

Boundaries

A Novel

By David M. McGowan
© 2023

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The following story is a work of fiction. Any similarity between this story and any historical recording of events is accidental and highly unlikely. Any similarity between the characters depicted and any actual people, either living or dead, is accidental, highly unlikely and very flattering.

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Reviews for D.M. McGowan

Cold Coffee Press on “The Great Liquor War”

“Great storytelling, true-to-life cowboy experience with US and Canadian history”

“Nuggets of history told within a great story of human experience”

On Line Book Club on “The Great Liquor War”

“Action-packed and entertaining!”

“My enthusiasm remained high all the way to the end.”

Author Barbra Martin on “Homesteader: Finding Sharon”

“I didn't want to put the book down”

Paul Johnson of Reader's Favorite on “Homesteader: Finding Sharon”

“A satisfying plot with enough action to keep the reader turning pages”

Western Fiction Review on “Partners”

“Partners is a well told story that entertains and educates”

Cold Coffee Press on “The Making of Jake McTavish”

“Incredible story telling”

On Line Book Club on “The Making of Jake McTavish”

“A quick and enjoyable read”

“Skillful setting and mood descriptions”

Tom Cole, musician, songwriter, entertainer on “The Making of Jake McTavish”

“Well developed characters perfectly weaved into places and times

Review of Jake McTavish from Lydia Efobi

“This is a 5-star novel and deserves the broadest possible readership.”

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“Rebel” on “Gunfighters, Thieves and Lawmen.”

“This was just as good as William Johnstone, Louis L'Amour, Zane Grey. I'm looking forward to other stories by Mr. McGowan.

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Novels by D.M. McGowan

The Great Liquor War (1998, 2015) **
Homesteader: Finding Sharon (2009)
(** Hank James series)

Partners (2008)
The Making of Jake McTavish (2016)
Gunfighters, Thieves and Lawmen (2019)

Short Stories by D.M. McGowan

Marker of Stone
Lucky
Into the Mountains
Stealing Janet's Cattle
A Voice from Beyond
Deacon
Invasion
Blizzard
Sure, I can do that!

Forward

I'm always finding small bits of history that I was not aware of or perhaps forgot when that information was forced out of my limited storage capacity by some other surprising/interesting/unbelievable nugget of information from the past. One such tidbit that I've been aware of for several years is that the British Columbia Provincial Police did not have a detective (or inspector if you prefer) among their ranks until the reorganization undertaken in 1924, the same year they adopted uniform dress.

Until that first detective, the BCPP had been one of the Pinkerton Agencies best customers. I've speculated that perhaps that US agency wasn't the only source for an investigator or for "outside" assistance. It is certainly recorded that many "part time" or "citizen" officers were used during those early years. This story, "Boundaries" is my first attempt at a fictional presentation around that information.

On those occasions when I have time to breath, I've been known to post on my blog at www.dmmcgowan.blogspot.ca

It is possible to make comments or email from there.

There are also links on this site to may Amazon author page where you will find a bio and various other info. You can also access that author page through a search engine by entering amazon.com/author/dmmcgowan

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank those who helped bring "Boundaries" to reality. Randy Hadland, Wayne Ezeard, (Author of "Where Eagles Soar," radio host on Peace FM) and Samantha Zwicker, co-director of Hoja Nueva of Peru who has created many of my covers. More information about them and their facility can be found at <https://hojanueva.org/>

But above all , Karen Lynne McGowan who has been by herself as I disappear into a computer screen.

Prologue

Sure, I can tell you how they cleaned up that nest of vipers but the information won't do you much good in today's world. These days you have to be so very careful you follow the rules while the low-life you're up against just ignores the rules and slithers around them. Back in those days, though, things were a little different.

Not that cleaning out that bunch of snakes made a long-term difference. True, for a few years those that took over, mainly that first woman boss, were not as harmful to the area as those they replaced but as time went on, they became more dangerous to society in general. That female boss, slick as she was, became even slicker when she made herself respectable and others took over. The new bosses, the third bunch were quicker to break bones and for a while it was hard to find safety.

