

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewees: **Dennis A. McAfee**

Interview Date: 11/17/2015

Interviewer: Jane Goodsell

Transcriber: Robert Gaffney

Location: 307 Fort Street, Richmond, Texas

19 Pages



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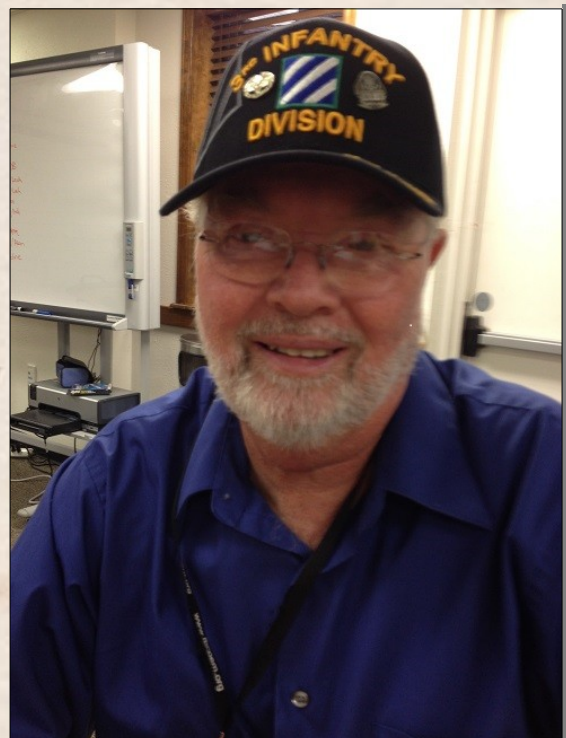
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*Dennis McAfee*

*Transcript*

GOODSILL: Today is November 17, 2015. My name is Jane Goodsill and I'm interviewing Dennis McAfee. This interview is being conducted by the Fort Bend County Historical Commission and is part of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission Oral History Project for a series on the history of this building that we're in now, 307 Fort Street, Richmond, Texas. Will you start with your name and date of birth?

McAFEE: Dennis McAfee, April 4, 1950.

GOODSILL: It's my understanding that this building has had three separate usages. It was the Fort Bend County Jail in 1954, then in 1981 it was the Fort Bend Juvenile Detention Center, then it was the Fort Bend County Office of Emergency Management in 2005. Will you tell us which of these you're familiar with?

McAFEE: Juvenile Detention. I'm from Fort Bend County. I worked for Harris County Juvenile Probation for ten years. I wanted to get back over here and the job became available and I applied for it. I went to see Judge Jody Savinoha and Judge Thomas R. Culver. The next thing I knew I had an interview and they hired me in either March or May of 1987.

GOODSILL: What were your qualifications?

McAFEE: I had ten years experience and I'm a graduate of Sam Houston State University in Criminology and Corrections and I have Master's Degree in Criminology and Corrections.

GOODSILL: So they had converted it from a jail into a detention center?

McAFEE: Yes, at that time it was a detention center.

GOODSILL: Had you ever been in it when it was a jail?

McAFEE: No, I had not.

GOODSILL: But the conversion probably wasn't too huge.

McAFEE: It wasn't. It was already equipped with the existing cells, which we used to hold the kids. I think at the time we could hold 36 kids here.

GOODSILL: When you were here, were there ever more than 36 kids?

McAFEE: Oh, we were over full.

GOODSILL: Really?

McAFEE: That's why we built the new center in 1994.

GOODSILL: So this was full to capacity for a lot of the time you were working here?

McAFEE: Yes. The other building on Gulfview was built in the early nineties because we were full. The county was experiencing a lot of growth at that time. I grew up in Rosenberg in the fifties and sixties. Went to school here. There were about 40,000 people in the whole county, counting the cities and the rural areas.

It was about 200,000 in 1987 and by 1990 it was over 250,000. Today it's around 700,000. It's had a lot of growth and a lot of changes. Not many of us "originals" are left. Judge Culver brought me over and introduced me to the crew. We called it the Juvenile Detention Center but it's called the Juvenile Probation Department now and it has a detention center as part of it. There were Probation Officers, secretaries Detention Officers and a whole staff for both departments. It's one department but it's both parts of the "engine". I was all in this one, little building here on this side.

