

# Nicholas Christian O'Flannigan

Introduction to the "Capital City Murders" series

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Nicholas Christian O'Flannigan was born into a strong Irish family in Boston, Massachusetts. As a skinny kid growing up, he was constantly teased about his name and his reddish-orange hair. Other kids would taunt him with things like, "*You will never be like Saint Nicholas because you're too skinny and you look like a carrot.*" Or "*Hey there, bean pole Nicholas.*" He hated his name and vowed to change it as soon as he could. As he entered high school, he insisted that people call him "Nick," and he would ignore anyone who used his given name. His frame began to fill out and he continued to gain height. He was 6'3" as he entered tenth grade, and the basketball coach sought him out and convinced him to try out for Varsity Basketball ("*The girl cheerleaders prefer the basketball players over the football jocks.*"). He made the team in spite of his initial awkwardness; everyone, especially the cheerleaders, now called him 'Nick.'

So where did his name come from? His dad served in the Navy, did his twenty years and then retired. He was a Warrant Officer, a Non-Commissioned Officer, an NCO. And so when his first son was born he told his wife that he wanted to give him a name that honored his role in the military. Thus, "NCO" was born, in more ways than one.

During his senior year, Nick was a 6'5" State All-Star, earning him a basketball scholarship to Boston College. His hair maintained its orangish hue, but now it was more of an asset, attracting attention and getting him noticed. One thing Nick really liked was the road trips the team would make, particularly when they took a bus. He would sit next to a window and gaze out at the scenery. The buildings, especially the historical ones, fascinated him. Nick didn't have a regular camera, an SLR, but his cell phone took good enough pictures for him. He would occasionally post some of the building photos on social media sites, gaining him a loyal following.

Nick was a good student while in college, and he was a rather consistent player on the court. He had dreams of entering the NBA, but a freak accident during an early season game in Atlanta, Georgia, left him sidelined for the rest of his senior year. His right fibula was broken in two places, shattering any hopes he had of playing professional ball. His "Plan B" (being an accountant) now became Nick's "Plan A."

Hoping to lift Nick's spirits, his dad bought him a nice camera, an Olympus E-M1X, and a set of lenses that would make many professional photographers jealous. Nick appreciated the lightweight nature of the Olympus gear, and he could easily carry it around with him even as he went around on his crutches. He was snapping photos everywhere he went.

One of his online followers posted a comment under a photo that said, "*These are great pictures, why don't you make a calendar of them and sell it?*" Nick had more spare time now that he didn't have to go to basketball practice, so he assembled twelve of his photographs of Boston buildings, and with a little computer work, he had a calendar.

Nick didn't know it at the time, but he had just started his career as a professional photographer.

By time graduation came around in May, Nick no longer needed his crutches, but he did walk with a slight limp. His “Plan A” was still to become an accountant (he had several local offers already), but his “side gig” of photography was more fun. He wasn’t making a lot of money from the jobs he would pick up from time to time, but he saw that there was a future in being a photographer. He definitely stood out in a crowd; he was now a little over 6’6”, and his full head of orangish hair made him visible from anywhere.

Two years after graduation, Nick married Susie, one of the former cheerleaders, and they lived in a relatively nice apartment in downtown Boston. He plunged headlong into a photography career, and she was an elementary school teacher. His right leg limp was almost gone, but he would occasionally notice the old injury going up and down stairs, so he would take an elevator whenever he could. Since almost everything to do with photography was now digital, Nick could work at home without the need for an outside office where he would have to pay rent—he was smart that way. Working out the apartment also gave him time to read. His favorite authors were Agatha Christie, John le Carré, and Arthur Conan Doyle. He never tired of re-reading one of their books because he would uncover some new detail each time, something he hadn’t noticed previously.

Nick’s eye for details was getting stronger; as he would take pictures of various designs on buildings and in nature, he would occasionally see something that most people wouldn’t see or they would just ignore. One of his more interesting “finds” was when he was looking at some photos he’d taken of the Rose window at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, the largest Roman Catholic church in New England. The images looked great, but there was something about the window’s symmetry that seemed odd. He began to study the minute details of each section, and he noticed that the color sequencing in the bottom right part of the window (looking from the inside) was different from all the rest. Nick posted his finding online along with the question, “*why is this one pattern different?*”

There were many responses to Nick’s question; the newspaper even ran an article about it. The church’s historian was perplexed as he couldn’t find anything in the archives dating back to its dedication in 1875 that mentioned the color differences. Finally, the Archbishop responded, “*The window is a reminder that while we are all beautiful in our own ways, we are not meant to be like everyone else.*” Nick’s online fan base grew tremendously after that, and his reputation as a detail-oriented photographer increased along with the demand for his services. He was once again very popular, just as he had been when he was a college basketball star. He created and moderated a social media site on Macro Photography where some of the photographic details were no larger than a half inch square.

Susie felt insecure in their relationship. Used to being the center of attention, her star stopped shining when she became an elementary school teacher. Nick was a good husband, and a faithful one, but he just couldn’t provide the nurturing Susie desired. They separated shortly after Nick’s twenty-fifth birthday, and were divorced a year later.

While he had a very good business in the Boston area, Nick was ready for a change. After two more years in Boston where he had spent his entire life, he wanted to experience something different. He sold all of his possessions except for his clothes, his beloved mystery novels, his computer, and his camera gear. He packed up his car and drove west, headed to Seattle, Washington.

