

LEWISVILLE HOTEL MEMORIES
(Written by Velma McDonald)

In 1960, my husband, Samuel Perry McDonald, and I purchased an 1898 hotel located in the north Texas small town of Lewisville in Denton County.

We were fascinated by the hotel's historical exterior and interior design. Also the furnishings which had been maintained throughout it's history.

The two story structure had outside porches upstairs and downstairs with railings. It still had clap board walls painted white. Doors and screens on each room, & the screens had half cover curtains for privacy. The heating system for the two floors contained one large gas stove located on the lower floor keeping the building very comfortable. Each individual room had been furnished with small gas heaters & small fans as needed.

At the end of each hall was a bathroom which consisted of a commode and an old fashioned claw foot bathtub. Just outside was a wash basin and mirror for washing of hands and shaving, etc.

The hotel had been converted into a mens' rooming house, rented by the week or longer. There were men renting by week, months, and even years. Many had broken homes or rented a room in order to look for work in the Denton, Dallas area. Some of these men were from out of state and all over Texas.

On the outside of the hotel in the rear was an attached wash and linen room. Also showers with five stalls, a small heater and clean, furnished linens daily.

On the upper floor ceiling were 2 large fans with open and closed shutters to be opened in the summer for air circulation, and closed in the winter.

Most of the original furnishings were still being used from the past era such as iron bedsteads & antique dressers. Some had antique chifrobes (half dresser, half closet).

In the back of the hotel was a parking area provided for buggies, wagons and hitching post to accommodate horseback riders.

Through the 18th & 19th century, the hotel accommodated not only roomers but was known to serve the best meals in the area to the public & travelers. Many cowboys working the range rode in for the noon meal. Attached to their saddle was a leather holster with inserted gun used for killing wild game, especially fox, coyotes, or other wild animals that sometimes killed their stock. When killing a fox, the men would line them upside down on a fence. Sometimes several would be killed at a time.

Being left alone to manage the business after the passing of my

husband was no problem having the experience of several years with the cooperation of the Police Department. By contributing to the association, I received membership decals which were stuck around to be seen. This seemed to have the desired affect since I had been deputized. Many of the men watched out for my welfare and informed me if there was any sign of trouble from any renter. Many men were long time middle class working men & felt this was home away from home. In order to make the men feel more at home, I provided them with a front entrance recreational room where there was always free coffee, TV and a game table.

Once a month, I served backyard Bar-B-Q lunches and every holiday a special lunch. The coffee was free to the mens' guest, night police and watchmen. I gave the men their privacy by working in my back room office.

On one occasion, I served as hostess to a backyard wedding for one of my young renters and his fiance. Cake, preacher & flowers were provided. One renter played a guitar and some of my renters were the guest. It was a happy occasion.

An elderly out of state relative made me a visit for the purpose of helping me in time of need. She and an out of state renter were sitting on the Bar-B-Q table in the backyard and from my inside office, I heard loud screams. I ran outside and saw two of the largest armadillos rumbling in front of them. They were in a bearhug on top of the table begging me for help. Neither had ever seen an armadillo before. These two armadillos were almost permanent fixtures, living under the building. I laughed so hard I cried.

I had another young renter who met and feel in love with a beautiful girl and when they married, I served cake at the reception and helped celebrate an alnight Polish reception and dance.

After closing my office one evening, three of the renters invited me to go fishing with them. One of them owned the boat so they often brought me fish. I thought it would be fun so accepted. We were still fishing after dark, trolling along, talking and having fun when suddenly we got stuck in a sand hill and broke a pin on the boat. I was scared until the boat owner improvised with a metal unit to get the motor going. As we backed out, we saw a big houseboat get stuck in the same area. There was no warning of the shallow water. I was relieved to get home. I decided it was better to leave the fishing to the men.

In the late 60's, this town allowed the Woodstock musicians to rent the previous race track property to entertain in spite of the objections of many citizens because of the negative publicity. A bus load of kids were brought through town inquiring about a place to bathe and change clothes. Someone recommended my hotel because I had a bath house with five stalls. Since the father of one of the girls was a chaperon and they all seemed so polite, just

curiosity seekers of the entertainment, I allowed them to use the showers, charging only for linens and soap. They were so appreciative and I enjoyed meeting them.

Although, being careful in selecting roomers over the years, I had the best group of men over all, most hard working, middle class. I was fortunate to have several that took it upon themselves to see that nothing got out of control and keep me informed before trouble materialized.

Upon renting, each roomer was advised about rules that had to be followed. Each man knew the police was always available when needed. A few renters did slip out at night when getting a little behind on rent and often left clothes which were stored the required time for them to claim. If not claimed, each garment was cleaned and stored in a large chifrobe in the hall to be passed on to the men in need. Many of the men were traveling with only one change of working clothes.

