

Richard Leigh Neilen

Dick

1945 - 1997

Dick was born on 29 August 1945 at the Soldiers Memorial Hospital in Maleny. He was the 5th child and middle triplet born to Henry & Nellie Neilen. He eventually became one of 8.

His parents Henry & Nellie Neilen had moved to Maleny from Brisbane in 1938 after buying a dairy farm at Balmoral, mid way between Maleny & Montville. After a few years of dairying, Henry decided to hire a share farmer and buy a truck. The family of Bruce, Ian & Desley shifted to Eagles Nest, Maleny. It was while they were living at Eagles Nest in August 1945 that the triplets were born. It was unknown how many babies would be born, but when 3 boys arrived, Dr Parer, the local doctor who delivered them, called them Tom, Dick & Harry. They were named Thomas Geoffrey (5lb 1oz), Richard Leigh (5 lb) & Henry Ross (5lb 3oz), known to everyone as Tom, Dick & Harry. As babies, Tom & Harry were more alike, placid, good sleepers and contented. Dick was different, his parents knew his life would be different. The Neilen Triplets were quite a local celebrity for many years, Dick was used to attention.



Nellie with Tom, Dick & Harry at 6 months

The family never lived at Eagles Nest for long, Henry bought a 7 acre property on the corner of the Maleny - Landsborough, Nambour Roads which became the family home & centre of their transport business for 40 years. Dick was often at the centre of trouble, I remember one time when his little legs couldn't carry him home before he got caught. He used to throw stones at the passing traffic, (so did Tom & Harry) the driver caught Dick, shook the living daylight out of him and brought him in to Nellie who disciplined him.

When the triplets were about 3 or maybe 4, one got a sore throat, so everyone had to get their tonsils out. In those days this procedure was common, Dr Parer the local doctor had taken Ian's tonsils and adenoids out, my tonsils were taken out, so it was the triplets turn. They were told they'd get jelly and ice-cream after the operation and that the fat hospital cat would get their tonsils. I remember when Henry & Nellie visited them after the operation, they were singing in their cots, so the operation was most successful. Some time later we were told that a cat had its tonsils out, the ones near its tail so that it couldn't have any more kittens. This was quite confusing for us kids.



Dick, Graeme & Harry ready for school

Tom, Dick & Harry attended the Maleny Primary School with their 3 older siblings. Dick was very popular with his peers, but he did not enjoy being locked up in a classroom having to learn things he wasn't interested in, he preferred to be outdoors. Graeme remembers one time when there was a flood in the Obi and it was running a banker. Dick jumped in at the bridge near the pub for a ride. He was swept downstream about a km before he was rescued. He was caned. It's a wonder he survived to be caned!

We used to go to Pialba for the Christmas Holidays, Santa always knew we'd be there. We all had good fun - swimming, skating, fishing, picture theatre. Dick's favourite was roller skating. We



Tom, Dick & Harry 12 yrs Maleny 1957 with Lassie, Elvis & Pluto



Dick, on BBC outing at the Oasis, Brisbane 1961

At his son's insistence, Henry decided to go interstate and bought 3 trucks for this business. Bruce & Ian eventually took over their trucks and branched out separately, but Dick and another driver, Tony Figg, continued with the Rockhampton run, East West Freights, both driving 1413 Mercedes. These were not reliable trucks, in those days it was difficult to find decent mechanics to keep them roadworthy.

After Bruce & Ian went interstate, Bruce's old truck, a Mercedes L series truck, "Herdie" was driven by Dick. The truck was reliable but slow, the top speed was 80 kph, it had no air-conditioning. He took a load to Darwin and on the way back, broke down between Kynuna & Winton. He was stuck on the road for a week before help arrived. Another time Dick's truck broke down at Holsworthy, once again he was there for a week before Tom (Malone) & I were able to get there and bring him home. He delivered huts to Gidgelalpa with his older brother Ian in Henry's 1413 Mercedes. No matter how much money he set off with, he never had any. Dick was hard-working and generous, he never asked for help himself and was honest in repaying any debt. He was a good driver, but unreliable with his loads. He was very popular & respected by his trucking mates. By the 1970's, Dick left the

walked everywhere. One matinee session, when we got home, it was discovered that Dick was missing. The theatre wasn't far from home, we ran back and discovered Dick asleep on the seats.

Tom & Harry claim that Dick was never a good sportsman. He played to win and always wanted to bat. He never like fielding. Dick never played sport like Tom & Harry. His passion was truck driving, he wanted to drive, anywhere.

After completing his primary education at Maleny, the triplets were sent to Brisbane Boys College as boarders. An academic career for Dick was not to his liking and he did not enjoy his time away from home as a boarder at school. He wanted to get home and drive trucks.

Dick left Brisbane Boys College early, he never finished his Junior. He came home to Maleny and off sided in the family trucking business until he was old enough to get his drivers' licence. Neilen's Transport had an established business locally around Maleny at this time, as well as a depot in Coronation Drive, later Windsor in Brisbane and they did a daily run. For a while, Bruce, Ian, Tom, Dick & Harry did this local run & operated the business from the family home depot & office & store in Maleny, as well as operating a local interstate grain business. Henry bought and set up grain depots in Woodenbong and Legume to avoid road tax. In about the mid 60s, an opportunity to open a transport branch in Rockhampton was offered and Bruce, Ian & Dick drove this run and other drivers drove the local run.



