

**INSIDE: PARENTS, FRIENDS & STUDENTS REMEMBER SAM HALL
VOLUNTEER CORPS ANNOUNCED • END OF THE BONNER ERA**

Highlights

University of Detroit Jesuit High School & Academy

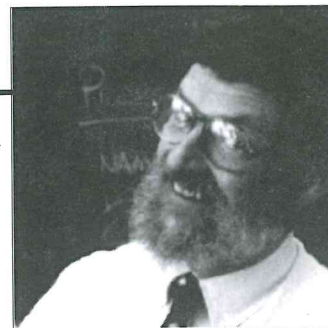


Spring 1995



**Wendel "Sam" Hall
1938-1994**

Sam Hall 1938-1994



The High Bids Farewell to "The Great Man"

Wendel V. Hall, Jr. '84

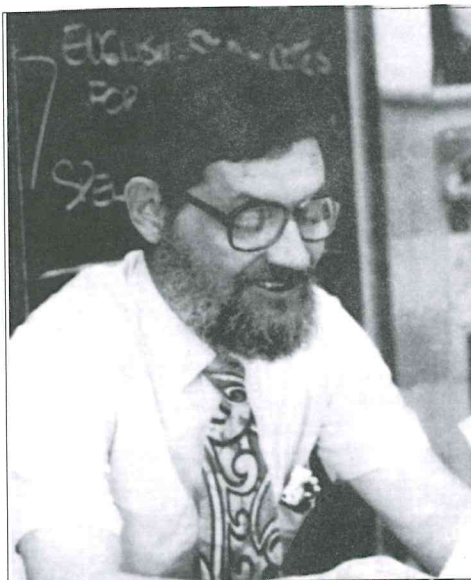
Over the last several weeks, my mother and I received many letters from former students and parents expressing sympathy and describing how my father touched their lives or the lives of their children. In describing his teaching, many mention that Dad was "tough," "hard," "taught discipline," "challenging," and any number of equivalent phrases.

Reading these letters, I thought that what made Dad the best was toughness, was discipline, was giving homework every night, and all the rest that made Mr. Hall.

But I was wrong. The reason my father was a great teacher is that he cared enough to demand the very best from himself and from everyone around him. He demanded the best from himself – two hours before school, four hours after, day-in, day-out, spring-summer-winter-fall. Preparation, grading, recording, thinking, planning. Filling

out progress reports for every student – including the A students. Thinking up the latest question to stump the research detectives. He offered the best of himself every day.

He also demanded the best from his students. For him, it was not just high grades; it was grades commensurate with ability. It was not just being a smart, nice boy; it was being a man of character and competence. He saw talent, ability, and value in each student. As a poster on his wall said, "God don't make no junk." And by accepting no less than the finest a student had to offer, he brought the best out for many, many of them. That is what made him a great teacher.



To honor my father and his memory, U of D Jesuit is setting up a scholarship fund in his name. The "Mr. Hall Man of the Year Award" - the Academy student who best reflects the Jesuit ideals of scholarship commensurate with ability and excellence of character - will receive a partial scholarship to attend ninth grade at The High.

The fundraising goal is \$20,000. Anything beyond that goes to U of D Jesuit to guarantee that a Jesuit Academy education is within the reach of every student. Please consider making a donation.



Matt Rennie '89

After my first hour with Mr. Hall, I feared him. After my first month with Mr. Hall, I respected him. After two years with Mr. Hall, I loved him.

I suspect I'm not the only person who went through such a transition with Wendel "Sam" Hall. For so many students during the last 20 years, Mr. Hall defined their Academy experience—through intimidation, through respect, and through love.

I feared Mr. Hall. I remember during my first days of the Academy—anxious days for a number of reasons—sitting in Mr. Hall's classroom absolutely wired with the fear that he would call on me and I wouldn't know the answer.

Who was this small man with the scraggly beard and what was it about him that commanded so much attention? Never in the 11 years I knew him did I ever see him get extremely angry. But I knew even in those early days that if he ever did, I didn't want to be on the other end of it.

I respected Mr. Hall. We worked in his classes. I remember his telling us the first day of seventh grade that we would have two hours of homework every day of the week from his classes alone. Then, he added, "And gentlemen, a week has seven days."

We complained, naturally, but no one ever questioned whether or not to do it. Mr. Hall had set the standards of excellence that people in all walks of life long for. When you entered his classroom, you knew what was expected of you. By expecting so much of us, he raised our expectations of ourselves.

