Joseph Vincent Hall (1916 – 2016)

Born: 21 November 1916, first of six children of Thomas Herbert Hall and Sarah Hall (nee Owen) Gresford, NSW.

siblings: Leo (deceased in childhood); Mary (Sr. Mary Anselm SGS, dec. 1991); Benedict (dec. 1979); Trevor (Brother Lex Hall CFC [dec. 2016]); Margaret (Sr. Philomena SM)

THOMAS Herbert (‘Herb’) Hall (Joe’s Father) barber, butcher, hotelier, bread-carter, baker 6th generation Australian.

SARAH Hall (nee Owen) (Joe’s Mother) Also an Australian of many generations.
The Early Years 1916-1932

1916-1923: Joe’s first years were spent in Gresford-Paterson in the Hunter Valley where his father worked as barber and butcher and his mother was delivering and raising their first children.

1923-1932: In 1923, the family moved to the Macleay region of NSW where Joe’s father became the licensee for Taylor’s Arm Hotel – later to be celebrated in Slim Dusty’s “Pub with no Beer”. Joe’s job was cutting the wood for the hotel; Joe owned a “grey pony” which he rode to school (remembered by the locals when Joe returned to the area in 1977). For a brief period, 1929-1930, the family moved to near-by Bowraville where Joe’s father ran the Royal Hotel.

Schooling: Probably began at Gresford Public School; mostly at Taylor’s Arm Public School except for a brief time when he stayed with relatives & attended the Marist Brother’s School in Maitland; then brief attendance at Bowraville Convent School. Joe repeated 7th Grade because there was no high school “in the bush”. He left school at 14 years of age due to the economic circumstances of the time.

The Depression: The family was forced out of business in the hotels due to the depression. For a few years (1929 – 1932), the family moved around the Nambucca area (Taylors Arm – Bowraville – Macksville – Nambucca Heads). There was little work available. These were difficult years, especially with the younger children still being at school. Joe
worked for a time helping build the sales’ yards at Paterson back in the Hunter Valley. The family then moved to Sydney.

Adolescence to Marriage 1932-1947

1932-1947: The Hall family moved to Belmore where Joe’s uncle ran the local bakery. Joe and his sister Mary were both present at the opening of the Sydney Harbor Bridge in 1932. Joe and his father worked as bread-carters (these were the days of horse-driven carts). Joe’s interest in and love for the bread industry began there. He soon graduated to apprentice dough-maker and began his studies in Bread-Making and Pastry-Cooking at the East Sydney Technical College (where he gained Distinctions in all his subjects.) Joe continued as bread-maker for his uncle throughout these years.

However, there may have been an additional factor accounting for Joe’s continuance at the A. B. Hall Bakery. Around 1935 a young woman by the name of Mary Alexius Gattenhof began her employment in the firm as the business accountant. Everyone else suspected there was a romance in the air because from time to time Joe was seen to escort this young lady to the parish ball. However, it is fair to say that Joe did not rush into love (on the sensible basis that only fools rush in where angels fear to tread!); there followed a nine-year courtship before Joe popped the question!

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The question was two-edged: “Mary, will you marry me?” – and “will you come to Wiangaree on the Far North Coast & be my business accountant?” [Secretly, Joe had been spending the past 15 years saving his shillings and pence so that he now had the required 2,000 pounds to buy the bakery business outright ... Joe never believed in credit!].

As you can imagine, apart from baking bread and sorting out his marriage options, Joe had time to do a few other things in this fifteen-year period. He was involved in rugby league with the newly-formed Canterbury-Bankstown Club. He was an active member of the Catholic Youth Organisation and A-Grade player for the Catholic Tennis Association). Joe was also one of the original “surfies”, often completing a day’s baking duties with a twenty-mile bike ride to Cronulla beach to catch some of the surf and sun action.

Joe twice attempted to join the Armed Services during the war years, but was twice knocked back either on account of his flat feet or his poor vision in one eye (this may have been the result of his wood-chopping days at Taylors Arm when his brother accidentally hit him on the head with the blunt end of the axe; or, more likely, on account of his contracting rheumatic fever in his early twenties).
1947-1966: Joseph Vincent Hall and Mary Alexius Gattenhoff were finally married at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church at Belmore in a double wedding. Joe’s brother Ben was married to Philomena Downie at the same ceremony on Boxing Day 1947.

