

This month, well-known Dandenong Cafe proprietor, Steve de George completes 50 years in business in Lonsdale St., Dandenong. And behind Steve's success lies a story

A native of the Greek island of Rhodes, Steve, in 1927 came out to Australia with a party of ²⁵ lads — all around 18, 19 or 20 — from his home town. They landed in Adelaide and Steve stayed there about a month without finding work. He was talking to an old lady one day and she sparked Steve's interest in Melbourne by telling of her son who had a cafe there. It sounded better than Adelaide, so Steve went down to the static, bought a ticket for Melbourne — only £2-8-3 in those days — and found that work was just as scarce over here. He spent most of his first two or three weeks in a Greek Club in Lonsdale St. Then he landed a job as cook's assistant in a Greek Cafe in Lygon St., Carlton, for the princely sum of 5/- a week. Steve didn't know a thing about cooking, but he soon learnt. He recalls that a 3-course meal in those days only cost 3d

Steve progressed so well that within six months his salary had risen to 30/- a week.

By May, 1928, Steve thought he had learned enough to strike out on his own, so he began to look around. A friend lent him 5/- and he went down to Flinders St. station, not knowing one suburb from another. But he thought out Williamstown way looked too dirty and grimy; out east it looked much cleaner and more interesting, so he bought a ticket to Dandenong, having no idea where it was or what it was like. He soon found out. It was in the depression and there were many empty shops in Foster St. and Lonsdale St. But he still liked the look of the town. Up where Wally Cor's business is now there was a poky little shop that Steve rented from Mr Walker for 25/- a week. Soon Steve opened his own fish and chips shop, but the going was tough, and his takings those first few weeks were only around £3 a week. Steve tells the story of how he loved grapes, but, although they were selling in a nearby shop for 2d. a pound, he couldn't afford to buy even 1 lb.

By 1933, however, he was well established, and looked around for larger premises so that he could run a cafe together with his fish business. Where his cafe is located today there was a big empty 2-storey shop formerly occupied by Green's Drapery Store. He leased it, and opened the Dandy Cafe. In 1938 his late brother, Mick, joined him in the business. Up till then Steve had been

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on his own. In 1943 he married Greek lass, Eugeni Tetlis, at St. James Church of England -- the first Greek wedding held in Dandenong.

About 1956 Steve bought the property in which he had made such a success. Later he was to ^{own} ~~sell~~ half of it.

Today he can afford to smile when he recalls the early hardships of establishing his first shop. Such as the time when a farmer, returning from market with potatoes he could not sell, agreed to let Steve have a ton (15 bags) for 2/6 ~~20/-~~. But there were two bags over, and Steve wanted them -- but had no money left to pay for them. "If I can carry those bags in with my teeth will you give them to me?" he pressed the farmer. The grower agreed. And then, to his amazement, Steve picked the bags up in his teeth and carried them into his shop!

During the war when the Army was camped in the Dandenong Showgrounds Steve's Cafe was a popular eating place for the troops, and many a time a soldier got a free feed there when he was broke. When one crowd was leaving, they formed up outside, marched into the Cafe and the tramp of their boots as they marked time brought a startled Steve out. In front of his eyes they started souveniring knives and forks. They weren't pinching them, they explained-- they wanted them as souvenirs of the Cafe. And they marched out with much of Steve's cutlery.

During the war many were the letters he received from soldiers. Some of those trapped in Tobruk, still retained their sense of humour, for they wrote and told Steve that they had put the sign, "Dandy Cafe" up above an old tin shed there!

Steve was always generous and when the late Frank Kirkham, a staunch worker for the Dandenong Hospital, was in his cafe one day, they talked each other into becoming two of the hospital's earliest Life Members by donating £100 each to the funds.

In 1957 Steve and his wife -- who has worked hard beside him in the cafe over the years -- re-visited Greece and their home town. There Steves brother, the Mayor, and a teacher by profession, the welcoming them, described Steve as the destroyer of the town because, over the years he enticed 300 residents to come to Australia and make a new life for themselves.

Now, in May, 1978, Steve has completed 50 unbroken years in business in the Main street. Any day you can still see him and his wife, working in their well-known Cafe. Steve, the successful businessman, has been a generous friend to many. For a time, between 1948 and 1958 he successfully raced many horses, but was never a betting man. His colours were frequently carried to victory, but after riding the crest of the wave of success on the turf, he was ~~shaded~~ enough

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retire while still in front. Today memories of those successes are recalled by the many racing photos that adorn the walls of his cafe.

Hard work has brought its own reward and today Mr and Mrs de George's success in business must be regarded as one of the bright spots in the business life of this bustling city of Dandenong. We congratulate them on their well-deserved success, and on having achieved a half-century of business-life in Lonsdale street -- a street of many, many changes in that time, but one in which Steve's "Dandy Cafe" still survives and flourishes.

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