There was a "sally port" and that's the way officers would bring their kids in; through the "sally port". We ran out of room, as I was saying, in the old building with a capacity of 36. We had to use some of the cells as offices.

GOODSILL: Some of those offices still have cell doors!

McAFEE: They're still there. They operated 24 hours of the day at that time. We only had two Detention Officers on per shift and up to 36 kids. We were short staffed. We were trying to come into compliance with state standards also. We had a room upstairs that had a real heavy duty washer and dryer in it. The washers and dryers went out every six months because they never stopped running. We were always washing clothes and bedding.

GOODSILL: Did you have staff to do it or did you guys do it?

McAFEE: The Detention Officers did it.

GOODSILL: No job too small.

McAFEE: No.

GOODSILL: Laundry is an important one.

McAFEE: Health and hygiene in a crowded situation is very important all the time.

GOODSILL: Do you want to tell us more about that?

McAFEE: Sure. Let me switch to food for a minute. On the first floor there was the kitchen. When I was hired we were just beginning to serve frozen dinners to the kids. It was convenient and fast but it really wasn't the best nutrition. We remodeled the kitchen, put in a big stove with a big vent hood. I hired a cook. We started cooking and serving the kids hot meals.

GOODSILL: Did that work out pretty well?

McAFEE: Oh, yes, a lot better.

GOODSILL: Probably more economical, too.

McAFEE: In the long run, if you start figuring it out, meals were under a dollar each by the time you bought it through wholesale prices and the Purchasing Agent with the county. It really worked out very well. It was also better, health-wise, for the kids. A lot of kids come in with a lot of health problems. A lot of kids were not fed properly; some were overweight and some were underweight. We got them on a regular diet and that helped with managing behavioral problems. If they feel better and their health is better, they're not acting out as much. It was a good move to do that.

GOODSILL: What was your title?

McAFEE: Chief Juvenile Probation Officer.

GOODSILL: So you had the authority to make that change in the food situation?

McAFEE: Yes, as long as I could accommodate it in the budget. At the time, Jodie Stavinoha, the Juvenile Board, and all the County Commissioners were totally on board with what we needed to do to really catch up. We were kind of behind-the-eight-ball when I came in.

GOODSILL: Had the juvenile problem increased without the Commissioners having paid a huge amount of attention to it?

McAFEE: Yes, that was the situation. It's not because the percentage of crime went up. We had an increase in population. We could have the same percentage of crime but the numbers are higher because more people come in and you need space.

GOODSILL: What was the nature of the crimes or offenses that people were held for?

McAFEE: Well, back then, there weren't many girls that came in. But it started changing. Girls started getting in trouble, too. Most of the crimes were misdemeanors. Back in the late eighties we had a real serious situation with a group called the Wolverines. These kids battered and killed their parents. I don't want to get into the particulars. That was the very beginning of some big changes of the types of behavior and problems we were starting to see.

GOODSILL: This was a group of kids?

McAFEE: Yes. There were six or seven of them. They called themselves the Wolverines.

GOODSILL: Did more than one of those kids attack their own parents?

McAFEE: They all attacked them. They planned to do it at the same time one night, and they did. Not all of them were successful but about half of them were. They killed their parents.

GOODSILL: Were they hard to deal with when you got them into custody?

McAFEE: No.

GOODSILL: Tell me about that.

McAFEE: Well, they had done what they set out to do and they got caught. It was basically over. They knew we were going to take them to court and certify them to stand trial as adults because of the nature of their crimes. That's what the law allows and that's what we did. We separated them. We watched them 24 hours a day. We didn't put them together. One of them was a girl.

GOODSILL: The cells in this facility were self-enclosed; they didn't have bars between them so they couldn't communicate back and forth. They were in different rooms?

McAFEE: Some of them had bars between them. They could communicate between them.

GOODSILL: You chose which ones?