Harry, Dick & Tom at the Oasis, 1961 aged 15 yrs



Dick, Pialba 1963

family transport business where he'd driven 4 ton chevrs, Mecedes, Commer Knocker, Commer Petrol.

Graeme remembers that Dick used to spend all week cleaning and polishing his Holden, then he'd do his best to wreck it over the weekend. If it was running well, he'd want to know what was wrong with it. Another incident that Graeme remembers was an accident Dick had when Frank Irvine was a passenger in the GM. It happened before the ice-box, before the turnoff to Hovard Rd. The truck went over the side and Frank was injured and wore a neck brace for many years after this accident.

I remember one holiday when I was at Teachers'

College and my girlfriend Lorraine Newton & I had a camping holiday at Cotton Tree. It was January 1962. We took Nellie's Leaping Lena. When we were coming home, Lena wouldn't come up the range. This was a common problem with "Leaping Lena". I phoned home, Dick answered and said it'd be no problem, he'd come and get us. He towed us home, drove like a bat out of hell and I really struggled to keep Lena on the road. Fortunately the rope broke and we came to a standstill. After about 20 minutes, Dick returned, relieved that we hadn't flown over the side of the range.



*Left - Dick's 1413 Mercedes on the back of Herdie
Middle - Ian's 1418 Mercedes
Right - 1413 Mercedes*

1968

Dick Married Jill Payne in 1970 and they had 6 children - Marcia, (who was adopted and located in 1988), the mother of Cassie, Hannah, Byron, & Thomas, Mark, Stephen (deceased), Leesa, Mathew & Aaron. Their son Stephen drowned tragically aged 2 in 1974, his death affected both Jill & Dick for many years.

After leaving the family business, Dick worked in a variety of jobs and the family shifted from place to place including Redbank, Blackwater, Innisfail, Mapleton, Kenilworth and Beerwah. He worked at the Yeppoon boat harbour for a while, then operated a drilling plant for the Qld Government at another time, refusing to be in-serviced at Ipswich which resulted in him losing this job. He & Jill owned a large van and shifted about. Leesa remembers living at numerous locations and remembers how Dick used to enjoy driving around on the weekends visiting his many friends with her as a little passenger.



Commer Knocker diesel truck that Dick drove on the Rockhampton run

Leesa also remembers that



Tom with Mark, Dick, & Harry with Stephen 1974

Mathew & Aaron were the apple of his eyes. When they got older, he'd take them with him whenever he could.

Dick worked hard, but his life was influenced by alcohol which affected his marriage and family. His marriage eventually broke up and Jill & the children shifted



Jill & Dick 1970

to Beerwah. His mother Nellie always worried about Dick and she helped him buy a house, next door to Jill & his family. Whenever the boys were in trouble, they'd jump the fence and visit him. He'd give them lollies and chips and they'd be in more trouble when they got home when they couldn't eat their dinner. He used to take them for drives down the Peachester Range and they always wanted him to go faster, which he did. After Nellie's death, Dick sold the house and moved to Toowoomba where he worked in Marrs depot. He missed his family and found it difficult living on his own. He continued to drink.

He finished this job in Toowoomba in poor health and for the last couple of years he had Nellie & Henry's VW camper van which he drove everywhere, from Blackwater to Beerwah, Maleny and back again. He concerned his family and friends with his drinking and driving, he always talked about how he was going to stop drinking, but couldn't. When he lost his licence, he hitched everywhere. He used to stay with friends, drinking happily and picking up odd jobs here and there. His friends remained loyal to him, they loaned him \$s, but towards the end of his life, he was so affected by alcohol that he never repaid some of his debts. This was totally out of character to Dick, alcohol just took hold and made him someone that he would have been ashamed of being.



Dick (left) & Colin Bott with Marr's 1418 Mercedes

He developed health problems, he used to get pains in the chest and said he felt "crook". He went to doctors, unfortunately his heart problem was never diagnosed. He died in his sleep in Maleny, at the home of a friend, Snow McKillop, from acute bronchopneumonia, aged 51. Dick's family is very grateful to Snow for caring for him.

Before his death Dick used to boast about the happy life he'd led, he reckoned he'd lived his 9 lives many times over. He was always the different triplet, his life was so different to Tom & Harry and to his other siblings.

At the time of his death in February 1997, Dick had 5 surviving children and was a grandfather to 3. His descendants have now grown to 5 grandchildren.

I know Dick would be very proud of his family today.

Written by Desley with reminiscences from Leesa in March, 2009



Mark & Allyson, Maleny 1972



Dick & Aunty Ethel at Graeme's wedding, Maleny 1969



Leesa with Aaron, Chris with Mathew, Newmarket 1988



Dick, Maleny 1960s



Matthew & Aaron, Maleny High School



Dick with Mark, 1972

