

DENNIS WEAVER BIO

William Dennis Weaver was an Emmy Award-winning American actor, best known for his work in television, including roles on *Gunsmoke*, as Marshal Sam McCloud on the NBC police drama *McCloud* and in Steven Spielberg's feature-length directorial debut, the cult TV movie *Duel* in 1971.

Weaver was born in Joplin, Missouri, the son of Lena Prather (1892-1970) and Walter Weaver (1890-1967), of Irish, Scottish, English, Cherokee and Osage ancestry. He wanted to be an actor from boyhood. He started college at Joplin Junior College, now Missouri Southern State University and later attended the University of Oklahoma, where he studied drama and also was a track star, setting records in several events. He served as a pilot in the United States Navy during the Second World War. In 1945, he married Gerry Stowell, with whom he had three children. In 1948, he tried out for the U.S. Olympic team in the decathlon. After he finished sixth in the Olympic Trials (only the top three made the team), his college friend Lonny Chapman convinced him to come to New York City to try acting.

Weaver's first role on Broadway came as an understudy to Chapman as Turk Fisher in *Come Back, Little Sheba*. He eventually took over the role from Chapman in the national touring company. Solidifying his choice to become an actor, Weaver enrolled in The Actors Studio, where he met Shelley Winters. In the beginning of his acting career, he supported his family by doing a number of odd jobs, including selling vacuum cleaners, tricycles and women's hosiery.

In 1952, Winters aided him in getting a contract from Universal Studios. He made his film debut that same year in the movie *The Redhead from Wyoming*. Over the next three years, he played roles in a series of movies, but still had to work odd jobs to support his family. It was while delivering flowers that he heard he had landed his biggest break—the role of Chester Goode on the new television series *Gunsmoke*—which would go on to become the highest-rated and longest-running series in US television history (1955 to 1975). He received an Emmy Award in 1959 for Best Supporting Actor (Continuing Character) in a Dramatic Series.

Having become famous as Chester, he was cast in an offbeat supporting role in the 1958 Orson Welles film *Touch of Evil*, in which he nervously repeated, "I'm the night man". From 1964 to 1965, he portrayed a friendly veterinarian in NBC's comedy-drama *Kentucky Jones*. His next substantial role was as Tom Wedloe on the television show *Gentle Ben* between 1967 and 1969.

He began appearing on the series *McCloud* in 1970, for which he received two Emmy Award nominations. In 1974, he was nominated for Best Lead Actor in a Limited Series and in 1975, for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Limited Series. His frequent use of the affirming Southernism, "There you go", became a catchphrase for the show. During the series, in 1971, he appeared in *Duel*, a television movie directed by Steven Spielberg. From 1973 to 1975, he was president of the Screen Actors Guild.

Later series during the 1980s (both of which lasted only one season) were *Stone* in which Weaver played a Joseph Wambaugh-esque police sergeant turned crime novelist, and *Buck James*, in which he played a Texas-based surgeon and rancher (Buck James was loosely based on real-life Texas doctor Red Duke). In 1978, Weaver played the trail boss R.J. Poteet in the television miniseries *Centennial* on the episode titled "The Longhorns". Weaver also appeared in many acclaimed television films. In 1980, he played Dr. Samuel Mudd, who was imprisoned for involvement in the Lincoln assassination, in *The Ordeal Of Doctor Mudd*. In 1983, he played a real estate agent addicted to cocaine in *Cocaine: One Man's Seduction*. Weaver received probably the best reviews of his career when he starred in the 1987 film *Bluffing It*, in which he played a man who is illiterate. In February 2002, he appeared on the animated series *The Simpsons* (episode DABF07, "The Lastest Gun in the West") as the voice of aging Hollywood cowboy legend Buck McCoy.

For his contribution to the television industry, Dennis Weaver was given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame at 6822 Hollywood Blvd, and on the Dodge City (KS) Trail of Fame. In 1981, he was inducted into the Western Performers Hall of Fame at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Weaver's most recent work was done on an ABC Family cable television show called *Wildfire*, where he played Henry, the father of Jean Ritter and the co-owner of Raintree Ranch. He was only on the show for season 1, and died of complications from cancer at the age of 81 on February 24, 2006.

Materials exerpsted from Wikipedia