

In the wind...

The secret of life

Donald Hall is an American writer. Because he's Wendy's client, I've met him several times. He was born in 1928 and last saw a barber or handled a razor at least ten years ago. He published an essay in the June 12, 2013, issue of *The New Yorker* with the title "Three Beards," in which he chronicled his long relationship with facial hair. It begins:

In my life I have grown three beards, covering many of my adult faces. My present beard is monumental, and I intend to carry it to my grave. (I must avoid chemotherapy.)

It concludes:

As I decline more swiftly toward the grave I have made certain that everyone knows—my children know, Linda knows, my undertaker knows—that no posthumous razor may scrape my blue face.

In 2011, Wendy accompanied Hall to the White House, where President Obama awarded him the National Medal of Arts. (That's the same day she chatted with Van Cliburn, as noted in the May 2014 installment of this column.) The neatly trimmed and dapper President met the self-styled Methuselah.

Donald Hall lives in the New Hampshire farmhouse that was built by his grandfather, whom he helped harvesting hay. Today, hay is harvested by powerful and intricate machines that spit out neatly tied bales in the wake of a tractor. (Hay bales are legitimately held together with baling wire.) Donald Hall, then a child, and his grandfather did it with scythes, pitchforks, and horse-drawn carts. And that's the way he writes—the old-fashioned way.

He has published dozens of books of poetry, and dozens more of non-fiction, memoirs, and collections of essays. He has written hundreds of articles of literary criticism and countless essays for many publications. And his lifelong collection of thousands of letters to and from other literary and artistic giants will be the grist of many future dissertations. He writes in longhand and dictates into a tape recorder, and leaves a briefcase on his front porch every morning for his typist who lives across the road, who in turn leaves a corresponding case of typed manuscripts.

When we were first dating, Wendy shared Donald Hall's memoir *Life Work* with me (Beacon Press, 1993). At 124 pages, it's an easy read, but when he describes his process, you feel obligated to read it again, and then again. He writes drafts. There were fifty-five drafts of that essay about beards, and there are hundreds of drafts for some of his poems. He started working on his poem *Another Elegy* in 1982, and put it away, disgusted,



Jack Bishop and great-grandson, Ben. The dome in the background is the Christian Science Mother Church in Boston.

in 1988 after more than five hundred drafts. He numbers the drafts. In 1992, he picked it up again, wrote thirty more drafts, then showed it to his wife, the poet Jane Kenyon, "who remembered the old one; her response encouraged me." As he brought it toward conclusion, he woke many days before the alarm, jumping out of bed to start writing, but reminding himself that "You felt like this, about this same poem, a hundred times between 1982 and 1988."

In *Life Work*, Donald Hall writes about his grandparents' work ethics, about baseball players' dedication to their work, and of course about his own routine, but he makes it clear that hates the phrase "work ethic." Shortly after leaving the security of a professorship at the University of Michigan to move to the farm with Jane to support himself with his own writing, he attended his Harvard class (1951) reunion where he found himself complimented over and over about his self-discipline. He responded, "If I loved chocolate to distraction, would you call me self-disciplined for eating a pound of Hershey's Kisses before breakfast?" He simply loves the process of moving words about, mining the English language, dog-earring his beloved *Oxford English Dictionary*—no matter what it takes to get it right to his own ears.

One of the principal characters in *Life Work* is the British sculptor Henry Moore. They met in 1959 when Hall was commissioned to write a magazine piece about Moore, and Hall was moved and inspired by Moore's approach to his work. There was always a sketchpad at hand, there were studios scattered about the property allowing work at different stages to proceed concurrently, and when in his seventies, Moore built a new studio next to the house allowing him to spend another hour at work after dinner. The last time they were together, when Moore was eighty, Hall asked him, "What is the secret of life?" Moore's response:

"The secret of life is to have a task, something you devote your entire life to,

something you bring everything to, every minute of the day for your entire life. And the most important thing is—it must be something you cannot possibly do!"

Wrapped around a monument

Last week, the Parisian organist Daniel Roth played a recital at Church of the Resurrection in New York where a couple years ago, the Organ Clearing House renovated, expanded, and installed a Casavant organ built in 1915. It was a treat and a thrill to be around him for a couple days as he prepared and presented his program, and I particularly enjoyed a conversation in which he gave some deeper insight into the heritage of the magnificent Cavaillé-Coll organ at St. Sulpice in Paris, where he has been *titulaire* since 1985. His three immediate predecessors were Jean-Jacques Grunenwald, Marcel Dupré, and Charles-Marie Widor—four tenures that span nearly a hundred-fifty years.

Those four organists are identified by their relationships with that organ. Their improvisations and compositions have been inspired by its beautiful tones and enabled by the ingenious mechanical registration devices built in 1862, maintained to this day in their original condition. Roth confirmed the legend that Widor's original appointment was temporary, and though it was never officially renewed or confirmed, he held the position for sixty-seven years. I've known this tidbit for years, but Daniel Roth shared some skinny.

