



**An Interview with Clara Jean Mosley Hall,  
Author of  
[Paris in America: A Deaf Nanticoke  
Shoemaker and His Daughter](#)**



**GU Press:** *What inspired you to write a memoir? What do you hope readers take away from it?*

**Hall:** In my family, no one could trace their lineage further back than their parents. They

didn't really discuss their grandparents because they didn't know much about them. In raising our two daughters, Ilea and Karelle, my husband, Howard, and I would relay a few stories to them about my dad. I realized, however, that just like the rest of my family, my daughters did not know much about their grandfather. That is because he made his transition when Ilea was just a year old and before Karelle was born. I felt that writing this memoir would help them to know their grandfather a bit better. Then as I was going through the process of writing, I realized what a wonderful role model my dad would be to other young Deaf students and Deaf adults.

Because we are all one, it is my hope that readers will discover and recognize our story of trials, perseverance, and triumphs within themselves. I hope that my memoir will help them see that the secret to achieving their own personal goals is not giving up during the period of trials—that they should take a step in faith towards their goals and what they need will appear.

**GU Press:** *Paris in America describes the many worlds that formed your identity: Native American, African American, hearing, and Deaf. How did that affect your sense of self, and of belonging to a community?*

**Hall:** For me, growing up at the intersection of various cultures was much like other bilingual children who grow up speaking and walking in different worlds. You learn what is appropriate in one culture may not be so in the other culture. Navigating this requires a bit of code switching. We all do this to some degree. We act differently when we are in a setting that requires us to act with reverence versus being at a baseball or basketball game. I learned quickly how to do this as a young child. I also knew growing up that my life was different from my friends' lives. Sometimes I felt like I was the parent instead of the child, which caused me to feel more independent and capable of walking in the adult world, perhaps more than I should have as a child. That independence has stayed with me as an adult. I view it as a positive in that I feel I am able to do most things that I set out to do. Given that I thrive on diversity and new experiences,

belonging to many different communities, using ASL and spoken language, and walking many paths fits my personality. I feel I belong everywhere.

**GU Press:** *You write in the book, "As the only child of Deaf parents, I never had the privilege of shyness." Could you expand on that statement?*

**Hall:** As a Coda (child of deaf adults) living during an era when there were no professional interpreters, you are thrust into adult situations because you are the only link between your parent(s) and the outside world. Interpreting doctor appointments, my parents' divorce, adult conversations, etc., I was at the center of the stage. Everyone is looking at you to be the mediator, problem solver, etc. Shyness is not an attribute that is useful in any of these situations. You have to step up to the plate and get the job done while ignoring any part of you that wants to retreat. For me, I had more of a gregarious personality anyway, so I never felt shy in any situation. Someone with a more introverted personality may not have felt as comfortable.

**GU Press:** *Your relationship with your father is the backbone of your memoir. What life lessons did you learn from him?*

**Hall:** I learned from my father how to love others because he showed me so much love. He showed me how to accept others who may be different from me. My dad had an excellent work ethic. I learned that hard work is required if you want to get anything out of life. What you get out of life depends on what you put into it. I learned the importance of being a knowledgeable, contributing citizen of this country, to know what views all political parties espouse in order to make a wise political choice regardless of your political affiliation. He taught me to be responsible and to have integrity because he embodied those qualities.

**GU Press:** *Your writing is honest and personal. What was the happiest moment of your life? The saddest?*

**Hall:** Despite the fact that I have accumulated many of the things most people would use as benchmarks of success, my happiest moment was finding out, after a medical scare, that I would be able to have children. My two daughters, Ilea and Karelle, are the best examples of what children can be. I am blessed to have been given such brilliant, beautiful, and caring beings to raise and nurture.

My saddest moment was hearing about how my father had been severely beaten and left to die. I cannot understand how anyone could take advantage of a defenseless human being and not care about what happens to the person they are harming.

**GU Press:** *You mention in the book that you have accomplished much more than others expected of you. Of what are you most proud?*

**Hall:** After growing up feeling like many people did not expect much of me, I am proud that I was able to receive my PhD and be the first in my family to do so. I am proud to have a fabulous career that has enabled me to be a support to others. I am proud that I am now a published author. What I am MOST proud of, however, is discovering that I am a good mother! When I first got married, I shared with my husband that I was nervous about having children because I felt like I did not know how to be a good mother since mine had left me and my father when I was four years old. Like always, he believed in me and told me that he knew I would make a good mother. I realized that when raising Ilea and Karelle, I became to them everything that I would have wanted in a mother. I gave them all the love that my father had given me. Today, I am overjoyed to say that my daughters are my greatest source of pride.

**GU Press:** *You established a scholarship in the name of your father to support Deaf students in their post-secondary endeavors. Why did you decide to honor your father in this way?*

**Hall:** The giving aspect of philanthropy was not something that I encountered as a child because I was at times on the receiving end—clothing from thrift stores, government cheese, and hand-me-downs. However, when sitting around the kitchen table at Mommom’s (my dad’s sister), there was a man’s name that came up more than once. His name was T. Boone Pickens. Mr. Pickens was a well-to-do American businessman who was also a well-known philanthropist. Mommom and Uncle Pick told of people writing letters to Mr. Pickens asking for something they were in need of, such as a new kitchen stove, a new furnace, or even a cow, and that Mr. Pickens would send it to them. As a child, that impacted me tremendously. I thought, how great would it be to have more than enough money that you could not only pay your own bills, but have enough left over to help others with their needs. As an adult, I contacted Mr. Pickens and thanked him for inspiring me to give back to others. He was gracious enough to respond to my note with a signed letter. Today, I give credit to Mr. T. Boone Pickens for instilling in me the desire to be a philanthropist. I currently have a [scholarship fund with the Cleveland Foundation in the name of my father, J. Paris Mosley](#). This national scholarship gives financial support to Deaf or Hard of Hearing high school students who use American Sign Language and are interested in attending college or in other post-secondary options.