I know from conversations we had after graduation that many parents of seventh-graders complained about the work load. Sometimes, Mr. Hall expected more from the boys than their parents did. In virtually all these cases, he would explain the rules of his class to the parents as he did to their sons. The final rule, which didn't need to be written, was, "No exceptions, no excuses." One of his favorite responses to those who "almost" completed their assignments was, "If you miss the bus by only two minutes, you miss the bus."

His consistency was testimony to his dedication. Mr. Hall didn't have off days. In a job where exhaustion and burnout are expected at some points, Mr. Hall's enthusiasm was a constant. This is testimony to his teaching style—no gim-

micks, no flash, just a system that worked. No catch phrases. Nothing fancy. To paraphrase Raiders owner Al Davis, just learn, baby.

He wore an invisible mark of leadership; no matter how much work he gave you, you always felt he was working just as hard for you. Throughout my Academy career, I continued to sit on the edge of my seat in Mr. Hall's classroom, but the motivation wasn't fear. It was respect. I knew I wouldn't get in trouble for an incorrect answer. I just didn't want to let him down.

This respect extended to his peers. When talking about Mr. Hall in the third person, **Joe Beldyga '69**, who still teaches in the Academy and the high school, referred to him as "the Great Man." Nobody ever asked whom he was talking about.

I loved Mr. Hall. After my Academy days, I moved on to the high school, but I still made frequent stops to the third floor—sometimes with a technical grammar question, sometimes to talk about baseball.

Mr. Beldyga has a photo of Mr. Hall and my friends, **R.C. Heaton '89** and **John Enright '89** and me. The photo was taken immediately after our high school graduation. Mr. Hall has the widest smile in the picture. He appeared to be happier than we were. Maybe he knew something then. Maybe he knew better than we did how far we had come.

Four years later, I saw Mr. Hall at the graduation ceremony for my brother, **Chris '93**. Mr. Hall had the same excitement I remembered from that photo. For 20 years, he watched his students graduate. Every year, he showed the same excitement—like your class was the only one that mattered.

Just learn, baby.

Mr. Hall began every year by explaining the communication process. Most of his students can probably still recite the mantra, "Communication is the process of transmitting ideas or emotions through symbols."

For those of us who have clung to that sentence like a security blanket at various stages in our lives, this is a frustrating time. The communication process breaks down at times like these, when we are left without the appropriate "symbols," written or spoken. How do you express all at once – loss, gratitude, love, and respect?

What word is there for that?

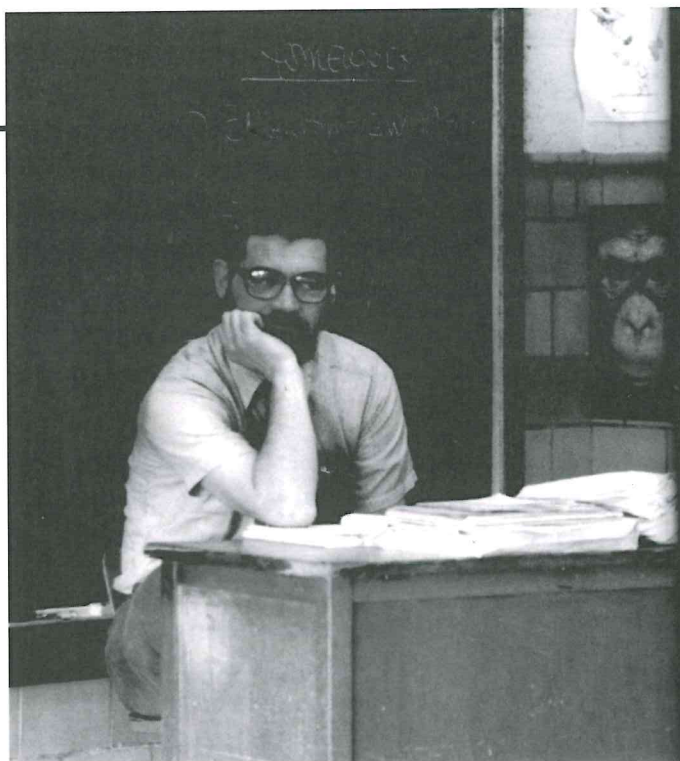
WHEN TALKING ABOUT MR. HALL IN THE THIRD PERSON, JOE BELDYGA '69, WHO STILL TEACHES IN THE ACADEMY AND THE HIGH SCHOOL, REFERRED TO HIM AS "THE GREAT MAN." NOBODY EVER ASKED WHOM HE WAS TALKING ABOUT.

Brendan Henry '90

A short time ago, one of the men I admire and am indebted to most, passed away in Detroit after a long battle with cancer. More than anyone but my parents, I credit this man with influencing the way my life has been shaped.

