

Paralyzed police officer talks about forgiveness



PHOTO/DON HORSEY

New York City Detective Stephen McDonald recounts the events that saw a teen gunman paralyze him for life and the importance of forgiveness to the student body at Mt. Carmel School in Tenafly.

BY DON HORSEY
For Suburbanite

TENAFLY — New York City Police Detective Stephen McDonald, who was paralyzed by shots from a teenager's gun, visited the student body of Mount Carmel School to speak on his experiences and the power to be able to forgive.

McDonald was an active police officer for 18 years, first as a patrolman then as a detective. "There are 40,000 police officers in the city, they love helping people — somewhat like being Jesus."

Fifteen years ago in New York City's Central Park, which he called a little piece of country in the city, the detective said, there was a crime problem in the park with 12- to 18-year-old boys and some girls. They were committing crimes, robberies, stealing bicycles and other things. Many of them came from poor homes and many had been arrested for a number of crimes.

On July 12, 1986, a rainy afternoon, Detective McDonald said he was on a routine patrol and questioned three 13- to 15-

year-old boys up in a tree who appeared to be hiding there. McDonald was in civilian clothes but showed the teenagers his police badge. He asked them their names and where they lived. One 15-year-old boy pulled a gun out and shot him three times, once in the head and one shot over the eye.

McDonald's partner called for help and raced him to the nearest hospital. Detective McDonald said, "After a day or two I pulled through — somehow. Cardinal O'Connor visited me at the hospital many times. My son's name is Connor — named after him."

McDonald spent about three years in hospitals as prayers and masses were said for him. Cardinal O'Connor baptized his son. His wife Patty stood by him throughout the long recovery.

While recovering, he told the students, he did much thinking and soul searching. The conclusion McDonald drew was to "be like Jesus to others" — he forgave the young man who shot him.

McDonald said, "I was locked
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in my body, I had to do this so that I could focus on other things — have faith that I changed emotionally and spiritually. I forgave the young man who shot me — I had to free myself, I had to love — I could not go on without doing this —

have to forgive."

Detective McDonald gave details about living a life being confined to a wheelchair and answered other questions about his family. He said that he has spoken to many groups

and especially at many schools.

He said it is important to get his message out.

Along with Detective McDonald the students of Mt. Carmel repeated the Rosary in unison.