

EDWARD J. PRESTEK: HIS JUNKYARD WAS BALLARD'S `GASOLINE ALLEY'

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Edward J. "Nick" Prestek was a small-time junk man at heart, but his enduring Nix Auto Wrecking company in Ballard was much more than the place to buy dirt-cheap car parts. It was a social landmark, a place where auto mechanics, car enthusiasts and tow-truck drivers converged for a little fellowship

Though the Nix crowd has dwindled somewhat, the old stucco building and auto lot at 1406 Leary Way Northwest continues to be a social hub, a rustic and rusty reminder of the man who gave the place its essence.

Mr. Prestek died Friday, Feb. 23, of natural causes at his home in Broadview. He was 83.

His daughter Linda Lee says that in its heyday, "The Joint," as it was affectionately called, was frequented both by back-yard mechanics and men like "One-eyed Rat," a convicted murderer, and his son, also an ex-convict.

Kids used to play in the auto yard, since it wasn't fenced in back then. Often, they made off with scrap parts without paying for them. Adults who came for parts also made out nicely, Mr. Prestek's stepson, Gerald Murphy, said.

"He'd sell parts cheaper than anybody else," said Murphy, who now runs the business.

Mr. Prestek bought Nix Auto Wrecking in 1939. His brother and business partner, Ernest Prestek, 76, of Mesa, Ariz., admits it was "a loose-knit operation" at first. When the wrecking yard was full, the brothers just parked their junk cars on the streets.

But whatever Mr. Prestek may have lacked in business savvy, he made up for with ambition.

"He'd sell the transmission right out of the car he was driving, if he could. In fact, he did several times," said George Lee, 79, who has been a mechanic in Ballard and a Nix patron since the early 1940s.

Once in the 1950s, Murphy said, Mr. Prestek sold the transmission of a junker he usually drove back and forth to work.

Unfortunately, he had no way to get home that evening so - always the improviser - he picked the only other junker that was driveable.

The car's transmission was bad - only the reverse gear worked.

No matter. Mr. Prestek drove the car home backwards, from Ballard to the Shoreline area, and backwards to Ballard the next morning.

"If there was an easy way and a hard way to do something, he would do it the hard way," his daughter Linda said. "He took pride in it."

His other source of pride was ballroom dancing.

Mr. Prestek took both his first wife, DeLoris, and second wife, Gladys, out to the old Parker's Ballroom in North Seattle.

"Sick or not, he'd go dancing," Murphy recalled. He never missed a Saturday night at Parker's. When he danced, "you'd think he was in heaven - with a smile on his face, just twirling around," Murphy said.

"He'd go around the floor three times to your one," said Lee, the mechanic.

As the years passed, though, Mr. Prestek slowed down. He retired from the business in 1974 and spent most of his later years mingling among the Nix regulars. His second wife, Gladys, died about five years ago.

In addition to his stepson, daughter and brother, Mr. Prestek is survived by another daughter, Stephanie Davies of Wayne, Pa.;

sisters Betty Moser of Seattle and Louise Wall of Bellevue; nine grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Services for Mr. Prestek are Wednesday at Wiggen and Sons Funeral Home, 2003 N.W. 57th St.

Memorials may be sent to the Edward Prestek Scholarship Fund, St. Martins College, 5300 Pacific Ave. S.E., Lacey, WA 98503.

- *Index terms: BIOGRAPHY EDWARD J. PRESTEK; OBITUARY*

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