Mr. Wendel 'Sam' Hall was my seventh and eighth grade English and grammar teacher. To us, his students, he was simply known as Mr. Hall, and he was an impact person far beyond the garish ties he purposely wore. Even now, I look back at his classes as some of the toughest I have ever had. Homework was assigned each night, and his two-hour exams were the dread of every student in the school. He graded everything strictly, but fairly. When you received an "A" from him, you knew you had earned it. However, I also remember laughing a lot during those classes — sometimes at those hideous ties and more often than not, his wacky teaching and disciplinary methods. With those methods, Mr. Hall drilled the basics of English and grammar into our 12, 13, and 14-year-old heads, whether we wanted to learn them or not, and in the process, he taught us responsibility. For the first time in our young lives, we had homework every evening, and we quickly learned the responsibility of doing the job that had been assigned. In accomplishing his goals, he freed our minds for the future, enabling us to concentrate on the "what" of what we were reading or writing, not the "how to." During his 20 years at U of D, Mr. Hall demanded daily from his students the same thing he demanded of himself—discipline and excellence.

If Mr. Hall had merely been an outstanding teacher, there would still be much to admire about him. Yet what I admire most about his life is that he was a man to be emulated. In the words of Pedro Arrupe, S.J., the goal of a Jesuit education is to produce "Men for Others." Sam Hall embodied this concept for me. He treated each young man who passed through the doors of his classroom as his own. His teaching was pushed by an earnest, heart-felt desire to do his God-given best to make sure that each of us succeeded in life. Teaching was not just his work, but his vocation, and indeed, perhaps his



avocation. I can only hope that one day I will achieve the same level of dedication to improving the lives of others that he had. Above all else, he proved to me that one man can make a positive difference in the world.

I was not in Detroit when Sam Hall passed away, and was unable to return home in time for the memorial services. However, I read something recently that I would have liked to read to the many people who gathered to mourn his passing, for I feel it embodies his spirit. **Robert Fulghum**, perhaps not so coincidentally one of Mr. Hall's favorite authors, in *It Was on Fire When I Lay Down Upon It*, relates the story of his asking a Greek philosopher, Dr. Papadoros, "What is the meaning of life?" Dr. Papadoros responds that each person is like a small mirror. "I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of the light. But light—truth, understanding, knowledge—is there, and it will only shine in many dark places if I reflect it."

A true "Man for Others," Wendel "Sam" Hall used the knowledge gained through his education and life experiences to, in Dr. Papadoros' words, reflect light, in the form of truth, understanding, and knowledge "into the dark areas of this world—into the black places in the hearts of man—and change some things in some people," that perhaps others, such as myself, may see and do likewise.

Mary Gilhuly, parent of Christian Gilhuly '96

Mr. Hall. I first heard the name when my son was only in fourth grade and 13-year-old-7th-graders seemed large and ominous—definitely a group to be avoided. I overheard an acquaintance at a basketball game who had a child struggling through his first semester at U of D's Jesuit Academy. It seemed there was a teacher whose English class was so demanding that the entire family was up in arms. The boy, who had managed a solid "B" in his elementary school English classes, would sit at the dining room table with his head in his hands and tears in his eyes while the parents tried to remember how to diagram a sentence. Now, conferences were in two days and this mother was not sure whether to be angry, or just start crying herself!

Boy, was I glad my son was safe and secure in his little elementary school. It would be a *long* time before I had to deal with that kind of anxiety!

Yet somehow, two *extremely* short years later, I found myself at a U of D Jesuit Open House. My son walked in the front door, took one look and said, "Mom, this is it!" My now 13-year-old-almost-7th-grader looked small and innocent—the foyer looked large and ominous.

We climbed the stairs and entered room after room. Slowly, I began to think that everything would be okay. Our tour guide was very courteous, the teachers I'd met so far seemed pleasant, even interested in who my son was. They engaged him in conversations about his favorite subjects and hobbies. Everything was going along pretty well, yet in the back of my mind, I knew I had heard something bad about the school. What *was* it?

Our tour guide led us into the very last room. The shocked looks on our faces must have made an impression because the boy looked at us with a triumphant smile on his face, turned to the teacher and said, "I always leave your room for last, Mr. Hall. It gets 'em every time!"

Mr. Hall?!?! That was it! Here was the reason *my* son was never going to go to middle school. I tried not to stare at the man, which happened to be easy. His room looked like a teenager's bedroom. Chaos reigned. Horror movie posters were everywhere, strange objects hung from the rafters.