Joe had now got himself a business associate and accountant, and he wasn’t going to waste time making full use of his newly acquired assistant. On the very night of the marriage, Joe and Mary boarded a train for the 500-mile trip to Wiangaree. Joe, being ever thoughtful, spared Mary the initial problems of making a new home in the electricity-free Wiangaree; he had Mary hop off the train at Kyogle where she (Mary) spent her honeymoon at the Kyogle Hotel by herself! Meanwhile, Joe was nine miles away getting the low-down on his newly acquired bush bakery business. All agree that his was a most novel way of organizing a honeymoon!

Joe soon established himself in the village of Wiangaree as baker & pastry cook extraordinaire. His bread & pastry making abilities were acknowledged in numerous prize-winning feats at bread shows from Lismore to Sydney and beyond. Joe was a founding member and long-term Secretary of the Far North Coast Bread Manufacturer’s Association. [Kyogle baker, Aub Grove, was founding President; 5 Remembering Joe Hall (1916-2016)
Aub & Joyce, Joe & Mary became life-friends]. Initial plans (and promise to Mary) of two years in the bush grew to become nineteen. During this time Joe saw the arrival of electricity, the Holden car (He bought his first in 1954), and television (towards the end of the fifties). Bread making at Wiangaree at first without electricity and, soon enough, with two young children, did not allow for any developed social life. Nonetheless, Joe was an avid dancer at the Wiangaree Balls and dances, a tennis player and eventually a lawn bowler (at the famous alcohol-free Risk Bowling Club ... set up on the nearby Wilson farm).

In these years Joe’s social life mainly revolved around “getting the ice” for the dough making. **Problem**: the ice-factory in Wiangaree had closed down. **Way out of Problem**: Joe now had a car and there was an ice-factory at Kyogle. **New opportunity/problem**: there was a hotel in Kyogle! It has been said that, on occasion, the nine-mile return trip could take anywhere between two and ten hours! Mary began to doubt that all this time was devoted to waiting for the ice to freeze! Even the excuse that Joe and his bachelor-mate Chappy Aboody were “going to town to help Father with a working-bee at the Parish” began to wear thin! [However, what did not grow thin was the life-long relationship between the Halls and the Aboody clan, proprietors of the Wiangaree General Store: the Halls became part of the extended Aboody clan].

Joe and Mary had two sons, **Peter Bernard** (b. January 1949) and **Gerard Vincent** (b. July 1950). The greatest sadness in their married life was learning that their eldest son, Peter, was brain damaged at birth. Their most difficult life decision was to place Peter in a home for intellectually and emotionally damaged children when he was about ten years of age. Words are unable to express the distress that parents of such children experience. Joe and Mary grew to share this burden.
of life and love with great faith and courage. Peter was taken to the Lord in his twenty-first year.

In the mid-sixties, a combination of drought, smaller families and changing pastoral practices meant that running a bakery business in Wiangaree was no longer a viable option. After years of missed opportunities (Joe had been looking at bakery businesses in places such as Coffs Harbour and Ballina), Joe finally made his bid for a bakery in Warwick, south-east Queensland.

**Warwick Years 1966-1985**

1966–1985: Joe and Mary were to spend the next nineteen years in Warwick. Wiangaree had been a two-man baking operation (Joe and a series of apprentices). The hope was that Warwick, with a staff of a dozen, would provide Joe and Mary a more leisurely approach to the hard work of bread-making and shop-keeping. Unfortunately, this was not to prove the case. Big bakeries from Brisbane and Toowoomba began to ship their bread in at reduced (and often non-profitable) prices. After a couple of good years, Joe and Mary found themselves having to work the sixteen-hour days they had hoped to leave behind them in Wiangaree.

Then there was the 1976 flood. Already at Wiangaree in 1954, Joe and Mary had gone through a flood when the Richmond River broke its banks there for the first time in living memory. Now the same was to occur with the Condamine River at Warwick. Both times the house was flooded some four to six feet. Both times it
was without warning and therefore without time to secure their valuable items on higher ground. However, in both situations, the generosity of people to those in adversity is something that makes one aware of the greatness of the human spirit.

1976 was eventful for another reason, namely, the priestly ordination of Gerard at St John’s College Woodlawn and subsequent Masses of Thanksgiving at St Brigid’s Kyogle and St Mary’s Warwick. Again, family and friends from near and far attended these celebrations.

Joe’s coming to Warwick was fortuitous for Rotary, because it was at Warwick that Joe was invited to become a Rotarian. As in all things, Joe Hall was a most loyal member, even to the point of driving people to distraction attempting to (and succeeding) in finding Rotary meetings to attend in such places as Washington DC (where he met the then President’s wife Barbara Bush), Chicago and Evanston (where he went to Rotary International HQ), Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Rome, London … and most places in between. Joe Hall loved his association with Rotary International because he recognised it to be a place where people come together to enjoy fellowship regardless of culture or creed and to provide so many wonderful services for people and communities in need.

