

Jerry McKeelvy's
WAY BACK WHEN

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HE ARRESTED LEE HARVEY OSWALD



I recently visited Greenwood Cemetery in our town of Camden, Arkansas and came across the grave of Maurice "Nick" McDonald, who became well-known as the cop who arrested Lee Harvey Oswald following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963.

Mr. McDonald grew up in Camden and was raised there by his grandparents after his parents had divorced. One of his friends didn't like his first name of Maurice, so he nicknamed him "Nick" from the word "nickname" and from then on, he was known as "Nick" McDonald. He enlisted in the U. S. Navy at age 17. After two years in the Navy, he returned to Camden and continued his education and enrolled in college.

While visiting at home in Camden from a college break, he was introduced to Sally Lou Plyler who was visiting her sister who lived next door. Sally was the daughter of Jonas Marion Plyler and Ludie Sarrett Plyler originally from near Bluff City, but the Plyler family was then living at Prescott where Mr. Plyler was serving as Nevada County tax assessor. Nick and Sally dated for several months and became engaged to be married on New Year's Day of 1950.

This was when the Korean War was starting up and Nick was in the Navy Reserve at the time. On the same day he received his discharge from the Navy Reserve, he enlisted in the U. S. Air Force and was assigned to a base in Biloxi, Mississippi for training. He and Sally had planned to be married later when he was finally assigned to a permanent

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base. He was surprised one day in 1951 when Sally showed up at his base unexpectedly. Sally's sister and her husband were living in Biloxi at the time and Sally figured she could stay with them and be closer to Nick. They decided to get married then instead of waiting even though they had very little money. Nick was unable to get a three-day pass to get married, but made a deal with his barracks sergeant to cover for him at the 10 p.m. bed check and promised to be back early the next morning for roll call. They got a marriage license at the courthouse and found a preacher who agreed to marry them. The wedding took place in the preacher's study with Sally's sister and her husband as witnesses.

Two weeks later, Nick was transferred to another base and Sally returned to Prescott to stay with her parents until Nick received his permanent assignment. He was finally assigned to a base in Indiana and found a small apartment off base and sent for Sally and they finally were able to be together. Nick expected to be sent to Korea at any time, but it never happened. He was able to remain in Indiana until his discharge in 1954. By that time, the couple had two young daughters. With a growing family and entering civilian life, they decided to make their home in Dallas. Nick applied for a job as a police officer with the Dallas Police Department and was hired in 1955.

On that fateful day in November, 1963, he was working in his usual area of the city. He and his partner had stopped for lunch at their favorite cafeteria and before they had finished their meal, the waitress told them that President Kennedy had been shot. They quickly left for their patrol car. A radio call went out for all available police officers to head to the motorcade route. They responded that their unit was on its way.

Ten minutes later, they arrived and were first assigned to crowd control. About this time, a call came through that a Dallas policeman had been shot and appeared to be dead. A citizen using the patrol car radio called it in and gave the number of the patrol car. Nick recognized the patrol car number as belonging to his friend, J. D. Tippitt. A description of the suspected killer of the policeman was broadcast and Nick asked permission from his supervisor to go and help hunt the suspect they were looking for and that request was granted.

As he got to the place where they thought the suspect was, a business owner reported seeing a man entering a theater who appeared to be somewhat suspicious like he was

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running from something. He had entered the theater without buying a ticket and sat down near the back while the movie was playing. Nick decided to enter the theater by a back door and the manager told him where the suspect was sitting. There were only about ten people in the theater watching the movie that day. Nick walked up the aisle, stopping to search some of the other patrons on the way instead of directly approaching the man. When he got close enough, he told the man to stand up. The man stood up and said, "Well, it's all over now". As Nick started to search him, he hit Nick in the face with his fist while reaching for a pistol he had under his shirt. There was a scuffle and Nick tried to get hold of the pistol with one hand. During the scuffle, the pistol came in contact with Nick's face and he heard a snap, but for some reason, the pistol didn't fire. Nick managed to get the pistol from the man and handed it to other officers who had come to assist. The man was taken into custody. Nick was left with a four-inch cut on his face from the scuffle. Nick felt good that he had arrested the man who had killed his fellow officer and friend. The man was identified as Lee Harvey Oswald, an employee at the Texas School Book Depository. It was only later that Nick learned that he was also the suspected killer of President Kennedy.

Nick filled out his report of the arrest and had his picture taken showing the cut on his face since Oswald had claimed police brutality when he was arrested. A picture was also taken of Nick holding the pistol he had taken from Oswald. Two days later, as Oswald was being moved while in police custody in the basement of City Hall, a man named Jack Ruby shot and killed Oswald, the first actual murder ever broadcast live on national television.

Nick's arrest of Oswald catapulted the McDonald family into front-page news. Nick received many awards and honors for being the man who arrested Lee Harvey Oswald. Later he testified before the Warren Commission which was investigating the assassination of President Kennedy. He had been named Police Officer of the Year back in 1960, but after this event, he was awarded the highest honor from the city of Dallas—the Police Medal of Honor. He was interviewed by reporters from magazines and television shows wherever he went. He was often invited to speak to civic groups and at schools about his part in the arrest of the man who had killed the president.

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McDonald's wife, Sally, died from a stroke in 1976 at age of 44. Their daughters were married by that time and Nick was left alone. In 1978, he married Rose Daisy Brown, a dispatcher with the Dallas police department. He retired in 1980 with the rank of sergeant after 25 years' service with the police department and he and his wife moved to Hot Springs, Arkansas where they were living at the time of his death.

His wife encouraged him to write about his experiences on that day in 1963, and just before his death in 2005, he had completed his story which he entitled "Oswald and I— The Story of an Ordinary Cop in an Extraordinary Situation". The book was published in 2013 and is available for purchase online. It gives an up close and personal look at the events of that day and how those events changed his life.



"Inflation is as violent as a mugger, as frightening as an armed robber, and as deadly as a hit man." – *Ronald Reagan in 1980*

"One thing that inflation did for mankind is that there is no longer enough candy in a candy box to be fattening" – *Unknown*

"Inflation is like toothpaste. Once it's out, you can hardly get it back in again".—*Otto Pohl*

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My son's birthday is February 1.

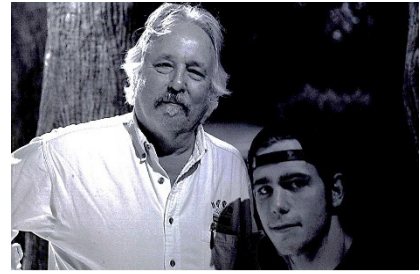
I would be grateful if you could run this poem in the next issue of Way Back When.

Thank you!

Don

Number 30 – by Don Mathis For Charlie

In Infancy, you were so sweet. As a little one,
we had such fun. Kindergarten days and early grades
led the way to adolescent faze. As a man,
you began to understand joys of living and for giving
and found how good was fatherhood. Responsibility
fostered your ability to be a parent to your infant.
And you did it well, I'm here to tell. As I've surveyed
your third decade, I've seen your grace as you face
trouble and trial all the while with fortitude
and a positive mood. So I want to say on your 30th birthday,
in all you endeavor, stay strong forever!



GEORGE HENRY'S SERVICE STATION BLUFF CITY, ARKANSAS

Sorry about the blurry picture, but this is the only known picture of this well-known landmark.