

Dick Stacey

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Compiled by Clarrie Neal from information provided by John Stacey, December 1999.

Dick will always be remembered as one of Riverstone's favourite sons, a man who always wore a smile and a man who always had a good word for everyone. He was born on the 25th August 1907 in Redfern and his full name was Richard Walter Victor Stacey.

His father died when he was just seven years old and he left school when he was 13 years old to help support his mother and his sister Marjorie. As a young lad he would go to the markets to buy a case of apples or pears for six shillings and go around the neighbourhood selling, hoping to realise ten shillings. He would then return to the markets and buy another case to sell.

As a youth he became one of Sydney's famous singing milkmen, running around the streets of Redfern and nearby areas singing while seeking customers to buy their milk at sixpence halfpenny a quart. He also helped his uncles when they drove their rabbit truck selling rabbits to the residents of these inner city areas. Another experience he often recalled was buying bacon sides from PDS and then taking them out west to sell to the farmers and cockies. A tale also told here was that before buying the bacon it was a good idea to take with you some maggots in a matchbox and by sprinkling them on the bacon you would get the bacon at a cheaper rate. We can only hope they removed the maggots before selling.

Dick's life was to change when he met a girl from The Rocks area. Her name was Ida Thelma Scott and they were married in 1927. They lived in the Chippendale area and it was here that Dick Jnr, Jean and Joy were born. John was born in Riverstone in 1937.

Dick and the family moved to Schofields in 1934 when he was able to buy a house with a shop alongside in St Albans Road. It was from this shop he began his career as a greengrocer and itinerant vendor, selling from the shop and from a truck he used to deliver around the district. The first truck was a Morris Commercial purchased from Alf Saundercock at Knights garage in 1934.

The shop was successful from the start and as Ida was busy raising the children, Dick invited one of his friends to come from Redfern to work in the shop. His name was Charlie Harris and he worked in the shop for several years until the girls, Jean and Joy, were old enough to work there. Charlie then left and started at the Meatworks as a foreman in the fellmongery. Dick ran the business at Schofields until 1942 when he decided to transfer to Riverstone.

Dick bought the two storey shop in Garfield Road from Jim Nowlands and the family lived on the top floor. At the time there were two other shops in the building - a confectionery shop owned by a Mr Vallos, and the end shop owned by Nelson Andrews the barber. In later years Roma Fisher bought the centre shop for use as a ladies hairdresser, and Frank Keating took over from Nelson Andrews.

The shop at Riverstone was very much a family affair with all members of the family involved. Dick's sister Marjorie worked there, along with son-in-law Bobby Cox. Lance Strachan was another who had a life long association with the Stacey family. The family all remember Lyle Rosenthal who owned the general store near the railway gates, as a regular daily customer.

Dick will be remembered by many residents for his leather apron which was the trademark of all greengrocers of the day. It had a pocket at the top for the note-book with the orders, a pocket at the front for the silver and copper coins, and a pocket on the inside for the notes. Dick was never one for folding the notes, they were just stuffed into the inside pocket.

Because Dick had been a 'battler' from his early days and right through the depression, he always had a soft spot for those not so fortunate. His family would take some of these people into their care, names that come to mind are Sonny Locke, his brother Jimmy and Georgie Cafe. In later years another lad who worked for Dick was Barry Taylor.

With his vending business Dick always owned a truck and when the Morris was replaced in 1944 he bought a Lend Lease Chevrolet. Even though Dick was in an essential industry he still had to get approval from the government to buy it because it was during the war. Petrol was in very short supply so the Chev was fitted with a charcoal gas producer.

In the early days Dick travelled every Monday and Thursday to the markets to get his produce, then known as Paddy's Markets and situated in the Haymarket area. As the business grew it became necessary to do the trip three times a week, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The Lend Lease Chev was used until he bought another Morris Commercial in 1955.

Besides carting his own produce he also carted for the Blair family who owned a shop in Garfield Road; their shop is now located at Heritage Village at Wilberforce. He also carted for Wally Wood when he had a greengrocers run around the Windsor area. Dick also carted produce such as potatoes, strawberries, tomatoes and mushrooms to the markets for the local growers, namely Martin Cunich, Mick Selic, Bob Perrott, Jimmy Christafaro and George Shillington. At other times the truck was used to cart bags of firewood offcuts from Max Gosden and Noel Dunston's sawmill to the city.

Due to ill health Dick retired in 1962 and sold the shop in 1963 to Johnny Octavo who traded under the name of Johnny Wallace. It was at this time Dick Jnr and brother John formed a partnership, bought a 3 ton Austin truck and became itinerant vendors selling fruit and vegies in the Rooty Hill and Doonside area. In 1979 Joy helped Dick Jnr on the truck when John decided to leave and commenced as a salesman in the margarine section at the Meatworks.