Back to Warwick: it was here that Joe developed his considerable lawn bowling skills. In 1971, just five years as a member of the Southern Cross Bowling Club, he was elected President, a position Joe took on with singular focus and dedication (as always, assisted by Mary his wife who was Club Treasurer for many years!). In Warwick, Joe continued to be an active member of the Bread Manufacturers’ Association. He combined his two-fold interest in the Baking
trade and in Bowls through annual pilgrimages to the *Bakers and Allied Traders Bowls Carnivals*.

During his Warwick years, Joe was also actively involved in various Church related activities, such as the *Cursillo Movement*, *Knights of the Southern Cross* and *Reader at Sunday Liturgies*. Throughout his Warwick years Joe also took on the mid-night till 1 AM shift on Saturday nights (the one night he was not baking bread) at St Mary’s Catholic Church where, in those days, there was Perpetual Adoration. Joe’s religious interests would further develop when he and Mary finally sold the business and moved to Ballina.

In 1983 Joe and Mary took advantage of visiting their son, Gerard, who was studying in Washington DC – taking along with them local Warwick priest Fr Danny Hook. Since Gerard was *en route* to further studies in Europe, the trek led to London (to stay with Joe’s niece Mary, husband Hugh & newly-born Elena) before heading to Ireland and Europe (with Joe’s sister-in-law, Phil). Disaster struck in Amsterdam when Joe’s wife, Mary, had a fall and ended up in hospital in Copenhagen before it was decided she and “Aunty Phil” would return to London. Now the group was reduced to three – Joe, Danny and Gerard – heading to Rome (via Euro-train through Germany-Austria). Joe managed his papal audience – thanks to Australian Marist Father Jim Murphy who also escort for the sites of Rome and the Vatican. Gerard headed to his course in Fribourg, Switzerland, leaving Joe (now by himself) to follow. After Fribourg, Joe took himself to Lourdes, Portugal, then back to London so he could take the now-recuperated Mary back to Australia. It was his and Mary’s first, most eventful, overseas trip!
Managing to get back to Warwick and the Bakery Business, Joe and Mary then set upon a plan – to eventually retire to their home on the hill in East Ballina.

East Ballina Years 1985-2008

1985–2002: Joe and Mary had bought the “little house on the hill” at East Ballina around 1960 while they were living in Wiangaree. It had been a place to get away from bakery and business. Eight hundred pounds had seemed a lot of money to spend on a “beach shack” in 1960. However, this was to prove Joe’s smartest “business move”. In many ways it was the only real house that Joe and Mary had ever owned: the Wiangaree residence was a combined shop-house-bakery all under the one roof; and the Warwick residence was an old shop converted into a house because of its proximity to the bakery. As the years progressed, it became almost a matter of course that, when finances and opportunity availed themselves, Joe and Mary would move to retire in Ballina. Thirty-eight years in the bush had converted them into country people so that earlier thoughts of returning to Sydney had long since evaporated.

In 1985 the Queensland and business years played themselves out. The Ballina residence was renovated and extended on the proceeds from the Warwick business. However, Joe’s involvement in bread-making was far from finished.
He found himself involved in the Ballina Quays Estate bakery as a sometime baker, sometime bread deliverer, and fulltime adviser on how to make good bread and pastries. Joe continued in this role (under various proprietors of the business) until the early nineties when he finally realised he didn’t have enough time on his hands to play bowls, involve himself in community and church activities, and keep working all at the same time. So, after sixty continuous years as a bread manufacturer and pastrycook, Joe retired to make scones at the East Ballina residence. At least if you managed to find Joe home on any given day, he would immediately whip up a batch of scones on request! He also offered an alternative to Father Mac’s Christmas puddings and cakes that had become famous! Mary’s Sunday roasts and Joe’s hospitality at East Ballina took on a life of its own. The motto seemed to be: everyone and anyone is welcome.

Among annual guests at East Ballina were the “religious”, usually over the summer period: Mary’s Josephite sister, Sister Joan; Joe’s Good Samaritan sister, Sister Mary, and his brother, Christian Brother Trevor; and, of course, their Marist son, Gerard. These did not come just for Sunday lunch, but for several weeks – often all at once from late December till early or later January [although now a three-bedroom house there was,
thankfully, a largish sleep-out veranda]. Apart from regular locals, such as Aboodys, Molloys and Shays, there were other Sydney-connected relatives and friends including the “Stewart-Martin” clan with their then-famous “half-house” on the hill (it was eventually to become a “full house”!). 