Aristide Cavaillé-Coll was a tireless champion of his own work. He was disappointed in the general level of organ playing in Paris in the late 1860s, but was enthralled by performances by Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens, the professor of organ at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, who first played recitals in Paris during a tour in 1850. Widor was born in Lyon into a family of organ-builders and Cavaillé-Coll was a family friend. It was he who arranged for Widor to study with Lemmens, and the twenty-five year old Widor was Cavaillé-Coll's candidate for the vacant position at St. Sulpice.

As a reflection of the political and even racial tensions leading up to the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), Widor's detractors competing for the important position claimed he played like a German! (*Quelle horreur!*) The rector compromised by appointing Widor for one year.

Hundreds of American organists have been treated to Daniel Roth's hospitality at the console of that landmark organ, hearing his improvisations and compositions, and his interpretations of the immense body of music produced by his predecessors. My conversations with him last week reminded me of that quote from Henry Moore. When a great musician spends a lifetime with a great organ, does that qualify as something to which you devote your life, but cannot possibly do?



1964 Noack organ, Wiscasset, Maine, relocated by the Organ Clearing House, 2004

Opera vitae

The mid-twentieth century renaissance in American organbuilding has given us a bevy of small companies building organs under the name of their founders. Among these, C. B. Fisk, Inc. is notable, in that the legendary Charlie Fisk passed away relatively young, and the work of his company has been continued by his co-workers—dare I say disciples? But when I think of names like Wolff, Wilhelm, Noack, Brombaugh, and the double-teaming Taylor & Boody, I think of these men, now elderly, retired, or deceased, who have had long careers personally producing many instruments with the help of their small and talented staffs. I think Fritz Noack is in the lead. His company was founded in 1960 and has completed nearly 160 organs. Nice work, Fritz, quite a fleet. Imagine seeing them all in a row.

Considering all the effort and expertise involved in selling, planning, designing, building, and installing a pipe organ, I marvel at what Fritz and his colleagues have accomplished personally, with a lot of help from their friends. That's work to which you devote your life, but cannot possibly do.

What was the question?

An old family friend is an expert in "heat transfer"—how heat moves from one mass to another, from a mass to a gas, or any other way heat moves around. One evening sitting with drinks in my parents' living room and staring at the burning fireplace, I asked him, "Just what is fire?" He told me that it's a chemical reaction. Yes, but what is it? I never did get an answer I could understand. I think he thought I was a bit of a prig, and I think I was asking a question that couldn't be answered.

The more you know about the organ-building trade, the more you realize you don't know. Building pipe organs is a profession that remains mysterious to its most experienced practitioners. How does that air get from one place to another inside the organ? How does that thin sheet of pressurized air passing through the mouth of an organ pipe turn into musical tone? And how do those tones blend so beautifully with each other? How do we move such volumes of air silently? We have answers that refer to the laws of physics, but like my question about fire, they seem unanswerable. I've come to think that all you can do is know the questions and keep working to achieve better understanding of how to answer them. It's work to which you devote your life, but cannot possibly do.

Go Daddy, go.

My father passed away at home on April 8, about six weeks shy of his ninety-third birthday. He was born four years before Donald Hall. He had a stroke a few months before from which he had largely recovered, although the gorgeous handwriting for which he was well known

Saving organs throughout America...affordably!



Foley-Baker Inc.

**1-800-621-2624
foleybaker.com**



was gone. A vicious headache, which may have been another stroke, was our signal that the end was near. His doctor helped us establish home hospice care, and after about a week of comforting medication and declining consciousness he was gone. My three siblings and I, and our spouses, managed to gather during that week along with lots of the grandchildren. My brother Mark and his wife Sarah, my wife Wendy, and my mother Betsy were with Dad at his moment of death. Coincidentally, I was at work in St. Paul's Cathedral in Boston, where my parents were married almost fifty-nine years ago.

The Rev. John J. Bishop was ordained an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Massachusetts in 1952, and all the parishes he served were in that diocese. Everyone called him Jack. He served as rector of churches in Somerville and Westwood before he was called to be rector of the Parish of the Epiphany in Winchester, where he served from 1966 until his retirement in 1989. That was when my parents moved to the newly renovated and expanded family summer home on Cape Cod. After that retirement, he served as interim rector at churches in Dedham, Woods Hole, Falmouth, Provincetown, and Belmont. In December of 2012, the Parish of the Epiphany hosted a celebratory Eucharist honoring the sixtieth anniversary of his ordination.

My father grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, as a member of Christ Church, which is now the Cathedral of the Diocese of Southern Ohio. Our grand colleague and mentor Gerre Hancock was organist and choirmaster there in the 1960s. Dad had recordings of that church's Boar's Head Festival led by Gerre Hancock—the first improvisations I ever heard. As he grew up in Ohio in the 1920s and '30s, some of the liberal causes for which he was later known hadn't been contemplated, but before he was finished, my father had championed civil rights, social justice, the ordination of women, and same-sex marriages.