But if I'm to tell you the story I have to tell you about the fence. Not that it had much to do with the story, but it showed Bob what a greenhorn his neighbour was. He and his neighbour had a few words over that fence and Bob knew that he needed to go away again for a while before those words resulted in someone getting hurt.

You see, Bob heard of this fellow that came into the country looking for gold and somebody said his name was Dave McCallum. The original David McCallum was a Scottish king and, having heard this newcomer's name Bob wondered if the back ground of this David McCallum was similar to his own.

Bob had first been hung with the name of another Scottish king, a descendant of the original McCallum. Because of some danger in his past and with some guidance from old Major Brash a few years before, Bob had changed his name and most knew him as Bob Morgan. But he thought there might be a chance this McCallum was his half brother.

You see, Bob's father had never married his mother. When she became pregnant, he told her he would buy passage for her to one of the "colonies" as they called them, but she had to christen the boy Robert

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Bruce and leave immediately after the birth as soon as she was able. By exerting more than a little pressure on Bob's sire including threats of exposure, his mother managed to receive a little more than just sea passage from the cad.

The heritage thing didn't bother Bob a great deal. His mother was Scottish and in the early days, before the English changed things, Scots followed their ancestral line through the mother's clan. However, from what his mother had told him, the man who had abandoned her had been an Englishman.

When Bob and his mother had been in New York for a few years it became apparent to her that the US was about to experience war. To avoid that war, she arranged in 1860 to move west with her young son. With some of the money from England and with more she had managed to save working in the "New World" as a book keeper she arranged to be part of a wagon train filled with what she thought were others avoiding war.

However, at least one of those fellow travellers had been an opportunist, a thief and a murderer.

The nine-year-old boy woke one morning to find the wagon train gone and no hint of its dust. His own head was bloody and full of blinding pain. His vision was blurred but he could easily recognize the body of his mother beside him.

He felt, despite his youth that it was his duty to bury the mortal remains of Heather Gregory Stalker but first he needed some horses and a shovel.

He forced himself to his feet and walked toward the setting sun following a few tracks.

Another train found the boy before he died and eventually, after travelling with several families, Bob had found himself in Barkerville. Following five years of education he had left the gold town and become a hunter of thieves and bad men. He proved to be adept at his chosen profession and enjoyed an excellent income.

His reason for bounty hunting and becoming a lawman-for-hire had nothing to do with the money, although he did well, but was to find his mother's killer. However, he had no luck finding the man who had called himself Jacobson back on the plains.

Then he heard about a man calling himself David McCallum who had bought an old but promising gold claim. Was this man truly a seventh or eighth grandson of King David the First or was he Bob's half

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brother, another son of the same father and consigned to the “colonies” to avoid embarrassment for some English aristocrat?

Bob arranged for this new British immigrant to receive the “inheritance” of a half section Bob owned next to his own place. There was a chance that McCallum would find something suspicious in this manufactured inheritance but he proved to be naïve and a genuine greenhorn. So green that the fence he built while Bob was away on one of his trips proved to be a problem and helped to result in a new direction for Bob’s life.

So now we’re back to the fence.

Bob came home that spring expecting and wanting to stay there for the summer. However, the misplaced fence put him on the opposite side of a war that was developing with his new neighbour. He didn’t want a violent confrontation but until Mary Ballantine appeared on the scene, he didn’t really have a reason to leave.

So, in a way the fence that didn’t follow the proper boundaries resulted in everything else.

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When Bob Morgan came back from the south in the spring of 1881 there was a fence barring his way. It was a snake rail fence built from local lodge pole pine and running right out into the old trail to Barkerville. Part way across the old trail there was a corner and then the fence continued on north. As he rode around the corner, his pack horse following, he could see where other traffic had detoured around the new fence corner putting an unnecessary bend in a trail that already had too many bends without the help of the new fence.

