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# Steven McDonald, Paralyzed Officer Who Championed Forgiveness, Dies at 59

By RICHARD GOLDSTEIN JAN. 10, 2017

Steven McDonald, a New York City police officer who was shot by a 15-year-old boy in Central Park in July 1986 and paralyzed from the neck down, but who forgave his assailant, hoped for the youth's redemption and remained in the public eye for his spirit in the face of adversity, died on Tuesday in Manhasset, N.Y. He was 59.

His death, at North Shore University Hospital, was confirmed by a police spokesman, Lt. John Grimpel.

Officer McDonald was hospitalized on Friday after having a heart attack. He lived in the village of Malverne in Nassau County with his wife, Patricia Ann Norris-McDonald, the mayor of the village and his caregiver.

A plainclothes police officer when he was shot, Officer McDonald remained on the Police Department's payroll afterward as a first-grade detective, at times appearing at roll calls and offering support for wounded officers.

His son, Conor, who was born six months after the shooting, is a sergeant with the New York Police Department and represents the fourth generation of the family to serve in the department.

“No one could have predicted that Steven would touch so many people, in New York and around the world,” the police commissioner, James P. O’Neill, said. “Like so many cops, Steven joined the N.Y.P.D. to make a difference in people’s lives. And he accomplished that every day.”

Officer McDonald was 29 with two years on the police force when he and his partner were on patrol on July 12, 1986. About 4:15 p.m., they stopped three boys who had been reported to be loitering near the boathouse at the northern end of Central Park.

Officer McDonald began speaking with one of the boys, Shavod Jones. Seconds later, Mr. Jones pulled out a handgun and shot him three times.

All three boys were arrested.

The shooting drew wide publicity because of the grievousness of Officer McDonald’s injuries, the young age of the gunman and the callousness of the act. President Ronald Reagan phoned the officer when he was recovering at Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan to wish him well.

At his son’s baptism in a chapel at Bellevue in early 1987, Officer McDonald wrote of Mr. Jones in a statement that was read by his wife. “I forgive him,” he said, “and hope that he can find peace and purpose in his life.”

Mr. Jones was convicted of attempted murder. In the summer of 1988, Officer McDonald sent stamps and a box of stationery to Mr. Jones along with a note saying, “Let’s carry on a dialogue.” He later met with Mr. Jones’s mother and attended services at a Baptist church in Harlem with his grandmother.

The correspondence continued for a while but ended after Officer McDonald turned down a request from Mr. Jones’s family to seek parole. The officer said he was not knowledgeable or capable enough to intervene.

Mr. Jones was paroled in 1995 after eight and half years in prison, having faced up to 10 years under guidelines for sentencing juvenile offenders.

Four days after coming home, Mr. Jones died of head injuries he sustained the previous day when a speeding motorcycle on which he was a passenger crashed into parked cars while performing wheelies in East Harlem, his old neighborhood, the police said at the time.

One of the cars carried a police officer from the department's parole division who was monitoring Mr. Jones because of the case's notoriety and his troubled record while in prison. The officer received minor injuries.

Officer McDonald, who was able to speak, albeit haltingly, and breathe with the help of a respirator, made many public appearances over the years, telling of his faith as a Roman Catholic and saying that if people wanted forgiveness, they had to show it to others. He also said he was grateful to God for sparing his life.

He made trips to Northern Ireland in the cause of reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants, accompanied by the Rev. Mychal F. Judge, the chaplain of the New York City Fire Department. Father Judge was killed in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center when debris rained down on him while he was ministering to victims.

After the Central Park shooting, Officer McDonald told of his struggle to cope in the book "The Steven McDonald Story" (1989), written with his wife and the writer E. J. Kahn III. Citing the support he received from fellow police officers, Mayor Edward I. Koch and the religious and business communities, Officer McDonald wrote that "there is more love in this city than there are street corners."

Officer McDonald's life also touched the New York sports scene. Mets relief pitcher Jesse Orosco gave him the glove he was wearing when he got the final out in the team's 1986 World Series victory over the Boston Red Sox. And he appeared on the ice at Madison Square Garden annually to present the Rangers' Steven McDonald Extra Effort Award to a player who had demonstrated special grit.

Steven McDonald, a native of Queens Village, was born on March 1, 1957, and grew up in Rockville Centre on Long Island, one of eight children of David McDonald, a police sergeant, and his wife, Anita. He spent four years as a medical corpsman in the Navy before joining the Police Department.

He was living with his wife in Manhattan when he was shot, and they moved to Malverne soon afterward, buying a home there outfitted for his needs. His wife and son survive him, but complete information on survivors was not immediately available.

Officer McDonald's efforts to support others who surmounted disabilities drew national attention. In August 1996, though he was a Democrat, he addressed the Republican National Convention in San Diego in support of Senator Bob Dole's nomination, citing the serious wounds Senator Dole sustained in World War II and had overcome.

The senator "raised himself up out of a chair not unlike the one I sit in tonight," Mr. McDonald said, "and he proved that the promise of America is not a cruel deception, but a dynamic reality."