

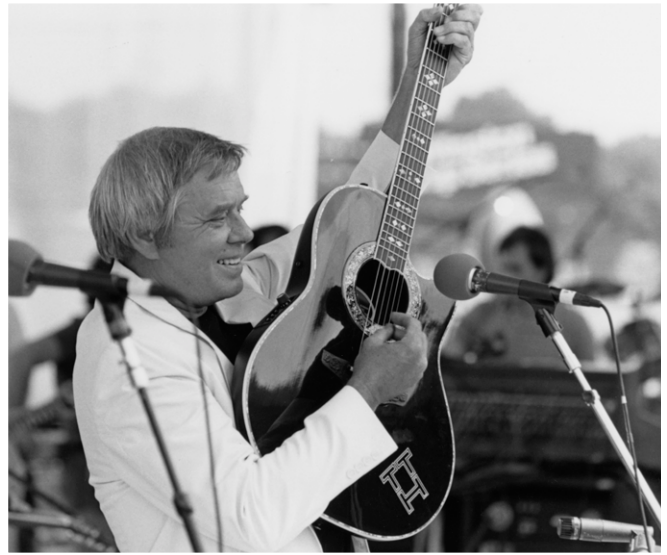
Tom T. Hall is known as “The Storyteller,” and his country songs are filled with characters and drama: a spunky mom defending herself in front of a disapproving parents’ group (“Harper Valley PTA”), a truckstop waitress longing for her absent father (“Ravishing Ruby”), a gravedigger who’s sore that the dead man still owes him forty bucks (“Ballad of Forty Dollars”).

Inspired by his own life and people he has known, Hall is in a small group of songwriters in the 1960s and 1970s who changed country music by introducing a gritty new kind of honesty and emotion. He was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2008.

Born in Olive Hill, Kentucky, on May 25, 1936, Hall is a Baptist preacher’s son who grew up with “picking and singing around the house.” He wrote his first song at age nine, and though singing and songwriting were always a part of his young life, he pursued other jobs first, including working in a factory, serving in the Army, and spending time as a disc jockey. He was twenty-eight years old when he moved to Nashville to write country music full time.

Hall arrived at a time when publishers demanded what he calls “little darlin’ songs”—tunes mostly about winning or losing a girl—and he made a living in the mid-1960s writing these for other performers. But he finally found his calling when he started writing from his own experiences. “I had met a lot of characters I found fascinating,” he explains, “so I began to put them into my songs.”

Hall started recording these personal songs himself when he couldn’t get other singers interested in them. The one major exception was “Harper Valley PTA,” which singer Jeannie C. Riley turned into a national sensation in 1968.



When the tune hit #1 on both the pop and country charts, it propelled Hall’s own performing career, and he recorded a string of hits through the 1980s.

Among his new ideas were albums with a common theme. One of these, *Songs of Fox Hollow*, was a collection of children’s music inspired in 1974 when he introduced his two young nephews to the sights, sounds, and critters at his Nashville-area farm, Fox Hollow.

“I didn’t make up songs about Fox Hollow,” Hall recalls. “I was walking around with these kids finding them. They were already there. ‘Sneaky Snake’ was here. ‘The Mysterious Fox’ was here. ‘The One-Legged Chicken’ was already here. I just hadn’t seen ’em as songs until my little nephews.”

Sources: *American Songwriter*, *Encyclopedia of Country Music*, *The Storyteller’s Nashville* by Tom T. Hall

“I Care”

“Sneaky Snake”

“I Love”

“The Year That Clayton Delaney Died”

“(Old Dogs, Children and Watermelon Wine)”

The Songwriter’s Handbook by Tom T. Hall (Thomas Nelson, 2001): Hall offers his own songwriting lessons, including tips on coming up with ideas, rhyming, revising, and getting paid for your work.