!

‘Course there was that one occasion when I actually heard Mom and Dad argue over a basement drainage problem she thought she could solve better than Dad. Having grown up with a plumber father, of Kentucky pioneer ancestry, Mom had horse sense to rival Dad’s, that’s for sure. Most of the time, though, my strong-minded Mom blissfully averred to Dad’s decisions. There was no question that she thought he was that gift from God she prayed from childhood to some day marry.

Another time, just after Dad was called to be bishop of our Pleasant View First Ward, Mom told me: “I looked up at your father, sitting on the stand, and thought that we could not have a more kind, good, wise man for our bishop. Nobody will be afraid to confess their deepest, most sensitive concerns to a man like your father.”

Dad was not a man of many words and not particularly demonstrative. However, I remember times, watching him with Mom, and growing up, as his child, when his kind, sweet thoughts slipped out. Dad had a quiet, benevolent stance and was a sunny influence in my life. I remember a father who beamed pride and encouragement. He made me feel that he thought I could do almost anything and do it right, which was a great source of motivation in my life. However, since Dad was a man of few words, when he did give me words of praise, they stuck for replay in my mind, over and over. After a concert in which I played my cello, as part of a trio accompanied by the BYU Symphony, I smiled for weeks at Dad’s response: “Why, Sherlene, I was amazed—I had no idea you were so GOOD!” (Here comes the guilt that I didn’t keep it up, after Dad paid for all those years of lessons. I think Dad was at least as excited as I, on the day we went to the little German shop, in New York, to choose the \$350 cello I still bring out from time to time, but not often enough.)

In some ways I lived a rather sheltered life. In jr. high they showed us a film where a teen driver got in an accident and killed another young person. I guess the intent was to help us be more careful drivers, but the blood and gore shown in that film traumatized me, so that unlike others my age, I had no desire to drive and was content to ride my bike to go shopping and to walk back and forth from home to BYU. I got a job, working half-days as a secretary at BYU, helping earn my way through college (my one-year debate

scholarship was not renewed, though my grades were high—the counselor told me my father was “too rich” and not to apply again.)

Anyway, I decided it was a good time to take my earnings and open a savings account at a local bank. I asked Dad how to do that, and he told me to just go to the bank he used, in downtown Provo, and tell them I was his daughter. So I rode my bike down there and told the account specialist I was Tracy Hall’s daughter and expected that to be enough. Well, this agent had not heard of my father and must have thought I was pretty naïve, showing up with no identification—not even a driver’s license! Though ignorant, I did not lack persistence. I insisted on seeing this person’s manager, who indeed recognized my father’s name and chastised her employee: “Surely you remember Tracy Hall! Why, he walks in here all the time, with that same shy smile as his daughter—can’t you tell he’s her father just by looking at her! Any child of Tracy Hall gets an account with our bank!”

I walked out of there with not only a new savings account, but a renewed appreciation for the value of a good name.

Another time, Mom and Dad came to visit us when we lived in the East, and the three of us embarked on a short genealogy trip. After a little maneuvering on highways there, Dad pulled over and said this was too much for him—he wanted me to drive! My days driving through metropolitan areas in three states, mostly on church business, had seasoned my driving skill considerably, but it had not occurred to me that Dad would ever hand over the wheel to me. (I had been coaching him a bit, as we went along—truth of the matter was, he probably couldn’t stand my back-seat driving!) Such a silly thing, but it felt SOO good that Dad would trust his and Mom’s life to me! At the same time, it was sobering to take that wheel. For all my coaching, I didn’t really want that seat in the car that had always been Dad’s.

(Later on that trip a rock came off a truck or overpass that crashed into the car, completely splintering both front windows! Somehow I maneuvered the car over two lanes of that highway to stop at a gas station. Glass was all over us and the car, but we were not hurt, and we were able to tape the window in a temporary fix that lasted ‘til we got home. Dad seemed to think I was strong as steel under pressure of that event, but I knew it was my silent prayer that kept us on course. That’s something Dad taught me. I remember the accident we had on a cross-country drive to Utah, when our car turned over and over, going down a culvert, in a storm. The other children were asleep, and I was bundled in a blanket on a floor of the car, but still awake. I

first knew we were in trouble when I heard my father pray out loud, just before our first roll and all the time we were going down.)

Probably the most important thing Dad did for me, as a child, was to love my mother. I saw many times when Dad brought Mom gifts and said sweet things to her or about her, but I think Mom sometimes needed more than that. Mom was a lot more social than Dad—especially in their early years. I think she was often lonely, while he devoted his attention to scientific research, though he was almost always at home, on-time, for breakfast and supper, and he certainly spent Sundays with his family. Because Dad essentially left the work of raising and disciplining children and care of the home and yard to Mom, I think she was under a lot of stress—not to mention the chemical imbalances that especially plagued her during her many pregnancies.

I saw tensions in their early marriage that my younger siblings either did not see or did not seem to register, later in life. However, I was blessed to have parents who took their covenants very seriously. To our eternal blessing, they worked things out and learned to appreciate their differences as strengths. I saw their relationship strengthen, deepen, and sweeten, as they got older, to the point that theirs was a marriage not only we, but surely angels must have celebrated. This example was a great blessing to me and gave me hope when Dan and I inevitably faced our marriage challenges.

Well, I've probably dragged on long enough. There aren't enough stories to sufficiently capture the influence of a steady, kind, and true father's hand in this oldest daughter's life. I will be forever grateful to have been the daughter of H. Tracy Hall. I hope that when we again meet, beyond the veil, that he will feel I merited the trust I always felt from him. –shb 23 Mar 2009