Another prominently displayed poster read *101 Uses For A Dead Cat*. In fact there were a lot of hostile references to cats. How could anyone learn in a place like this?

And yet, when I looked again, there were charts filled with kids' names, rows of stars after most of them. A stack of books on one desk showed a list of titles that I couldn't help but approve. Perhaps it was safe to take another look at him.

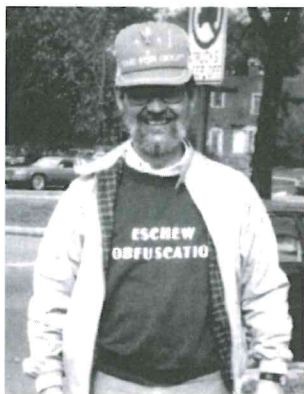
Ugh, that tie! Well, maybe he was color blind.

He had a stern, kind of academic way of talking, but that was definitely a twinkle I saw in his eye. And I couldn't help but notice the ease with which he spoke to our tour

guide—one of his current 8th grade students. Maybe he wouldn't be so bad after all. But I could foresee a time when we would come to blows over this *cat thing*!

Well, my son survived the Academy, and is currently wending his way through his junior year in the high school. I, too survived his time in 7th and 8th grade. (I never went to conferences without my cat earrings and a cat sweatshirt on. Mr. Hall would roll his eyes heavenward and gnash his teeth when he saw me!) When I think back on that time, I never think about the subjects my son was taught, or the physical space that the high school kids grudgingly allowed the "Academites" to occupy. Instead I think of the men who would change the way my son looked at the world, thus effecting—in no small way—the shape of *all* our lives. I think of lively accounts of "*Bell Bowls*", and the "*Great Academy Egg Drop*." And I think of Mr. Hall—not so much as the Academy English teacher—but as the man who at conferences asked me more questions than I asked him. The man who, when he saw me on the main gym floor during my first high school conferences, yelled from the balcony, "Hey, Gilhuly! They're no fun down there. Come on back up here!" And the man who looked out over the field as my son, championship trophy held high, led his Academy Track teammates in a victory lap. The cigarette dangled from his lips, and he never stopped clapping. He just turned and said quietly, "I sure love those kids."

We know, Mr. Hall. We know.



Ron Simons '78

A short while ago, I read the letter notifying the alumni of the passing of Mr. Hall. It is with special sadness that I receive this news. Mr. Hall was the single most influential teacher that I was fortunate enough to experience during my tenure at The High. It wasn't his classroom skills that impressed me since I never actually sat in a class with Mr. Hall. It was through the lessons he taught me as the Moderator/Director of the Harlequins where my studies took place. Among the many lessons learned from Mr. Hall were: learn from criticism, have faith in yourself (he always did), and never sit with your legs open when wearing a kilt on stage.

Mr. Hall was at once a teacher, humorist, confidant, and friend. He was the first person I sought out when I first returned to U of D a few years after graduation. As always, he had a ready smile, a bear hug and an enthusiasm that was uniquely Sam. He caught me up on the happenings of Dennis and Julie and life and the school. Until today, I looked forward to coming back to The High and seeing him again. I guess I'll have to wait just a little longer to once again share communion with Mr. Hall.

My heartfelt condolences to Mrs. Hall and Wendel, Jr. Although it may bring small comfort today, please know that there are

many who share in the loss of this wonderful human being. Although I graduated 16 years ago and had not seen Mr. Hall in more than six years, his name will always bring me warmth and a smile.

Mr. Hall was fond of the quote, "it ain't over till the fat lady sings." Mr. Hall, I pray the song she sings this day is as beautiful as the person who takes his final bow today.

**"...LEARN FROM CRITICISM,
HAVE FAITH IN YOURSELF,
AND NEVER SIT WITH YOUR
LEGS OPEN WHEN WEARING
A KILT ON STAGE."**

SAM HALL

Ajit Katharopoulos '87

My fondest memory of "Sam"—who will always be Mr. Hall to me—is of a parent-teacher conference that my mother and I had with him during the first quarter of my

eighth-grade year at The High. I knew my grades in both of his classes—I had an 88 percent in English and a 98 percent in Spelling. Actually, I was quite proud of them both and thought that this parent-teacher conference, of them all, would go well.

Little did I know what Mr. Hall had in mind. After introducing himself to my mother with his best winning smile, he regarded me with a scowl. "What are you smiling about, young man?" he demanded, his tone surprising my mother and me. "Have you *seen* your grades? What do you think about them?"

