Trouble: Assassin’s Gun Made It Way Of Life For George Wallace

By Saul Kohler

MONTGOMERY, Ala. - He rubbed away the pain and shifted in his wheelchair, and on the second anniversary of the assassination attempt which left him paralyzed for life, Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama made Martha Mitchell cry.

The estranged wife of former Atty. Gen. John Mitchell was visiting the executive mansion here, and was telling George Wallace her troubles.

That’s Not Bad

"Honey, you may have your troubles," the governor said with a half-smile on his face. "But so long as you can kick off your shoes and wiggle your toes, you aren’t too bad off.

"Fellow came in the other day and told me he needed a job to keep his son in college. I told him I’d exchange places with him if I could. I’d be a tenant farmer if only I could get up from this chair and walk out of the room."

And March Mitchell, the blonde belle of so many balls, wept.

The governor also shed a tear. He pointed to a bullet wound in his arm — and his wife, Cornelia, leaned over his wheelchair to whisper to him.

And George Corley Wallace, the tough politician, pulled out his handcuffs and wiped his eyes.

It was two years ago on May 15 at a shopping center in Laurel, Md., that the estranged wife of former Atty. Gen. John Mitchell was visiting the executive mansion here, and was telling George Wallace her troubles.

"I don’t want to talk about connections in public," Wallace said, "I have my ideas, but I’ll never say it to anyone."

Wallace doesn’t need conversations to remind him of that day in Laurel. He thinks of it all the time, when he has to be helped from place to place, and when he sees the bullet holes in his abdomen as he exercises muscled shoulders to make up for useless legs.

He recalled that he and his wife were interviewed separately on the same day recently.

"They asked me which single thing was the worst that happened to me in my lifetime," he said. "I told them it was losing Lurleen, my first wife."

"And then George Wallace’s eyes became hard, and he became the tough guy once again for just a moment."

"The chickens have come home to roost as a result of the permissive society we have allowed to happen in this country," he snapped. "The court system has to be reorganized."

He was asked whether he has communicated with, or heard from, Arthur Bremer, the would-be assassin now serving 60 years in prison for the shooting in Laurel.

"No, I haven’t, but I wouldn’t mind if he wanted to talk to me," Wallace said. "I don’t hate him. I hope the Lord helps him."

"I hope that young man repeats. But I can’t forget him. Even the simple act of getting out of a car — I used to jump out and move, move, move — now is a major production."

Talk Off Record

Mrs. Wallace’s mother, Mrs. Ruby Austin, and the governor’s son, George Jr., joined the governor, Mrs. Mitchell and a reporter for lunch.

The conversation was off the record, at Wallace’s request, because it involved the shooting and the similarity in the diaries kept by Bremer, Sirhan Sirhan and Lee Harvey Oswald — the men who killed Robert Kennedy and John F. Kennedy.

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"They asked me which single thing was the worst that happened to me in my lifetime," he said. "I told them it was losing Lurleen, my first wife."

"Then they asked Cornelia the same question. We didn’t talk it over, but she said it was her divorce from her first husband."