McAFEE: You put one down on this end and you put the other one on the furthest end. That was the beginning of an increase in felony cases. We were overcrowded anyway. That's what I was leading up to. We were overcrowded as Probation Officers and what used to be jail cells. The other building was unoccupied. We took it over and I moved myself, some of the Probation Officers, some of the clerks and the secretaries over there and then converted some of the cells back to being cells again. We became overcrowded again and I approached the Juvenile Board and the courts about expansion. They knew we had to do something. So we built the existing facility out on Golfview. I was fortunate enough to be in the planning and layout of that building.

GOODSILL: Oh, was that interesting for you?

McAFEE: Very! I had a lot of experience with the Harris County facilities; what does and doesn't work.

GOODSILL: Well, you knew from here what worked and didn't work, too.

McAFEE: Right. You combine all of that and don't reinvent the wheel. You eliminate the things that don't work. I got to act as the general manager. Every day I was over there (FBC Juvenile Detention Center construction) watching it being built. That way you knew what you were going to get.

GOODSILL: Tell me some of the things that you felt were important. What did you institute over there that turned out to be effective?

McAFEE: The most obvious is the size. It's over a 100,000 square feet. The front of the building was Juvenile Probation and Administration. The back of the building is a Detention Facility. In the front of the building you have the kids coming in on probation, secretaries and the Administration people. You have a locked gate that separates the front from the Detention area. From the Central Control Room there's a Unit from which you can look down this way, straight ahead there's another Unit you can look over this-a-way and from another Unit you can look that-a-way. One of the units was for girls and two were for boys. We could separate misdemeanor kids from felons. I added two padded isolation cells for kids who would become uncontrollable, which happens sometimes. We had one for the boys and one for the girls. We added a nice, central kitchen, and three cooks so that we could provide meals. And I added a classroom. I went to Lamar Consolidated Independent School District and got them to realize that we weren't educating the kids, which is a lot of the problem, and they came in and took over and started providing education in the detention center.

GOODSILL: That was brilliant! How long did you work over there?

McAFEE: Until 1998. Then I went to the jail complex.

GOODSILL: Oh, you did?

McAFEE: Yes, for eighteen years. Milton Wright was elected and he made me an offer I couldn't refuse.

GOODSILL: What did you do at the Sheriff's Office?

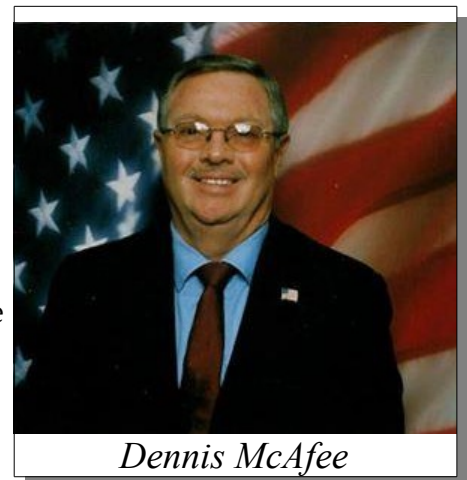
McAFEE: The Sheriff's Office is basically law enforcement and you respond to issues. He was thinking outside of the box. "What can we do with kids at the Sheriff's Office?" So I came up with juvenile truancy prevention program. He gave me officers and we started teaching kids in the schools about making good choices and staying in school.

GOODSILL: And what happened if they didn't?

McAFEE: Well, that's an interesting point because, with the cooperation of all the agencies in the county, and the approval of the district attorney, we started doing truancy sweeps. We started hitting the streets and looking for kids on the streets. We'd find out what school they really go to. You call that school and say, "I've got Johnny..." They say, "Yeah, he's supposed to be here. He doesn't have Early Release." "Okay, we're bringing him back." We take him back to school and let the school deal with the truancy laws at that point. Then we started working with parents. If parents called us and they were having trouble with their kids, we'd go to them and deal with the parents and their kids. It's still going today.