Again in 1990, Joe and Mary – this time with life-friends Jack and Joan Martin and Col Dorfield – found themselves on a second overseas trip to visit Gerard studying now for his doctorate at Catholic University of America in Washington DC. Then in 1996, they travelled with Gerard to New Zealand where, among other things, they were hosted by the Tuohy family in Wellington. By now, Joe had almost become a seasoned international traveller!

In December 1997, Mary & Joe celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary at St John’s College, Woodlawn, which was a magnificent occasion attended by family and friends from Sydney, Wiangaree-Kyogle, Ballina, Lismore, Warwick and beyond. Among special guests from Sydney were Joe & Mary’s bridesmaid & her husband, Mary (Stewart) and Vince Toohey. In the same year Joe was to find himself the recipient of the “Paul Harris Fellowship” for life-long service to Rotary and was, at the same time, nominated to be President of Ballina Rotary Club in 1997-98. Although now over 80, Joe took on this role with his customary dedication and flare.

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When Joe was not at Rotary or Bowls related activities, he was normally found doing something at “The Church” (including being a “Eucharistic Minister” for the sick). Joe’s interest in religious questions and issues saw him darting off to scripture discussions and prayer groups. The Scripture group met weekly on a nearby farm (Brooklet, home of Glenys & Kevin Gerraghty) for over twenty years. Joe and Mary were regular attendees. Joe’s lack of formal education never dimmed his interest in pursuing the “big questions” of life. Joe loved to read about things and then – his specialty – being involved in discussion. Joe was never caught short of having something to say on most topics! He was always a person passionate about life, open to truth wherever it may be found, and committed in a practical way to making the world a better place. He was a person with a big mind and an even bigger heart. Joe Hall was very well respected by all who knew him because he deeply respected everyone he knew. Moreover, Joe Hall was never heard to say a negative word about anyone either in public or in private. He was in every sense a generous-hearted person.

This reflection on Joe Hall’s life until 1997 is primarily due to his reception of the “Paul Harris Fellowship” in that year. Rotary asked Gerard if he could provide a biography of Joe’s life to that point. This is an (amended and extended) account of that document which Gerard had concluded as follows: “Two tasks now await Joe Hall: to be President of Ballina Rotary Club in 1997-98; and to take Mary on that honeymoon she never had!”
While it would be an exaggeration to say that Joe & Mary honeymooned for 55 years, what is not an exaggeration is to say they never wavered in their love for each other, in their Christian faith and ultimate trust in God, and in being people of loyal friendship and expansive hospitality.

In 2002, Mary, now ninety, became quite ill and within six months or so was hospitalised and died at Ballina Memorial Hospital with friends and family on 20th July that year. Her Requiem Mass and funeral at St Francis Xavier Ballina was celebrated with fifteen priests (Diocesan, Marist and an MSC) and a near-full Church of people from the North Coast (especially Wiangaree-Kyogle-Woodlawn-Ballina), Queensland (especially Warwick and Brisbane including representatives of Australian Catholic University) and beyond (including many relatives and friends from Sydney). The Woodlawn choir provided the music along with the most moving rendition of “Ave Maria” sung by Marge Riordan after communion. Joe continued to live at East Ballina (he had learnt from Mary how to make the Sunday Roasts!) for the next five-and-a-half years.

2002 –2008: These years without Mary also afforded Joe the opportunity for more travel with his son Gerard. These included the trip to Sydney for the “first Christmas without Mary” to catch up with family in Sydney, Gresford-Paterson and Appin. Joe accompanied Gerard to two
Practical Theology Conferences: Manchester in England and Auckland, New Zealand, where Joe attended all sessions (academic & social!) and entertained the world’s practical theologians with stories about baking bread (being of course much more practical than any of the so-called “practical theologians”!).

There were other domestic trips including Perth WA and Cairns (Great Barrier Reef & Atherton Tablelands accompanied by Bet Green). When Joe was home he continued with his Church, Bowling, Rotary and Scripture activities. Sunday lunches at East Ballina also continued with now regular Brisbane visitors including Gerard’s-now-become-Joe’sriends [e.g. Anne Tuohy, the Velings, Blair-Swannells, Riordans, Greens & Olms]. Another regular attendee for all the Ballina years was Toowoomba priest, Fr Kevin Noble, who would come for a week or two a couple of times each year.