A few hundred yards south and behind him the new Cariboo Road ran almost due west and the old road ran slightly west of north to his cabin. However, with the new fence he, and apparently all other traffic was forced to follow the new fence rails due north and then, a quarter mile further turn around the next fence corner to return to the road.

True it was the “old” road but that didn’t mean it was no longer used. There were a few homesteads along the road and a few used it to get to the lower edges of the gold bearing mountains to the south of Barkerville. Others used it to reach cabins in the Horsefly Lake country. Building an obstruction in the middle of the old trail was asking for trouble.

He halted his mount, wrapped the reins around the horn and began rolling a smoke as his eyes followed the zig zag of the rails. The other three horses, one of them carrying his pack, continued on for fifty feet then stopped and each chewed off a mouthful of the fresh, spring grass.

“As with many of man’s efforts” he said, “the damn thing does little for the country but this particular engineering feat also interferes with transportation.” His gaze followed the rails to where they disappeared in the trees to the west. It had been necessary to cut some trees to allow room for the fence.

“Top o’ all that it appears to be on my land.”

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He nodded, turned toward his buildings and said, "Give a man a break so he's got his own land an' he does his best to make everybody in the country mad, including me. Team o' horses 'll fix that little problem in no time."

Most of the next day was spent catching his heavy team and a fresh pair of riding horses and preparing them all for a working summer. They had been running free all winter in a country where there was plenty of grass that had been cured on the stem so they were not particularly hungry. They also hadn't done any work for four months and, with the excellent memory common to most horses, recalled well having to work for their feed. As a result, they felt no desire to return to gainful employment and it took most of the day to get them in the big corral.

It would have taken a lot longer than a day if he had not had the two horses he brought back from Fort Langley. They had been left for the winter in the care of a long-time acquaintance that operated a livery service in the town. The acquaintance had been far too kind to his mounts over the winter, feeding them far too well and working them very little. However, a week on the trail coming home had helped start them toward the beginning of a working condition. The other two horses he had brought home he had ridden from Arizona Territory and they were in no condition to do any work and would be rested for several days.

He had to admit (but did so grudgingly) that the new fence helped on at least two occasions to direct the loose horses toward his corrals.

He had the five horses in the big corral and was closing the gate when a voice said, "You have some nice horses." Bob was side-stepping his mount as he swung the gate shut and had not seen the man arrive. Bob dropped the gate and grabbed the butt of his hand gun as his mount shied from the strange voice.

The stranger, unarmed himself, stepped from behind a corral post, his hands held up at shoulder height. "No need t' get jumpy neighbour, just commentin' on your horses."

"Bein' a bit jumpy has kept me alive time t' time," Bob said, then added, "An' I just spent several months strung tighter 'n a barb wire fence in order t' maintain that state."

"Do you not find it awkward carrying that weapon while you're working?" the stranger asked.

"No, I don't," Bob replied. His right arm still crossed his body, his hand holding the pistol resting in a holster mounted on an angle in front

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of his left hip. “Mr. McCallum,” he said, acknowledging the man’s presence. He swung his mount around switching the reins to his right hand, lifted the gate with his left hand and completed closing it.

“Heard you workin’ over here,” McCallum said. “And just came over t’ welcome you back.”

Bob nodded and hooked the rope loop to latch the gate. He was about to mention that six months in Arizona Territory without a friend in site had made him a bit nervous and it might be a good idea for people to announce their presence before they got too close but then decided that was his problem and not McCallum’s.

“It’s good to be back,” Bob said as he swung out of the saddle. Because he was angry about the location of the fence and because he had let his anger boil for a day, he was more than a little abrupt when he added, “You’ll need to move your fence.” He flicked the reins of the gelding over a corral rail and loosened the cinch.

“Ah, you are one of those that doesn’t handle change well,” McCallum noted. “A good fence makes for a good neighbour.”