Somewhere in there the sheriff got interested in some new programs and needed money to fund them. Running the budget in Juvenile for so many years, I was real familiar with budgets and how to prepare them. I said, "Let's apply for some grants. I'll do it." To make a long story short, in addition to being the Juvenile Outreach Officer with the truancy program, I became the Grants Coordinator. Over the rest of the years, I also wrote grants for the Sheriff's Office.

GOODSILL: So you did both of those jobs?



McAFEE: I did both of those jobs. During the time I was there we got about \$20 million in grants. That's what I did over at the Sheriff's Office.

GOODSILL: You have one of those brains where you like to figure things out and put them in the right place?

McAFEE: Well, I got the truancy thing going and I got the right kind of people to work with the kids and the parents. I got a good sergeant who knew how to run things so I had time to expand Grant coordination.

GOODSILL: Were some of those grants used for the kids?

McAFEE: Actually, yes. Not too many come along like that. But some of them, like Target, Coca Cola, and agencies like that, give, not a lot of money, but they give some money for kids programs. I was able to tap into that.

GOODSILL: It must have felt really good after you'd been in Probation for so long to begin to do prevention of truancy, prevention of crime, prevention of juvenile detention.

McAFEE: Right. Because truancy today isn't like truancy fifty years ago where you went down to the river and fished. Most of the kids who are truant today are into other things they shouldn't be into. I felt pretty good about, maybe, turning somebody's life around.

GOODSILL: That's a good thing. Let's go back to when you were working in this building. Tell me what your day-to-day life would have been like.

McAFEE: As the chief, even in the new building, but particularly over here because there's so many issues when you're crowded, you're really never off duty.

GOODSILL: It's all people management, isn't it? And paper management?

McAFEE: Yeah. When somebody leaves you've got to fill his or her position. When you can't fill their position then you use your other staff to fill in. A lot of our secretaries at the time were Detention Officers. To be a good Detention Officer, you had to go through state training. They were certified as Detention Officers and they were my emergency backups while we were trying to get other staff in here. You might have been the secretary today and somebody called in the nighttime and you worked the night shift.



We did what it took to make it run. Basically as the chief for ten years I never got off duty. You're always on call. You try to restrict your calls to what you describe as emergencies but you're never off duty. It's 24 hours a day. You're always worried or thinking about it. Or you get up in the middle of the night and can't sleep. You go down there and check on everybody. It was pretty intense for a decade for me. It sure was enjoyable though.

GOODSILL: What part of it did you enjoy?

McAFEE: Oh, gosh, the whole thing. The running of it, the managing of it, the people, working with the kids, working with the parents, working with the courts, working with the County Judge and the County Commissioners. I enjoyed the whole thing.

GOODSILL: Do you think that being a Detention Officer you have to have a particular personality?

McAFEE: Yes. You mention detention but it applies to Probation Officers, Detention Officers, even the cooks.

GOODSILL: Same set of skills?

McAFEE: Same kind of behavioral personality skills is what you're looking for. If I interview you and you say you "love the kids," I'm not going to hire you. I'm looking for the person who can be calm, who can handle a stressful situation, can handle an emergency or a fight between kids without overreacting, a person who knows how to not escalate a situation, and you've got to be reserved and stay calm. If you find that kind of person and train them, then you can make them a good Detention Officer or a good Probation Officer, a good cook. They interact with the kids, too. They're all talking to the kids.

GOODSILL: And you have to get somebody who can't be easily conned.

McAFEE: Right. Somebody who realizes these are kids who aren't always going to tell you the truth and know how to work the system.

GOODSILL: Sometimes they're volatile and sometimes they're pouty.

McAFEE: Right. Somebody who can recognize those kinds of things and wonders what's going on with the kid. By the time I left, we were recognized as the best Juvenile Probation Department in the state.

GOODSILL: That's something to be proud of.

McAFEE: I won Chief of the Year awards.

GOODSILL: That must have made you proud.

McAFEE: It did.

GOODSILL: Were there ever any medical issues that needed to be addressed?