Being owner and manager of the hotel over a period of years, many events happened that sometimes were humorous and sometimes upsetting, but was to be expected in this kind of business as you deal with so many personalities.

Not discriminating because of age or color, I found I had rented to working illegal immigrants. One week-end, three police came rushing in informing me they were informed I had such renters living in the back apartments. As they came through the hall to the back, the aliens were jumping out of windows, around the building and into the yard. It was fun to watch. A pistol was left behind which I got rid of.

One night while in my office, I heard a noise of crashing and some bad language. rushing upstairs, the man was rather tipsy, kicking his T.V. because the program wasn't's pleasing him. Two of my other renters took over this problem.

Shortly after renting a room to an elderly man, he became a problem. He requested I change his bed to face the east in preparation for the coming of Christ. Shortly after this request, he accused me of spying on him while walking the upper hall, dressed in white. After a serious discussion about his behavior, he took his pick-up to the Lake and got stuck in shallow water and mud. Upon returning to his room, I requested he check out and leave which he did including all the bed linens which I provided.

Renting a room to another elderly gentleman was a mistake although he seemed normal at the time. However we soon found out differently. My renters informed me he was walking back & forth on the upstairs porch talking in two voices in code. We soon discovered he was in shell shock from WWI and his family had to remove him from the premises

One time after renting a room to a very nice appearing young man,

I noted he never unpacked his car except for his shaving kit. Soon some of my renters complained he was trying to con them. He was two days behind on his rent & some of the men said he was night clubbing. I had approached him to pay up immediately and he told me he was going out to get some money to pay me off. Later in the evening, three policemen came rushing down the hall, practically pushing me into my office, then requested I lock the door. The young man was on the run from Oklahoma where he had robbed a bank. The police had no record on him at the time I had requested information about him. I never knew if he had ever been apprehended.

One Saturday while serving a Thanksgiving meal for the men, I walked one of my new renters. He handed me a rather pretty pot plant, with a little card not read at the time. He reached my desk, picked up my car keys, saying he had to take a drivers test to be able to drive a truck the following morning. He was employed by a company in town. He said he would be back in two hours. He took off before we had time to make our protest, knowing full well the office was closed on Saturday and that he was stealing my car. The men said he was in the habit of making the night clubs on the week-ends.

Two car loads of us jumped into cars and started down the night club strip, knowing my red van could be seen easily in parking lots. We finally drove to the closest night club. Sure enough, there it was. Getting permission from the Club guard, I got my keys from under the hood and as we started off, we saw him wobbling out with a bottle in his hand, his cowboy hat missing.??????????
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When we got back to the hotel, the men sent me to my office to close and lock the door. The men waited for his entrance. He went upstairs, kicking the door. The men had locked it and stood at the bottom of the stairs. One man went up, collared him and escorted him out of the building. Getting back to my office, I finally had a chance to look at the card on the plant he had given me and it said "I Love You". I never heard the last of this as the flowers cost me over seven dollars.

Shortly after renting a large two bedroom upstairs apartment to two men, I became suspicious after noticing they began having an unusual amount of friends coming in and out daily. Getting a tip, we found they were gambling. I called the police for investigation. The police made a raid after observing them for a time. They found they had not only set up gambling tables, but had in their possession, stolen business uncashed checks and lots of money. They were taken to jail immediately.

Early one morning, as I stepped outside in the back of the hotel, I noted a big wild looking mangy, slobbering dog. He was headed for my back door where I was standing. Scared, I yelled to everyone around to stay inside knowing the dog was rabid. I called the police to send help immediately informing them of the

circumstances so as to be prepared for what was needed. The police arrived quickly with a pick-up, rope and gun. Nervously, the police took aim and shot him on my back sidewalk which I had to wash down with Purex water and soap to kill all germs.

In 1972, I sold the hotel. In 1976, the hotel burned to the ground taking the antiques with it. Having been a landmark in Lewisville for so many years, it was a sad sight walking through the rubble. Also, many memories went up in smoke along with those contents.

Memories such as wonderful friends who helped with the remodeling of the premises and the many years of visits from those friends. Naming only a few such as Horace and Mary White & Shawn, John and Olean Underwood, Ross & Juanita McCurley and so many others it is hard to remember and name them all. Also the fact that my husband died in the hotel.

After selling the hotel and talking with natives of Lewisville, they also have many memories. There is a rumor that a tunnel went from under the hotel to somewhere on Mill Street. For what purpose no one seems to know except to maybe bootleg liquor and no telling what else. It may be only a rumor, but it would be fun to know for sure.

If only the walls of the hotel could talk, can you just imagine the stories they would have to tell?