There was nothing waiting for him in Seattle except possibilities. He did have a few ongoing streams of revenue based on licensing some of his photographs, but he left most of his business behind in Boston. His first choice for an apartment was in a great location, but the rental price reflected that greatness. He chose a less desirable, yet pleasant area, to rent his first place in the Pacific Northwest. He hit the streets hard right away, talking to businesses, organizations, government entities, anyone he could pitch. Business slowly started coming his way, and by the end of his first year in Seattle, he had re-built his income to the level it had been when he left Boston. He chose to stay in the same apartment rather than move downtown; he would be able to sock away some money as well as do some traveling—all while taking photographs, of course.

A year later on one of his trips into the mountains he met Gerry Grainger, a social media manager for *Travel USA* magazine. Gerry let Nick know right away that she was gay, but that didn't dissuade Nick from pursuing a friendship with her. She was attractive and fun; she was smart and well-connected in the high-end photography business. Their times together, definitely not “dates,” were typically spent sharing photographs, talking about social media, and comparing the latest camera gear. Nick, now twenty-nine, asked Gerry if he could submit some photographs for publication to her magazine, and if there were any projects that he might be able to apply for.

“There is one project, a long-term one, which might be a good fit for you. The book printing and marketing arm wants to create a coffee table book containing each of the state capitals. You would have to visit each state capital, take the typical photographs, but also get some very unique shots of the capitol building, the highlights of that city, and maybe even the state bird, the flower, et cetera. You'd be on the road full-time for at least a year to do all that. I can't promise anything, but would that interest you?” Gerry picked up the cup and took the last swig of her coffee.

Nick closed his eyes and nodded his head slightly as he processed the information. A slight smile lit his face. “Wow. Yes. I could do that; it would be fun.”

“I'll get you more details tomorrow; maybe I can get you in with the right people before it's made public.”

Gerry didn't get the details to Nick the next day as there were some political games being played inside the magazine headquarters. But she was able to pitch him to the decision makers before there were any other applicants. It was almost two more months before Nick got the phone call. “Of course, I still love the concept of the project,” Nick gushed when the magazine's Executive Editor asked him if he was still interested. He was then invited to present his approach for the job in person.

“We have a tight timetable, Nick,” the editor said as she explained the details. “We have outlined a route for you to take, starting here in Washington, then down to Oregon and California before heading over to Nevada and Idaho. You should travel on weekends so you have Monday through Friday to take your photographs, conduct interviews, and look for the special angles that make that state capital stand out. You will have one week to cover each, so that means you will be on the road for almost a full year.” She continued to reiterate the financial aspects of the freelance project, including how to charge gas for his car, which hotels to use, his per diem allowance for food, what and when he would be paid, and the schedule for submitting his work. “So you can start in three weeks?” the editor asked.

“I could start anytime you want,” Nick replied. A date was set for Nick to go to the magazine’s headquarters to sign the necessary papers, get the electronic reimbursement forms, and take a bouquet of roses to Gerry.

From Book #1: *Overdoses in Olympia*:

Mary slipped her arms into the white sweater, the one with her name tag Mary Lawson, RN, attached. She took one final sip of her coffee, poured out the rest, and paused. *What did I miss? The patient had come in with a shattered right leg and an arm broken in two places. Thank God he was wearing a helmet, or he might have been taken to the morgue instead of to the hospital. He seemed healthy other than the injuries from the motorcycle accident.*

She'd been racking her brain for the past two days trying to figure out what happened, why the accident victim overdosed. He was under her care, and she did everything that any nurse would do in the same situation. She was sure of that. Both the floor nurse and the resident physician said there was nothing else Mary could have done. They assured her that she was not under suspicion. There would be an autopsy, of course, and that would show exactly what caused his death. That would take at least two weeks.

Mary looked at her watch. She should be heading to work. The drive to Mercy Hospital took her past the location on the freeway where the motorcycle had been sideswiped, and she grimaced as she passed the spot. There was a piece of shiny metal on the right shoulder she hadn't seen before. Was it from the accident?

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"I see a new name on the board. What's he in for?"

"Mainly observation," the departing nurse said. "He works at a lumber mill, and was hit in the head with more than just the proverbial two by four. Cat scan didn't show any abnormalities, but the ER doc wanted to hold him for a day or two just to make sure."

"Well, let's go over report so you can go home and get some rest," Mary said.

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Mary gently pulled her hand back. "Your hand seems a bit cool," she said as she looked at his vitals that had been taken just about an hour ago. "Are you in any pain right now?"

"I do have a headache, but the doc last night said I probably would for a few days. It's pretty normal considering what happened to me."

"It is normal, but there is no reason that you have to put up with it." Mary looked back at the chart. "You've had enough acetaminophen that it should've gotten rid of it." She paused. "Let me order up something stronger for you. Is there anything else you need right now?"

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Read more about Nick and his travels across the United States as he visits each state capital. His goal is 50 state capitals in 50 weeks. Can he do it? You'll have to read the books to find out. Each book is available at [CapitalCityMurders.com](http://CapitalCityMurders.com) and at your favorite e-book seller. Don't forget to join the CCM Books Club for updated information about Nick, his travels, and where he's going next. It's easy to sign up; it's free, and there is NO SPAM. [Click Here](#) to sign up.

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