McAFEE: Yes. If a kid comes to you and they're sick, you can't take them. The agency that arrests them has to take them to a medical facility and solve the situation before they could come in. We didn't have any nurses. Another thing we added in the new building was a nursing staff 24 hours a day. Basically if a kid got sick and we couldn't handle it we had to go to the emergency room over here in Rosenberg and let them handle it and then bill the county. I did get a dentist friend of mine to donate dental work to kids for free. That way some of the kids were able to get dental work.

GOODSILL: That could be a life changer.

McAFEE: Yeah, it was. The way they looked, the way they talked, the way they act all ties together. Also if they needed prescriptions it was a problem because back then, basically Rosenberg/Richmond shut down at ten o'clock. There weren't any 24-hour pharmacies.

GOODSILL: Things have changed, haven't they?

McAFEE: Yeah. Over the course of time most things changed. It helped adding 24-hour nursing because they could do a lot of prevention stuff, they can see a lot of stuff coming on (and) take care of it.

GOODSILL: Did wounding or accidents happen in the detention center?

McAFEE: Probably the most would be somebody got into a fight, got their lip busted or something like that but really no accidents of a severe nature. The deal with detention is three main issues: care, custody, and control. If you enforce those three things you're not going to have a lot of problems.

GOODSILL: How did bathrooms and showers work in detention center? Did they have toilets in their cells?

McAFEE: Yes. We didn't have a lot of problems with shower time because you knew to take certain kids at certain times. Don't put certain kids together to prevent bullying. Always protect the girls. Take them at completely different times. All the cells had toilets in them. Sometimes some of the kids liked to stop them up. That was a favorite thing. The cells upstairs had what we called a catwalk behind it so the cells didn't go all the way to the wall. The cells ended with enough space that we could walk behind them, up and down the catwalk.

GOODSILL: No one's told me that.

McAFEE: I don't even know if it's still up there. It would be interesting to go see. Sometimes we could hide around the corner and watch them.

GOODSILL: As the population changed probably the ethnicity of the county changed as well. Is that anything we need to talk about?

McAFEE: We're really recognized as one of the most ethnically diverse in the country. In the beginning it was mostly white kids and black kids, some Spanish kids. As time wore on, it changed. We never did get many Asian kids. They're very close knit and family oriented. They tend to take care of themselves. The ethnic mix reflected the county changes.

GOODSILL: Going back to the education feature, how long were these kids in custody? Could the education really get an opportunity to kick in?

McAFEE: In some kids it did. The way it works in detention is there's no such thing as a bail bond. They can't get out until a judge lets them get out.

GOODSILL: And that is based upon an officer's recommendation and the kid's behavior and attitude?

McAFEE: And usually what their priors were, if they had any priors or were runaways. When you come in, Detention decides whether to hold you or not. What we did is outline certain kinds of misdemeanors that we don't have to hold. If it was a property offense you can let them go back home and we'll see them in court. If it's against a person, we're going to hold them, tell the judge and let the judge make that decision.

GOODSILL: So if they hurt a car that would be one set of circumstances, if they hurt a person, that would be another.

McAFEE: Or invaded a house. That would be a crime against a person. We held all the felonies automatically. Every ten days that kid has to go back in court to see the Juvenile Judge. The Probation Officer says, "We want to hold them", or "Judge, I think we can release them." Let's say we got a kid in here for murder. He might be here for a year, year-and-a-half. So they're going to be in school for a year, year-and-a-half. You don't want to enroll all of the kids that first ten days. They have other things to think about and it's a paperwork nightmare to enroll a kid and ten days later he's gone.

So we take in a kid, we hold them, if they're going to make it through that first ten days and the judge says, "We're going to keep holding them", then we enroll them in school. Even if it's just ten more days. Maybe they'll get something out of it.

GOODSILL: And it gives them discipline and structure to their days. So when you were at this facility, could you do any kind of schooling or was it beyond your capability?

McAFEE: Oh, no, this was in the new building. At the old building you didn't have that opportunity. No room to do that.

GOODSILL: When you first started working here, there were specific juvenile judges.

