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Watonga quackers

Just Ducky

By Rachelle Stevvins

Every day, every hour, every minute someone is being entertained. Everybody enjoys entertainment, especially if it makes them laugh. Anyone who has been entertained in the last fifty years has seen or at least heard of Donald Duck. Clarence Nash, the original voice of Donald, was a star from Western Oklahoma who had many likable qualities.

First of all there was the man, Clarence Nash. Born in Watonga on December 7, 1904, he attended grade school in Watonga and then moved to Independence, Missouri. In spite of the move, he still called Watonga his hometown. Many of Watonga's older townspeople remember how Clarence could pick up bird calls easily, or any other animal call for that matter. One man, Les Tompson, remembers Clarence making sparrow calls in class, and how the teacher soon had the whole class looking for the sparrow that must have been trapped in the room after flying in the window. He was brought up Catholic and attended the Catholic Church in Watonga on his last visit home. He has one relative still living in Watonga, his cousin, Mrs. Agnes Jacoby Tompson.

Another aspect of him is the Duck. Clarence played Donald for fifty years, and sometimes he said Donald just seemed to take over. For instance, Clarence and Donald (a hand puppet) would travel to many children's hospitals all over the country. One time when Clarence got to the part of the show where he imitated bird calls, one child asked him to do an eagle; well, Clarence wasn't sure what an eagle sounded like. Suddenly the puppet let out an enormous shriek — an authentic eagle's cry — blowing the sound system and short circuiting the lights. Clarence once said it scared the heck out of him.

Clarence started as the "Whistling Bird Man"; however, doing bird calls as a means of steady work did not seem too realistic, so he moved to San Francisco and went to work for Postal Telegraph. To supplement his income, he took to performing fifteen minutes

of birdcalls for the Rotary and Kiwanis luncheons in return for a free meal. He and his wife, Margaret, moved to Los Angeles, and he got a job with the Adohr Milk Company. He was to be the Adohr Whistling Birdman. His job was to go from school to school telling kids to drink milk for healthy bodies and sound minds. His salary was thirty-five dollars a week, plus, all the milk, eggs, and cheese he and Mrs. Birdman could consume.

On his way to the Adohr Milk Company each day, he had to pass Walt Disney's studio there in Los Angeles. One day he walked into the studio and presented his card to the receptionist. His card proclaimed him as a "one man aviary who did bird concerts for the greater glories of milk." A director from Disney interviewed him, and after he performed "Mary had a Little Lamb" in Duckspeak, the man asked him to "please do that again; I'm putting Walt on intercom." Well, Clarence did it again and Walt said that "That's just the duck we're looking for." So on June 9, 1934, the quacking character, Donald, premiered in *THE WISE LITTLE HEN*.

During World War II, Disney turned to making films for the armed services. But Clarence and Donald were not washed up. There was still a place for them, making comedy shorts to help keep up the spirit and the country's sense of humor. It was during this time that *DER FUEHRER'S FACE* was made. This was nominated and won an Academy Award for Best Comedy Short in 1942. There were many characters added to Donald's family, but none so special as Donald himself.

A third aspect is the legend. Donald



Clarence Nash with his friend, the duck.

Duck has been in 125 films and has comic strips in over one hundred foreign newspapers running today. There are comic books from back when Donald first appeared up to the present. Many countries including the Republic of San Marino and Bhutan have issued commemorative stamps in his honor. Besides winning an Academy Award in 1942, he has been nominated eight other times. Today the library of films on Donald is still presented to the estimated eight hundred thousand subscribers to the Disney Channel.

Clarence Nash made his last film in 1983, as Scrooge McDuck, Donald's ill-mannered old uncle in *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*. He came back to Watonga on December 7, 1984, when the celebrated Donald's fifty year birthday was observed. He visited old friends and family and then went to a dedication where they pronounced Hook Street with a new name, "Clarence Nash Boulevard." Clarence Nash died in the spring of 1985 from pneumonia, although he was suffering with cancer. All who knew him or had met him at the celebration were saddened, but they smile when they see Donald.

Yes, there were many wonderful characteristics about Clarence Nash. Probably everyone for years to come will enjoy the ill-mannered duck. Many will never know the man behind the voice of Donald Duck, but they will enjoy what he left behind, entertainment. For entertainment lives forever ■

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