

Museum News: A Dear, Sweet Lady

by C. W. (Bill) Smith, curator

Terrell County Memorial Museum

In my job as curator of the Museum, one of my functions is to collect obituaries of residents, former residents and those deceased who were born here but buried elsewhere. As a consequence I see many, many obituaries. At present there are about 1900 obituaries available on the Museum web site (terrellmuseum.info) and I have handled every single one of them. If I can't find an obituary, I will sometimes research the person and at least gather basic information that tells a little bit about them and create a short death notice, including, name, place of birth and death, dates, parent names, children names and spouse(s) names, in short, information that might give a genealogist help in locating other information.

Since I was not reared in Sanderson I never met most of these persons. But, being a historian, I am interested in every story that comes across my desk.

Occasionally, though, I run across an obituary for someone I knew. When I see these it makes me sad to see their lives summed up in just five short paragraphs. How can a whole life of accomplishment and experiences be reduced to 150 words?

In January of 2012 I placed an obituary online of someone very dear to me, Jackie McKinney Adams. She was one of the nicest people you will ever meet. I met her in Marathon when I was four years old when she came to work as a waitress in my dad's Big Bend Cafe on main street Marathon, where the old book store is located. And, I fell madly in love with her!

Beautiful, flaming redheads, Jackie Foutch and her sister, Sally, both worked for my dad in the cafe, and I was walking on Cloud Nine. Of course, she didn't see me as anything more than a curly-headed blond kid constantly getting under her feet. She was kind and patient with me, but she had her eye on the young guy working down the street at the Gulf Station, Tommy McKinney.

Tommy was a multi-talented guy, not only a mechanic and gas pump jockey, but a very talented musician who played the "bull" fiddle in the Cook Brothers Band and other groups, and liked to jam with my sister Margie Lee and her husband Sam Allen at their house sessions. That's how I met Tommy, sawing and thumping away on that big upright bass, my sister hammering away at the piano and singing and my brother-in-law strumming the guitar. They, with a couple of others, could have had a great band by themselves.

Eventually, Tommy and Jackie tied the knot, and not long after, Les and Jimmy came along. Before we knew it, they had moved down the road to Sanderson.

I never forgot Jackie, however, who was my first crush and case of puppy love.

As time passed, Les and Jimmie grew up and, sadly, Tommy passed away. A few years later Jackie remarried, again to another Marathon man and, again, another multi-talented fellow.

Sam Adams had spent his life working for the Texas Highway Department, but he could have done anything he wanted. He was the type of guy who would get a book about a subject and become a real expert in a short time.

I first saw this when he wanted to build a brick home for his first wife. He did not have any experience at masonry, but he got a book on the subject and, with a little advice from local builders, built a beautiful home with absolutely perfect masonry, laying every brick all by himself.

Another time, he decided he wanted to build guitars. He got a book and some local advice, then began to turn out absolutely gorgeous guitars in native woods, with quite a waiting list of customers wanting his product.

After a few years he tired of creating guitar masterpieces and decided he wanted to build saddles. Out came the books on leatherworking and saddle making and soon people were clamoring for his saddles.

He tired of all the intricate leatherwork and decided to make just the saddle tree, the wooden framework on which the leather sat. His trees, however, were works of art and perfection. He shipped them all over the world. I ran into Sam at the post office in Marathon one time when he was shipping a saddle tree to a customer. He didn't have to pack it...it was like a piece of iron. He just put a tag on it and shipped to the buyer. I marveled at how it resembled a piece of modern art, perfect in symmetry and slick as something stamped from a machine.

And all this time, Jackie assisted him during their years together, helping and encouraging and surely marveling at what she saw coming from his mind and hands. How could one woman be so fortunate as to have two talented husbands, true Renaissance men and really nice guys, to boot?

All too quickly the time passed and Jackie found herself a widow once again. She moved back to Sanderson to be closer to Les and Debbie, and I ran into her at the post office. You talk about a person who could put a smile on your face just by her presence, that was Jackie McKinney, and that was how I always knew her. We visited up a storm at the post office and I was a silly four year-old all over again. As we parted I told her I would bring my wife and come visit as soon as she got settled in her new home. Unfortunately, only a few weeks later I was shocked to receive the news that Jackie had passed away.

I miss that dear, sweet lady, someone who obviously made an indelible impression on me throughout my whole life. She was a ray of sunshine who brightened my day every time I saw her. And, though I am sad even now, the memory of that fiery red hair and sweet disposition brings gladness to my heart. I am so fortunate in having known her, and those of you who also knew her know exactly what I am talking about.