McAFEE: Yes, Judge Culver was one of them and Judge Walter McMeans was the other one. In emergencies, the County Judge could take over. Judge Stavinoha would hold detention hearings if one of those judges were tied up in a case. Basically Judge Culver and Judge McMeans did all of the final rulings on cases.

GOODSILL: You respected them?

McAFEE: Oh yes. It was a mutual thing. We'd gotten to the point where they realized that we had a really good staff who knew what they were doing and they relied a lot on our findings and recommendations.

GOODSILL: Will you tell us something about Tiny Gaston?

McAFEE: Tiny Gaston was the sheriff. He was a longtime law enforcement person here. I remember when I was growing up, Tiny was the sheriff in the fifties and sixties.

GOODSILL: Give us a visual of him. His name is Tiny because...?

McAFEE: He was called Tiny because he was a big, tall guy. To a little kid, somebody who was six foot four, or whatever he was, was a monster. I remember stories of friends of mine saying at four o'clock in the morning he would meet the delivery people coming from Houston delivering goods to the merchants on the back street of Morgan Street. He would be there to be sure they got there safely and all the merchants got their stuff in. He was protecting his city and the town.

GOODSILL: Making sure there was going to be no disruption to the system?

McAFEE: Yes. Nobody stealing anything. I don't know a lot about when he was the sheriff in particular because I was a child. He had a reputation of respect amongst all of the adults. They liked Tiny. Big Tiny. When I came here as the chief in 1987 he was not the sheriff. He had retired. But he decided he needed to get back in law enforcement and he got elected as Constable. I got to work with him as constable. He was a pretty good guy. Family oriented. Community oriented. A "no nonsense" person, that's a good way of putting it.

GOODSILL: You've had a long career and except for those ten years when you were in Houston, you've been out here in Fort Bend County.

McAFEE: Twenty-six years. Forty years all together.

GOODSILL: When did you say you retired?

McAFEE: January 2014.

GOODSILL: Some people tell some stories of unusual things that happened in this building.



*Dennis McAfee*

McAFEE: Okay. That reminds me about something. We always had plumbing problems in this building. The building itself is very structurally sound. This is an emergency shelter built to withstand two hundred mile-an-hour winds but we had lots of plumbing problems. We always had roof leak problems. The secretaries would come in and if it had rained or there had been a plumbing leak their whole desk would be wet. We got into the habit, before we moved into the new building, that before the secretaries left, they'd cover their entire desk with plastic, their chairs and everything.

GOODSILL: Okay. Any ghost stories? Any odd things that happened?

McAFEE: No, I don't recall anything like that. Oh, we had to shut the facility down for about two months because they were working on the plumbing. In between the first floor and the second floor there's an area that you can't walk in. You have to stoop down. It's only about two foot high, three foot high. That is where all the plumbing issues were. It was full of asbestos so the Maintenance Department got with the county judge and they said, "We've got to do something because that's a health hazard." So we shut down Detention. We shut down this whole building. Had to farm the kids out to any other counties that had detention centers that we rent a bed space for a couple months.

GOODSILL: That must have been very chaotic.

McAFEE: Yes, it was. When they came in to do the asbestos abatement the guys wore space-looking suits. Everything was covered with plastic to enter and get out. Of course, it all worked out in the long run, but our headaches were that transportation became a big problem because if the police arrested somebody and it was a felony we had four or five counties we had to contact for bed space. Maybe the nearest one at that time was Harris County. So we would have to transport to Harris County. We didn't have any kids here to watch but Detention Officers still had lots of transportation duties.

GOODSILL: Let's talk about transportation because the kids needed to be transported every now and again to different locations, right?

McAFEE: To court mostly.

GOODSILL: But court was fairly close to here. Was that walking or driving?

McAFEE: We drove them. All of the kids were handcuffed and put into a van. There's a back entrance to the courthouse but you can't help but meet the public when you take them up the elevators. Now the Sheriff's Office has an underground entrance. When we were shut down and kids were coming in and we were having to farm them out, that was a transportation nightmare.

GOODSILL: Your officers did double duty then.