Bob stepped around his mount toward McCallum, hitched his gun belt to relieve some of the strain on his suspenders and then hooked his thumbs behind the belt. “The way Ben Franklin said it was, ‘Love your neighbor but don’t pull down your hedges. Yep, fences make good neighbours as well but not when they take land from one of ‘em. This fence for example is well on t’ my property. It was on your property it wouldn’t bother me near so much, ‘sept for it bein’ ugly. In addition, you need to move back west o’ the road. You’ll have a whole bunch of old timers upset and they’re liable to tear that section down. There’s also a couple o’ those boys from back up in the hills that’re liable t’ go out o’ their way to help you have an accident.”

McCallum turned and gazed at the fence. “What are you talkin’ about? It’s beautiful.”

“It’s a useful and substantial structure,” Bob agreed, “but, like I said, it isn’t exactly a work of art. You will have heard me say it’s on my land, but that won’t be a problem once I hook my heavy team to it.”

The neighbour pulled back a step. “You’re not pullin’ it down.”

“That I am,” Bob said. “Then you’ll have a chance t’ put it where it belongs.”

“It is where it should be,” McCallum insisted. “Half o’ those zigs ‘r on your land an’ half on mine.”

“And how would you know that?” Morgan asked. “You get yourself a surveyor in to mark it out for you?”

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“Well, no I don’t need t’ do that ‘till after I prove up. Apparently, I have to show my good intentions and then the lawyer I’m dealing with will work on finalizing a deed. It’s an inheritance you see. I may have to call in a survey at that point.”

Bob nodded. “So, you paced it off.” He stepped back around his horse and retrieved the reins “The other end of those zigs, what I guess you’d call the inside of that fence is still a good five, six feet on my side.” He gestured toward the west. “An’ it’s on a slant. I didn’t stop t’ look when I was bringin’ in the horses this mornin’, but I think she’s maybe ten ‘r twelve feet inside my land over on the west end. There’s survey markers. Take some time t’ find ‘em, then come back an’ talk t’ me. Maybe I’ll have time t’ help you.”

“Why should I go by your markers?” McCallum asked.

Morgan shrugged. “Ain’t mine. You’ll find they have a brass tag on ‘em with a government surveyor’s number.”

“That’ll be the old survey,” McCallum noted. “They don’t go by that any more.”

Bob took a breath and a look at the trees while controlling his temper, then said in an exasperated tone, “It’ll be the new survey from four years ago.”

“You have this quarter deeded?” Dave asked.

“I have this section deeded,” Bob said. “An’ it should have been deeded five years ago but it took ‘em awhile to get a crew out here.”

“Well, that long,” Dave said.

There was a long pause while the two neighbours stood and looked at each other.

“Well, can you show me where these stakes are?” Dave asked. Something came to him and he added, “There’s supposed to be pylons to mark the location of the stakes. Where are they?”

Bob thought that McCallum should do some of the necessary work himself and not expect someone else to do everything for him so instead of volunteering to go out on a search he said, “They use pyramids, tripods o’ sticks they cut out o’ the bush. But they have been gone a long time. A lot o’ times they used rawhide strings t’ make their tripods. Wind blows ‘em over. Coyotes and such chew on the rawhide an’ scatter the sticks. Supposed to have used wire and such but they ran out an’ used rawhide. You might find a couple of six ‘r seven-foot sticks lyin’ close together.”

Bob turned back to his horse. “I’ll be most of tomorrow checking out my horses, trimming feet an’ mounting shoes. It’ll take me some

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time. That'll give you two days." He lifted his reins, swung one around the off side, stuck his foot in the stirrup and swung aboard.

"Two days for what?" Dave said. "Took us most of two weeks to build this side."

"Us?" Bob asked.

"Me an' a couple of Indian fellas I hired."

"Two days t' find the right line and start movin' fence," Bob said. "I don't see anything happenin' I'll move it with a team. Now, that might be some quicker, but some o' them poles'll be busted up an' you'll have t' find new ones to put 'er back up again. And don't be taking 'em from my place like you did last time."

"Two days?" Dave asked.

"An' after you've found the markers, better hire some more o' them Injuns," Bob said, swung his mount and started around the corrals toward his barn. He raised his voice and added, "Some of 'em's good workers."