

Mary McElroy

Kidnap Victim
1908-1940

by Barbara Magerl

In May 1933, two armed men took 25-year-old Mary McElroy from her home while her father Henry McElroy, controversial City Manager with a tough political image, was at City Hall. Mary was taken to Johnson County, Kansas, where she spent 36 hours shackled to a basement wall.

Notified of his daughter's kidnapping, McElroy gathered several powerful allies, including John Lazia. An area underworld figure, Lazia knew local mobsters were not involved. Although kidnapers wanted \$60,000, Lazia decided \$30,000 was enough. The hoodlums agreed and Mary was released. When she met her father she said, wanting to please him, "I didn't break once." Three men were arrested, thanks to Lazia's shrewdness.

Mary's nightmare was just beginning, however. Her father was often blamed for being lenient with criminals. She became the victim of cruel stories, even accused of a romance with a captor.

George McGee, 21, and his machine gun, had protected her from an unsavory accomplice. Gratitude to him cost her dearly. McGee's brother and one of the kidnapers, Walter, 28, was sentenced to die for the kidnapping. Mary's father lived by the "favor for a favor" policy, so she would, too. Repaying a personal debt, Mary shocked everyone by pleading for Walter's life. The governor commuted his sentence to life imprisonment.

Mary suffered several nervous breakdowns; friends deserted her. Newspaper allegations against her father, who had raised her alone from age 12, forced her to defend him, even joking about her ordeal to lessen his burden. Mary was ridiculed nationally.

Henry McElroy died in 1939. Mary was without her best, and maybe worst, friend. She became an outcast. One evening in 1940 she phoned five friends, asking them to join her. None could, or would. In the wee hours Mary, feeling pressured by politics and the media, killed herself. Fulfillment, perhaps, of what Walter



McGee's mother said at his trial, "...the death verdict will prove a boomerang...".

Sources

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