McAFEE: Then we got to go pick them up for court. Maybe the night shift had seven or eight kids come in and they were running all over the country. Then the morning shift came in at six o'clock and they've got kids that have court at eight o'clock, so the night shift might have been lucky enough that they hit one county where they're taking a kid and then picked up another one because he had to come back.

Then you bring him back and you sit and watch him until the shift comes in the morning to watch him, to take him to court, and after court to take him back to where he was being held.

GOODSILL: It's not very efficient, is it?

McAFEE: It was a nightmare. But we got through it.

GOODSILL: Have you been to the county courthouse since it's been renovated?

McAFEE: Oh, yes. The courthouse to us was the Travis Building, which was the new building.

GOODSILL: What have I not asked about? I was interested in your work on the budgets at the Sheriff's Office.

McAFEE: Everybody in the Sheriff's Office does their individual budget and turns it into the Budget Officer. She puts them together into one budget. I did the Criminal Investigation Division budget for six years.

GOODSILL: What's involved with that? I don't know much about the Criminal Investigation Division.

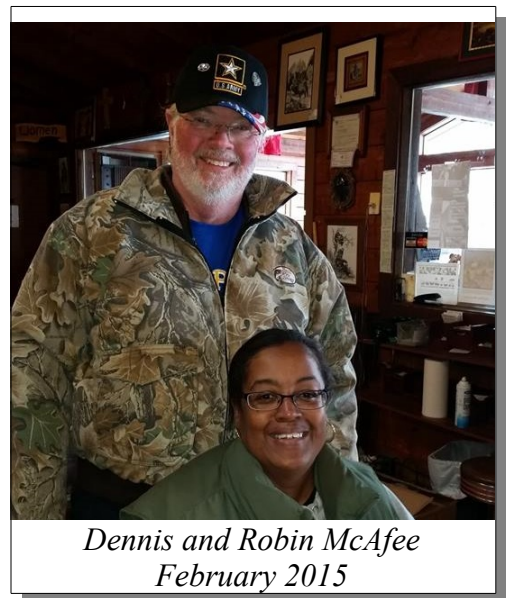
McAFEE: The detectives need transportation, cars, office supplies, printers, computers, cameras, they need flashlights, they need recorders. That has to be in the budget. They provide their own weapon in the Sheriff's Office.

GOODSILL: What are you doing in retirement, if you don't mind my asking?

McAFEE: My wife and I are retired. She's retired from Juvenile Probation. She had thirty-six years. She was a Budget Manager, she may be an interesting person for you to interview.

GOODSILL: What's her name?

McAFEE: Robin McAfee. She did thirty-six years. She started out under Zora Dell Cole with the District Clerk's office, then to the DA (District Attorney) and finally to Juvenile probation.



*Dennis and Robin McAfee  
February 2015*

She stayed with Juvenile the rest of the time. She ran the budget, in the old building and the new building.

GOODSILL: Was she here when you were working here? Is that how you met her?

McAFEE: Yes.

GOODSILL: Really! That's a good story.

McAFEE: I did the budget. I give it to the Budget Officer. She (Robin McAfee) ran the budget during the year. She had the expenditures.

GOODSILL: Now why would she be an interesting person for me to interview?

McAFEE: Because she has a history from before I even came here in this building. She did payroll and ran the expenditures and the accounts and things like that. You'll find her full of information.

GOODSILL: You were going to tell me, now that you're retired...

McAFEE; Oh, yes. We bought a 'fifth wheel' and we are in Corpus Christi right now. I don't know where I'll be in the spring; we go wherever we want. I met a guy down there who is on the Coastal Conservation Association Board. He's a veteran, like me. He runs an organization called Heroes On the Water (HOW). We plan fishing trips. We take mostly Iran and Iraq veterans out fishing. It's an organized type thing. We've got one coming up Saturday. It's in the name of a veteran who committed suicide. We provide the kayaks and all the fishing gear and we'll take them out. We'll pull them out in boats and let them loose and let them fish all day. Then come back in, feed them, and have a good time. So, I'm involved with Heroes On the Water.