Apart from his family and business Dick had three other great passions in his life, his music with the piano, his greyhounds, and punting. Many residents would best remember Dick seated at the piano and giving a big smile to all who looked his way. His love of music was shared by the whole family, with Dick Jnr, Jean, Joy and John all learning the piano. John also learnt the saxophone and the clarinet and the family provided their own dance band for many years. Their mother Ida was a top class dancer.

As a dance band they held regular bookings at the Richmond RSL Club, Penrith Rowing Club and were the first band to play at the Rooty Hill RSL Club when that club first gained its liquor licence. John recalled that Dick had fond memories of playing at a charity ball that was held every year at Camp Mackay, Kurrajong. The ball was always well attended by Sydney's leading doctors and surgeons, and the top brass of the police force.

Dick was a very successful greyhound owner and won many races with Deventure, Jean O'Joy, Major Whirl, Ida Thelma, Chief Escape, Bright Souvenir, and Apache Boy. Lance Strachan was the trainer of all these dogs but once again it was a family affair and you would often see Dick Jnr, Jean, Joy, John, or Ida out exercising the dogs with Lance. Dick Jnr also became a successful dog owner and won many races with Miss Whippa, The Black Don and Dessick, with Gordon Alderton as the trainer.

No story on Dick Stacey could ever be complete unless it told his favourite yarn, he told this yarn to everybody and everywhere:-

"One day as he was driving his truck around the streets of North Sydney selling bags of firewood, calling out bags of firewood, a voice from the second floor ordered "three bags, please". Dick thought this is my lucky day and proceeded to carry the bags up the stairs one at a time and placed them against the door. As he placed the third bag down he knocked on the door, but there was no response. He noticed the door wasn't locked so he walked in to find the house empty except for a cat asleep on the lounge and a cockatoo sitting on his perch, saying "three bags please".

Dick was furious and in a fit of anger grabbed the cocky and with feathers flying all around the room half strangled it, opened the window and threw it out. The cocky landed in the garden, stunned and with his feet up in the air.

Dick proceeded to carry the bags down the stairs, one at a time and placed them on his truck. As he was placing the last bag on the truck the owner arrived home and seeing the cocky missing and all the feathers around the room, immediately grabbed the cat, belted it and threw it out the same window. The cat landed alongside the cocky with a thud, with his feet in the air. The cocky by now was coming to, and as he struggled to hold up his head, he half opened his eyes and looked across at the battered and bruised cat and said "and how many bags did you order, Tom?"

The following article was extracted from the *Market Industries News* in August 1962:-

Dick Stacey in his summing up after 40 years in the trade said Sydney Market agents are a 'good mob' who would sooner help than do anyone a bad turn. Mr Stacey retired only last month due to failing health and will 'potter about' with his wife and grandchildren until he again feels like doing a spot of work. He sold his shop at Riverstone to a very likeable young Italian who trades under the name of Johnny Wallace. Dick Stacey has been a battler all his life.

Born in the slums of Sydney he left school at the age of 13 (by special permission) to assist in the upkeep of his widowed mother and the family. He hawked fruit around Chippendale then became one of Sydney's famous singing milkmen in the old days when milk was sixpence halfpenny a quart and as many as six carters used to race along streets for customers.

He later took a job in the potato market with Walter Deacon and George Hurley, but subsequently started his own fruit run when the partners separated and opened separate businesses.

Mr Stacey was at Riverstone for 23 years and built his shop into a really first class business by giving the public value. He would never buy fruit or vegetables when they reached levels his customers could not afford. He would advise housewives to buy a substitute when the quality or price was not suitable.

He always took the customer's word and exchanged or refunded the money without an argument.

Mr Stacey was the last president of the NSW Fruit Shopkeepers Association....

Dick Stacey passed away on the 7th March 1966 after a long illness. The following tribute was printed in the local paper:-

An overwhelming tribute to the memory of the late R. W. Stacey was paid by hundreds of mourners who attended his funeral service at St. Paul's Church, Riverstone, last Wednesday.

The congregation overflowed into the adjoining church hall, and more than a hundred cars followed the long funeral cortege through Riverstone's commercial centre, to the Australian Memorial Park on the Windsor Road.

The funeral service was preached by Rev. Turner who said that cheerfulness had characterised all aspects of the late Mr Stacey's life, and great courage, in the last eighteen months of his illness.

Mr Stacey, he said, had been well respected as a family man, businessman, musician, and member of the Riverstone community.

The late Mr Stacey who had lived in the Schofields and Riverstone district for over 35 years, is survived by his wife Ida, two sons Richard and John, and two daughters Jean (Mrs Cox), and Joy.

Ida Thelma Stacey passed away on the 12th April 1994, and was also buried at the Memorial Park on Windsor Road, Rouse Hill.

Dick Jnr carried on with the family tradition of involvement in the community by taking over as President of the Riverstone Bowling Club in 1978 and holding that position until 1991. Dick Jnr passed away on the 28th February 1996.