Sid Gally, a Caltech grad and longtime historian of Pasadena, dies

By Kevin Smith, San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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Sid Gally, a lifelong Pasadena resident who attended Caltech, worked for Southern California Gas Co. and wrote a weekly history column for the Pasadena Star-News, has died. He was 95.

Gally took a fall in December and had been hospitalized at Californian Pasadena Convalescent Hospital where he died Thursday.

“He didn’t break anything when he fell, but when he was at the convalescent home trying to get his strength back things started going downhill,” said daughter Susan Golden, who lives in Berkeley. “We were hoping ... for the best.”

Born Sidney Kilburne Gally in 1920, he attended Pasadena schools, including U.S. Grant Elementary School, McKinley Junior High School and Pasadena Junior College before transferring to Caltech where he studied electrical engineering and graduated in 1941.

Gally subsequently landed a job in the research department of Southern California Gas Co., where he remained until World War II began and he joined the Navy.

He was sent to the electronic and radar schools at Harvard and MIT in Cambridge, Mass. where he became an instructor. He later took part in an anti-sub patrol to Northern Ireland and was assigned to the staff of the commander of a destroyer squadron.

After his stint with the Navy, he returned to Gas Co. and held a variety of positions, including as a division engineer in Pasadena. He retired as an engineering design manager.

Gally and his wife Helen, who previously had lived in North Dakota and Oregon, had three children. She worked as a teacher in the Pasadena school system for 12 years. She died in 2004.

Over the years, Gally volunteered for the Caltech Alumni Association and joined the Westerners organization. He also served as a volunteer for the Pasadena Museum of History for several years and wrote a weekly “Past on Parade” history column for the Pasadena Star-News that ran for about 14 years.
“Sid was just an extraordinary man and deeply rooted in Pasadena’s past,” said Larry Wilson, public editor for the San Gabriel Valley News Group, which includes the Star-News. “His faculties were still 100 percent. He invited about 25 people to a luncheon for his 90th birthday and he stood up and went around the table introducing everyone to each other. He knew everyone’s first name!”

Golden remembers her father as a kind of Renaissance man.

“He was interested in architecture, he enjoyed gardening and he belonged to several book clubs and gourmet cooking groups,” she said. “And he made the jump into the computer age. He always had his iPhone, laptop and iPad. In fact, even yesterday he was trying to use his iPhone. He died with it on his chest.”

Golden also recalled early summers spent with her father on Catalina Island, where the family owned a home that had belonged to his grandparents.

“I remember those long summers and going off to our Catalina house,” she said. “He wrote an article for the Star-News about sitting on the front porch and watching passersby.”

Gally is survived by Golden, 61, of Berkeley and her husband Karl; daughter Joan Gally-McLellan, 63, of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and her husband Peter; son Tom Gally, 59, of Yokohama, Japan and his wife Ikuko; and four grandchildren.