

Ruby Doris Buggs Hall – A True Symbol Of Strength And Integrity

I am sure if I took a poll, one of every three students who had classes or knew Mrs. Ruby Doris Hall, would have a funny story to tell. She taught high school math, did hair, raised seven children, and was the “cool” teacher everyone liked. Perhaps it was because she had children the same ages as most of us or perhaps it was because her house was a hub of activity where kids and grownups hung out, folks coming in and out all the time. Though her husband’s name was Artee Johnes Hall, everybody

called him Mr. Billy. He was a barber who loved to go fishing.

Mrs. Hall had that demanding teacher voice that seemed to carry for miles. You never wanted to be embarrassed by her yelling out your name in the hallway. Her oldest daughter, Patricia (Tish), and I were classmates for 12 years and went to the same college. Many times, our moms took us back and forth to campus, and I remember how Mrs. Hall felt so sorry for me when it was raining, which meant that her car would probably get stuck

on the muddy dirt road leading to my house. She would bring me down the hill, and then we would all pray that she would make it back up the hill. And she did many times.

Her second daughter, Danita, joined me and Tish at Ole Miss our sophomore year. One day during our senior year Tish told me and a few friends gathered in the dorm that Mrs. Hall was having a baby. We carried on like you would not believe. We had already spoiled the youngest, Yolanda (Lu-Lu). However, we at 20 years

old just could not imagine Mrs. Hall having a baby at her age – not that we outsiders even knew her age.

So then came Natasha, whom everyone loved and spoiled even more and watched grow into a smart and accomplished young woman. When Tasha got married a few years ago in Arizona, aside from the opportunity to see everyone after far too many years, I don’t know why, but I felt compelled to attend her wedding, and I did.

Danita and Tasha now offer more insight about their mother.



By Dottie Chapman Reed

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kids and friends would come over, they came through the back door on most days.

My mother wouldn’t let a kid pass through without quizzing him/her with a math problem that was appropriate to that particular child’s age. What is 7 times 7? What is the square root of 81? If “x = 10, and the sum of x+y = 25, what is y”?

She never stopped teaching. I truly believed that the kids came through the back door for that reason alone. They wanted to please my Mama by providing the correct answers which gave them a small sense of satisfaction as a Black child. She was very understanding if one of us got a “C” in English or some other course, but you better not bring a “C” home on your report card in math, regardless of who taught us.

My mother worked at other jobs during the summers when school was out. She didn’t have a choice, given that she was the sole provider for our family. She was a proud woman. She wouldn’t allow any of us to take on any jobs that required cleaning other people’s homes, which was basically all there was in Water Valley at the time. Instead of having a carefree summer off, she worked and worked and worked, making the choice to let us older girls run the house rather than have us work at someone else’s home. That was who she was.

I loved my mother like no other. She instilled the following three things in me as we were growing up:

A person is right until proven wrong. If proven wrong, be woman or man enough to say “I stand corrected.”

We are not a minority (as a race). You might be a minority if you are the only woman or man in the room (for example), but never as a race.

Be true to yourself.

I took those three things to heart, and it actually helped me in a major way to get through the difficult times at Water Valley High School (1970-1971) during my senior year, which was also the year Water Valley fully integrated all grades—no more white versus black schools. I believe one of the earlier articles that Camille Fly Dautrich wrote said it all.

As for Daddy, he would sit on a stool and cut hair just so he would have a few spending dollars in his pocket and not be a burden to our mother. She hardly ever complained, although I did see her cry one or two times simply from being overwhelmed because she didn’t have enough money to provide for us in the manner she felt we deserved. This broke my heart, but as a teenager, I couldn’t do anything from a financial perspective.

Besides being a teacher, my mother played on the women’s softball team until she had breast cancer and had a radical mastectomy. She would run around the bases like she was a teenager herself.

After the surgery, she coached the team until she could no longer do it. She believed in God and attended Sanders Chapel Church in Water Valley until her death.

I miss her dearly, but I know she is in Heaven teaching math to somebody! You can count on that (no pun intended)!

As remembered by Danita Hall

My name is Danita Hall. I am the second oldest child of Billy and Ruby Hall. I have six siblings, three brothers and three sisters. I say this because I want to lay the foundation of what a remarkable woman my mother was to her family and everyone she came into contact with during the course of her short life time.

Where do I start?

Ruby Doris (Buggs) Hall was born in the small town of Houlika, Miss. on June 6, 1929. She met my father, Billy Hall, who hailed from Water Valley and the two married on February 4, 1951. My father was an auto mechanic by trade, but unfortunately, he hurt his back and became disabled in his early thirties. At the time, my parents had six children—Patricia, Danita, Dennis, Marvin, Tony and Yolanda (the seventh (Natasha) didn’t come along until much later). For those who didn’t know, my father was denied any and all types of government assistance. As a result, my mother was the sole provider for the family on her small teacher’s salary but still sent us to college, although we had to acquire loans, grants and work study, which wasn’t always enough. We all managed, though, with my mother’s help and graduated with college degrees. The only exception was my youngest sister, Natasha (Hall) Weaver, J.D. She was the smartest one of all of us, and she received a full four-year academic scholarship from The University of Mississippi. My mother had passed away before she finished high school.

Ruby Hall was the epitome of education! She taught 5th and 6th grade math for 37 years! In fact, she taught me for two consecutive years. A loving mother, wife, friend and overall person, she was a beast in the classroom. She believed that every child had the capacity to learn, not get passed along because he or she was a problem kid, or for any other reason. She didn’t believe in failure. I fondly remember one incident in her classroom when I was in the 6th grade.