Then, of course, in 2006 there was the celebration of Joe’s 90th Birthday at Ballina RSL Club – with the wonderful view on the river. People came from near and far including old Wiangaree-Kyogle and Warwick friends. John Molloy gave a wonderful speech to be followed by an equally wonderful and very witty poem for (& on) Joe, written and spoken by Barbara (Aboody) Thacker. And the
inimitable Fr Richard Foley gave a spontaneous, humorous and insightful tribute to Joe. By 2008, Joe’s driving licence had been reduced to a three-kilometre range which meant he could not technically drive from East Ballina to down-town Ballina. This meant there was only one thing to do: move into independent living at Crowley Village where Church, club & town were all within the 3K range!

Ballina-Crowley Years 2008-2016

Joe took to “independent” living at Crowley like a duck to water finding he now had friends “on tap” including his old friends Dympna Sheehy and Sr Anne & Bill Shay. And he soon discovered new friends who became extended family in Gemma & Bill Duffy. Fr Lou Molloy had also returned to the Ballina area and was a wonderful support to Joe in these years. By now, Joe’s driving skills were becoming problematic resulting in two car accidents. While nobody, apart from himself, was injured in these events, it is worth noting that the final accident involved his car doing a full 360 degree roll! The ambulance driver attempted to put him in a stretcher but Joe, ever independent, insisting on walking to the ambulance! Since he was technically at fault, he was charged with “reckless driving”. According to John Molloy, when the policeman came to the hospital to “book” him, he (the policeman) said to John: “He’s a tough old bugger, isn’t he!”. While Joe took the booking in
his stride, he wasn’t happy about the suggestion he should give up driving. But reason finally won. Joe, ever the adapter to new circumstances, bought himself a driving buggy and was for a few years seen to be “buggying” around in Ballina (sometimes called the “buggy capital” of Australia due to it being flat & inhabited by a well-above the average % of retired & older folk).

Then there was the brave decision Joe made for a knee-replacement at the age of 93! He figured this was the best way to keep himself mobile which, in fairness, it did for a few years. But even with the knee-replacement, and the kindness of so-many people like the Duffy’s to ferry Joe to Church, club and shopping, Joe became increasingly dependent on a “walker”. And ‘though being so well looked after by many friends and outside care, the time had come for Joe to consider moving to the Crowley Hostel. When his brother Trevor & son Gerard suggested this, they thought Joe would initially refuse. They had written down twenty reasons why they thought this a good idea. Surprisingly, none of the reasons had to be mentioned. Joe simply said: “That sounds like a good idea!”

In 2011, Joe moved to the Crowley Hostel. Ever the social extrovert, he adjusted to the new life-style with his always amazing love-for-life wherever he was. He joined in all the social, cultural and religious activities Crowley provided. Joe, the staunch Catholic, would go to whatever religious service was provided in the Chapel which included Anglican & Uniting Church services. He was a true ecumenist at heart!

Even though, in the last few years, Joe’s physical and mental states began to deteriorate, he rarely lost his winning smile – and his ability to thank anyone and everyone who was there to help or simply be with him. Tony Baldwin, by now the Service Manager at the Hostel, had catered for Joe’s 50th Wedding
Remembering Joe Hall (1916-2016)

Anniversary at Woodlawn, his 90th at Ballina RSL, and then his 95th & 99th birthdays at Crowley. For his 99th, his son Gerard gave him a beer mug with the inscription: “Joe Hall: 99 not out!”. Tony was preparing to cater for Joe’s 100th birthday on 21st November 1916 when, without warning, he simply died in his sleep in the early morning of 14th November – just seven days too early!

But not to be outdone, Joe Hall’s funeral was then held on the day he would have turned 100. It was decided that “Joe’s 100th Birthday Party” would proceed – though of course doubling as his wake. The Requiem Mass at St Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Ballina – as in the case of Joe’s wife Mary some 14 years previously – was attended by people representing family and friends from Sydney, Brisbane, Wiangaree-Kyogle, Warwick and beyond. It was wonderful that his niece & nephew, Mary & Frank Hall, and their partners were able to represent the extended family from the south. Priests of the Lismore and Brisbane dioceses and many Marists who came from near and far concelebrated. Again, there was representation from the extended Woodlawn family and Australian Catholic University. Though death is always a time of sadness, there was a sense of joy in celebrating a life well-lived in faith, hope and love. Joe has now returned to be with his wife Mary, son Peter, parents Herb & Sarah, brothers Leo, Ben & Trevor, and sister Mary. At time of writing, Joe is survived by his sister Margaret (Sr Philomena SM) and his son Gerard (also a Marist).