



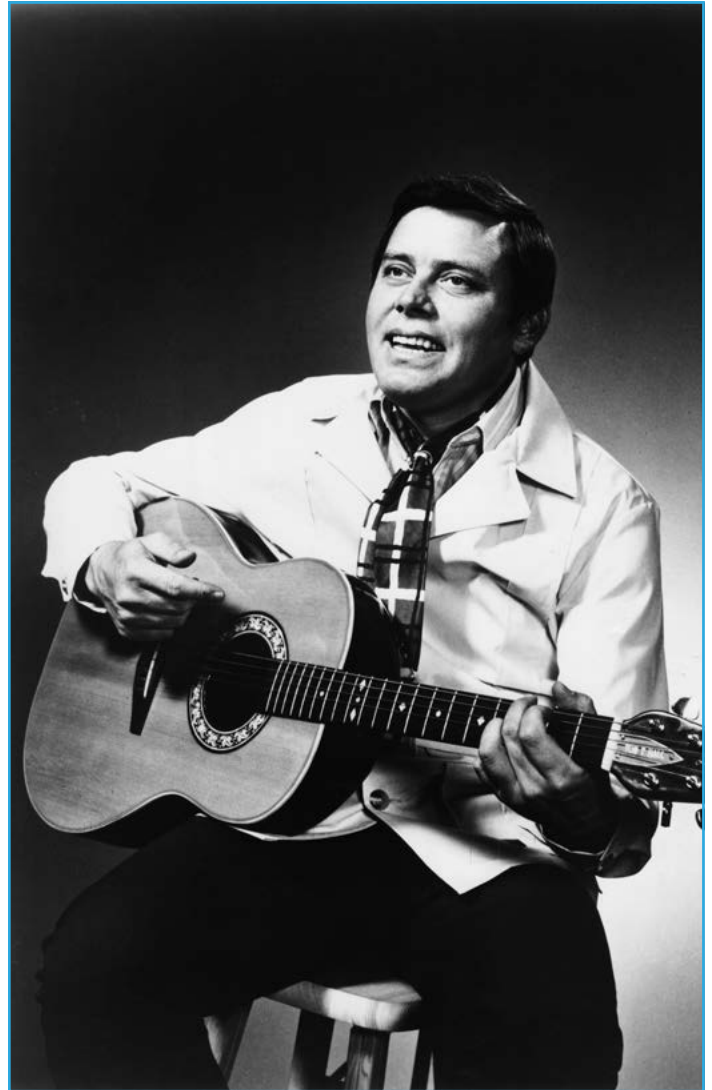
TOM T. HALL: “THE STORYTELLER”

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 truck stop 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”).

Born in 1936 in Olive Hill, Kentucky, Hall was 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 become a full-time songwriter.

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, so I began to put them into my songs,” he explained.

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

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LISTEN

“I Care,” “I Love,” “Sneaky Snake,” “The Mysterious Fox of Fox Hollow”



TOM T. HALL: “THE STORYTELLER” (CONTINUED)

Hall often focused his albums on a common theme. One of them, *Songs of Fox Hollow*, was a collection of children’s music inspired by a 1974 visit of his two young nephews to his Nashville-area farm, Fox Hollow. “I didn’t make up songs about Fox Hollow,” Hall recalled. “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.”

Drawing inspiration from his own life and people he knew, Hall ranks among a small group of legendary songwriters in the 1960s and 1970s who changed country music by introducing a gritty new kind of honesty and emotion in their lyrics. Inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2008, Hall died in 2021.



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. What are two jobs Tom T. Hall had before he moved to Nashville to write songs?

2. Circle the word “disapproving” in the first paragraph. Underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand the meaning of the word.

3. Explain Hall’s greatest impact on music in your own words. Highlight evidence in the text for your answer.