The Rev. Jeanne Sprout was the first woman to be ordained in the Diocese of Massachusetts. Her ordination in 1977 happened at the Parish of the Epiphany in Winchester as she joined the staff there. And Dad chaired the steering committee that nominated Barbara Harris as the first female bishop in the Anglican Communion. As interim rector in Provincetown, he blessed same-sex unions many years before the ruling of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court that made them legal as marriages ten years ago. During his adolescence in Ohio and while serving in the United States Army during World War II, he would never have imagined such a thing.

At the height of the Vietnam War, the parish's associate rector Michael Jupin participated in a widely reported protest on the steps of Boston's Arlington Street Church, placing his draft card in an offering plate in the hands of William Sloane Coffin, pastor of New York's Riverside Church, and activist and pediatrician Benjamin Spock. This created a firestorm in the then conservative parish (Winchester was cited as the town where the politics met the zip code: Zero-1890). The wardens approached my father, demanding to know "how to get rid of Jupin," as important pledges units left the parish in droves. Dad's immediate answer was, "you get rid of the rector." He told us later about that crisis in his career and the life of that church, how he sat alone in his car weeping, wondering what to do, and how he sought the council of his bishop, who encouraged him to "stand in the midst of those people and lead."

Through all of that, Dad remained devoted to the traditions and liturgy of the Anglican Communion. He was a strong supporter of the music of the church, and during his tenures, the parishes in Westwood and Winchester both purchased organs from Charles Fisk. I remember the thrill of using my newly acquired adult voice, singing in harmony accompanied by orchestra as the adult choir presented Bach's Cantata 140, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*.

Dad understood the importance of the "theater" of liturgy. My childhood friends who were acolytes laugh today about how they were terrified of "blowing it" around Rev. Bishop. He needed it to be right. He led worship and celebrated the Eucharist with enthusiasm and joy—his "church voice" was nothing like his everyday voice. The crisp cadence and musical intonation of his delivery of the Prayers of Consecration are still in my ears, and remain my ideal. He really celebrated communion.

I've spent many days working as an organbuilder in churches of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts. Often, when I'm introduced to a rector, I've

heard, "There's a priest in this diocese with that name," followed by unsolicited tributes. It's been wonderful to hear accounts of my father's work from so many different sources. I'm grateful for Dad's encouragement and inspiration.

What a weekend.

Today is Monday. Dad's memorial service was Saturday. There were four bishops and twenty priests in robes up front and the pews were full of family, friends, and parishioners from across the diocese and around the world, and plenty more priests. In a piece included in the leaflet for Dad's memorial service, I wrote, "The definition is 'Great excitement for or interest in a cause.' It's from the Greek root, *enthousiasmos*, which came from the adjective *entheos*, 'having God within.' Enthusiasm." That is the way he lived his life, inspiring people, encouraging them to think and grow, and sharing his love for the church, for better or for worse.

That's work to which you devote your life, but cannot possibly do.

Of course I'm sad. Of course I miss him. But when a man lives such a long

and productive life, has nearly sixty years of marriage, sees four children grow up, knows ten adult grandchildren, and with our grandson Ben, knew his first great-grandchild, we can only be grateful.

Yesterday, we interred Dad's ashes. There were about thirty of us at the end of the boardwalk over the marshes that led to Dad's favorite Cape Cod swimming hole. As the last of the ashes sprinkled into the water I blurted out, "Go daddy, go." ■

INSANITY \ in-'san-et-é\ noun:
 Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.
 ~Albert Einstein

How many electronic organs will your congregation purchase before they realize that a pipe organ lasts indefinitely?

A · P · O · B · A
 Associated Pipe Organ Builders of America

NORTH AMERICA'S PREMIER PIPE ORGAN BUILDING AND SERVICE FIRMS

APOBA.COM
1-800-473-5270

Call today for APOBA's free 66+ page color prospectus

BUILDER MEMBERS		SUPPLIER MEMBERS	
American Organ Company	Dorwin Pipe Organ Builders	Novice Organ Company, Inc.	Quesney Pipe Organ, Inc.
Berkshire Pipe Organ Company	Galeano Pipe Organ, Inc.	Parsons Organ Builders	Rainell Dyer & Associates, Inc.
Berkshire Pipe Organ Builders, Inc.	Goldens & Wood, Inc.	Parsons Pipe Organ Builders	Schwartz Organ Company
Bond Organ Builders, Inc.	Holtkamp Organ Company	Pipe Organ Builders, Inc.	Schubert & Co.
Breton Pipe Organ Builders, LLC	J.H. & C.S. Cobb	Patrick J. Murphy & Associates	Taylor & Boyd Organ Builders
C.B. Pitt, Inc.	Knox Pipe Organ Builders	Pipe Parts & Co. Organ	
Cavalier Pianos	Litchfield Pipe Organ		
			A.R. Schreyer Sons, Inc.
			Harris Precision Products
			Integrated Organ Technologies, Inc.
			Solid State Organ Systems
			Stevens Corporation
			OSI - Total Pipe Organ Resources
			Peterson Electro-Musical Products