No one in the entire classroom except me and my best friend, Diane (Lewis) Hervey, knew the answers to the problems she presented to us on the blackboard. Back then, teachers were allowed to give a student a “paddling” across their legs while sitting in a chair, which consisted of a maximum of 10 licks. She had the entire class line up for a paddling, except for me and Diane. As she paddled one student after the next, the two of us began laughing at our classmates. She told us to stop laughing. We disobeyed. Needless to say, when she finished paddling our class-



Ruby Doris Buggs Hall

mates, she called the two of us and gave us a paddling.

I was crushed and humiliated beyond words. How could she embarrass me in front of my classmates?

That, in itself, spoke to the type of teacher she was – she didn’t believe in favoritism. She treated all students equally and fairly. However, that didn’t stop me from not speaking to her for a solid week after I received that paddling. And, as a side note, I had to address her as “Mrs. Hall” like all the rest of the kids. She wouldn’t respond to “Mama” on the school grounds from me or any of my siblings.

Although Mama was hard on us kids in the classroom, our house became the “after school hangout” for most of the neighborhood kids. It didn’t matter whether she was our teacher or not, or how old we were. Some of the high schools kids came over to play with us as well, especially for the softball games.

We also played badminton, or croquet in our back yard just about every day after school. However, my oldest sister (Patricia), and I weren’t allowed to go outside to play until we finished all of our chores. Our closest friends came to our rescue on some days and helped us out so that we could go outside before it got dark. Diane and I rode our bicycles all over town. When the neighborhood

forced their resolve to make ends meet for their family no matter what. For Mama, that meant taking summer jobs outside of the house when school was over and ‘doing hair’ from the house in the evenings and on weekends. For Daddy, that meant becoming a ‘shade tree mechanic’ and an in-home barber. Together, they grew a garden, raised hogs and fished as much as time would allow. They made sure their family always had enough to eat. They were my living example that there is strength in numbers.

But for me, the greatest show of strength came on the day we learned of Daddy’s untimely death. At the time, I was one-week shy of my 13th birthday. Mama was about one-year post-recovery from having a radical unilateral mastectomy. Daddy had left before the sun rose to go fishing with a family friend as was usual during the summer. Mama and I were running errands when the tragic accident occurred (Daddy had a massive heart attack while fishing). We first learned that something might be wrong after returning home; our neighbors had received confirmation but didn’t know how best to tell us and only alluded to the ‘possibility’ of something being awry. After receiving several calls, Mama decided to drive to the sheriff’s office to find out the truth herself; simply put, she was strong-willed

and had the type of personality that would always rather know the truth no matter how hurtful the truth might be in the end. It was at the sheriff’s office where I witnessed Mama’s strength in action. As she received confirmation of Daddy’s death over the radio system, she broke down and grieved... but she didn’t forget to embrace me in the process. During her most vulnerable moment, she had the strength to care for me in her grief – and I’ve never forgotten that valuable lesson to this day. It was 1985 and Dad was only 57 years old.

Two years later, I witnessed Mama’s immeasurable strength again as she was preparing to die. Shortly after Daddy died, Mama’s cancer resurfaced and attacked her lungs. When we realized the cancer was out of remission, one lung had collapsed, and the other lung was continually filling with fluid. True to her personality, my strong-willed Mama outright asked her oncologist how much longer she had to live. She explained that she had a minor child and she needed to make provisions for me. And Mama did just that. She didn’t want me becoming a ward of the court, so she enlisted the help of my sister, Danita. The two of them hired a lawyer who drafted and finalized her will and made sure I would legally be provided for according to her wishes. She said what needed to

be said to each of her children and died in peace. In other words, she handled her business! There was never a time when I didn’t respect either of my parents, but when I reflect on the strength and courage it took to make the decisions she made as she was dying, my heart, spirit and soul overflow with happiness and gratitude at the gift provided by my Mama.

Because I was so young when Daddy and Mama died, I often asked God why he took them and left me behind. That was before I understood that each individual has purpose in life. As a wife of almost seven years, and the mother of a 4½-year old son, I’m eternally grateful for the life lessons taught to me by my parents. Because I witnessed the way Mama handled Daddy’s disability denial, I learned how to treat my husband in a non-emasculative way. Because Mama was able to comfort me in her time of grief, I’ve learned to never consider my grief (or problems) greater than anyone else’s. And because Mama never forgot that she was a mother – even as she was facing death head on, I’ve learned that God gave me the gift that is my child, and it’s my responsibility to provide for him at all times. I didn’t realize it at the time, but both Mama and Daddy were equipping me with valuable life lessons that I would be able to draw from when needed.

As students at Davidson schools we were blessed to have many outstanding teachers and role models. Mrs. Hall was by far one of the favorites of favorites. We loved her. She was real. She was funny. And she was absolutely intentional about wanting us all to succeed. She made us feel important, that we mattered.

She was a “virtuous renaissance woman,” a black woman of unbelievable strength and impeccable character. We were so privileged to have her in our lives and we

can, if we are honest, give her credit for inspiring much of our success. Mrs. Ruby Doris Hall exuded confidence, respect and a moral fortitude that touched many lives in a way that we should never forget.

She showed us how to be a professional woman, a wife, and a mother with pride and integrity when segregation was still the norm and well before the women’s movement took hold. She chose to work as a cashier during the summers because she did not want her daughters to work

cleaning houses for whites. Mrs. Hall passed on November 19, 1987. She was 58. Two years earlier Mr. Billy died on August 14th, 1985. He was 57 years old.

If Mrs. Hall influenced your life or if you are inspired after learning about her from her daughters, can you commit today to do something to make a difference as she did? I know I can, and I will. I invite you to join me in her memory to do more to positively impact our youth and young adults.