*Dennis McAfee, Heroes On Water*

GOODSILL: Do you do the organizing of it or do you actually go out in the boat?

McAFEE: Both.



GOODSILL: I hear about these programs and I see them on TV. Dick Cheney has something similar to this that he does in Wyoming, takes the vets out, right?

McAFEE: Yeah.

GOODSILL: What's it like when you see the vets out there doing their activities?

McAFEE: Well, they're strong.

GOODSILL: They are?

McAFEE: Yeah.

GOODSILL: Physically or mentally?

McAFEE: Both. These guys are unbelievable. Even the paraplegics. Unbelievable guys.

GOODSILL: And they're fairly young still?

McAFEE: Oh, yeah. They're all in their twenties and early thirties.

GOODSILL: You mean they stay fit?

McAFEE: The paraplegics have a hard time staying fit. We take them out in boats where we can put them in and take them out. But they're strong. They're strong mentally.

GOODSILL: How do you notice that? What do you mean?

McAFEE: The way they talk. The way they act. Their beliefs. They're okay that they got hurt. 'We're going to go on. If I can go back, I go back.'

GOODSILL: Really?

McAFEE: Oh, yes. In a heartbeat. They just know what they believe in. They were doing the right thing for freedom. They're all very, very, very dedicated. All of them.

GOODSILL: Really.

McAFEE: Yup. I've met some that are troubled and we help with suicide issues by just hanging out. The ones that are more troubled, Heroes On the Water, we have them just come over every once in awhile. We'll do a little barbecue.

GOODSILL: Just to show them humanity, just to be with other people.

McAFEE: Yes. They just need to be around us, you know? Spend some time. "Come on over." We're taking twenty-four of them on an offshore tuna trip on December the 4th. There'll be twenty-four of us on this big boat out of Port Aransas. We're going to go 110 miles out to fish for three days for tuna. The boat last week caught 7,000 pounds so we're going to be busy.

GOODSILL: No particular special needs for these guys?

McAFEE: They're either wounded or they've got PTSD. We can handle paraplegics. We just go for it. There's no such thing as saying no. It doesn't matter.

GOODSILL: What do you mean?

McAFEE: Who'll say no to a vet? It don't matter what their needs are, you meet it.

GOODSILL: It's handy that you were a medic in Vietnam.

McAFEE: Oh, yeah. Very. If they're paraplegics, you take them. The boat's 85 feet long and we can accommodate them. We'll push them around. We'll take care of them. We'll feed them. We'll take them to the bathroom. Whatever it takes. Wheel them up to the end of the thing to catch a fish, put a pole in their hand, let them catch it.

GOODSILL: Oh, the joy in their faces.

McAFEE: Oh, it's wonderful. Heroes On the Water's really a good thing for all these guys.

GOODSILL: What do most of these guys do or what do some of them do in their day-to-day lives?

McAFEE: The ones that are capable are working. A lot of them are in the oil field business right now if they haven't been laid off. They're trying to gain some stability in their lives. Work is a good thing because it keeps them occupied and keeps them going, gets them in a routine. The thing to do is get them into a routine. Don't let them sit around, wait around.

GOODSILL: Get them doing something that matters and then the next thing is to help them to do something to help somebody else.

McAFEE: We haven't got to that point with some of them yet but we are working on it.

GOODSILL: Doing this work is probably part of YOUR healing.

McAFEE : Yeah, it is. It's helped a whole lot.

GOODSILL: That's a great thing. That's a good story. I admire your work.

McAFEE: Well, thank you.

GOODSILL: Does your wife do any of that, too?

McAFEE: No, she just likes to fish.

GOODSILL: Does she ever get to go out with you guys fishing?

McAFEE: Oh, yeah, she's on the boat. She loves to fish. We're having a good time. We just got back from Alaska.

GOODSILL: Beautiful, isn't it? Pure nature immersion!

McAFEE: Oh, God! I'm going back. That's why Heroes On the Water is nice because you get them out with nature. There's something about that feeling. It's not dealing with concrete; it's not dealing with people, its nature!

GOODSILL: Wonderful, thanks for the interview, Dennis!