"Well, um, Mr. Hall, I thought that they were pretty good—especially the spelling." I was petrified now, and my mother, who was given to bouts of stern speech herself, sat back with a

surprised but smug expression on her face.

"Oh, are they?" He produced the grade sheet. "You mean to tell me you're satisfied with this?" He frowned as he pointed to the English grade. "I'm very disappointed in you; I'd thought that you had higher



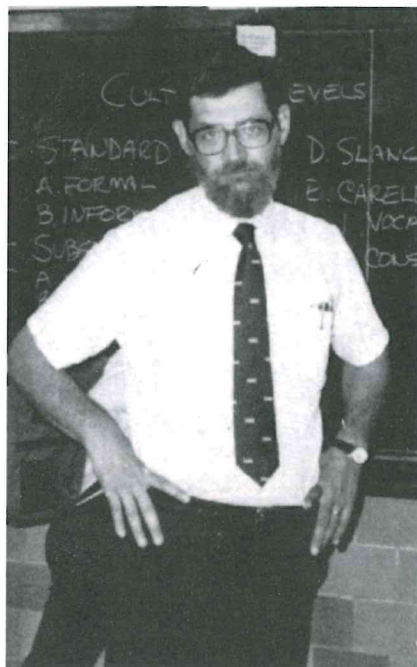
standards." Shamed, I sat back in my seat as he turned to address my mother, his gaze somewhat softer. "Mrs. Katharopoulos, your son is one of my brightest students and it is a pleasure to have him in my class. But if he'd only apply himself"—he paused to glare at me—"I am confident this is certainly not as well as he could do."

A fond memory of embarrassment. This is, however, the story that my mother tells whenever people ask her why she sent her son to UDJHS. Because, she tells them, UDJHS is more than a place where you can get your high school diploma. The High is a place where students broaden their minds – and never mind their acceptance rate to schools the likes of Harvard, Columbia, the University of Michigan, Berkeley, and Stanford. It's a place where boys go to become young men—Young Men for Others—not only through tough classes and intense competition, but through the examples set by people like Wendel Hall.

I am honored to have known and learned from him. I grieve not for him, but for the kids at The High who are robbed of the opportunity to know him. He will be missed terribly.

Damon Wright '92

I have mementos from a few people. Just trinkets, really, things that give me confidence, a smile, some luck. But mostly they remind me of past times, fun times. They remind me that I'm not alone. I have a loonie from Linda, a pen from Kim, a hat from my dad, an Indigo Girls tape from Sara, and memories from Mr. Hall. I owe him so much. All the teachers I had at U of D left an impression on me. I can remember a surprising amount of detail (I normally can't remember what I had for dinner a week ago) from almost every course. But the teacher who probably had the most profound effect on me was Mr. Hall. And I don't just mean the ties, SWA's, TRA, TRD, I mean the whole package. Those schedules he had us make, even if I didn't always follow it (and how many of us honestly always did?). I still learned the value of budgeting my time, deadlines, and responsibilities. His harsh exterior masking the extreme concern and caring he had for his students—at least the students who tried, even if they didn't always succeed. How many people used to get less than great comments on their report cards despite relatively good grades? I know I did. I feel sorry for all those kids who won't learn from him. And those who had the chance, and blew it.



At work the other day (I haven't been able to start college yet, I'm still saving money), I found myself asking two people if they were there to work or to play "touchy-feely." I stopped cold after I said it.

I'm sure I'm not alone when I say that I didn't believe the letter when I read it. He couldn't be dead, not Mr. Hall. Cancer? Sure he smoked and coughed, but people like him aren't supposed to die. Y'know, there were all sorts of things that I had to say. I've been going over this letter in my head since I heard the news. I had *so* much to say! He was, well, he was Mr. Hall! Now that I'm actually writing this, though, everything I have to say is just slipping away. He was too much, larger than life. Of all the things that letter could have said, that was the last thing I expected. And here all I can do for him is ramble on about how much I respect him. How he'd probably kick me in the backside for not being in college yet. How he used to encourage me, talk to me.

Y'know, I kept waiting, when I was younger and didn't know what they were about, for Mr. Hall to win one of those teacher awards on the Disney Channel. Well, he didn't, but he's the greatest in my book. And I've got the stories, the work habits (now that I'm out of school, figures, huh?), and the vocabulary to prove it. And if I can ever afford it, I'm going to start a "Mr. Hall Scholarship." Not a Wendel Hall scholarship, oh no! There may have been rumors that his first name was Wendel, but you never said it too loudly, lest he hear. And let's face it, he only didn't hear what he didn't want to hear. Because he was Mr. Hall.