

# Toby Giacomini, godfather of Point Reyes Station

by Justin Nobel

Toby Giacomini came to Point Reyes Station in 1939 to sell vegetables for his brother Waldo. When Toby passed away on July 17 at the age of 88, he left behind a trucking business worth millions, an eclectic general store and a clan of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren large enough to field an entire division of baseball teams.

"Anything you couldn't figure out on your own, you would just go ask Toby," said Joyce Goldfield, of Point Reyes. "He's the god of our town."

## Milk money

Tobias Benjamin Giacomini was born November 2, 1918, in Petaluma. His mother was Italian and his father was Swiss-Italian. The family ran a 40-acre chicken ranch on Washington Street.

"When we were kids everyone was poor," said Don Ramatici, a childhood friend. "No one had a lot of money but we had a lot of family and we worked hard."

Toby attended St. Vincent's High School. During his last year he worked in the produce department of a local store and at age 21 moved to Point Reyes to work at the Palace Market, which his brother Waldo operated.

In Point Reyes, Toby fell in love with Vetalea Poiani, the daughter of a conservative Tocaloma rancher. The two were married in 1940 in North Beach. Two years later, sensing a business opportunity, he borrowed a pickup truck from his father-in-law and delivered 16 cans of milk from the RCA Ranch in Bolinas to a Point Reyes creamery. He made 10 cents a can.

"I thought I was the luckiest man in the world with \$1.60 in my pocket," Toby later told an interviewer. "That's small change today, but don't get me wrong—I'll take it anyway."

Eight months later, he took out a loan from the bank to buy a truck and was soon hauling milk across the Bay to Richmond by ferry. By 1970 he was picking up milk from more than 50 Marin dairies. As dairies installed their own creameries or developed their own trucking Toby began to truck hay and grain. He operated a ranch in Nevada that shipped cubes of hay to Japan and Hawaii. Later, Toby trucked everything from redwood bark to fishmeal, often waking up at 4 a.m. and working 16 hour days.

"He was a real working man," said Joe Giacomini, his eldest son and one of four children, "there were times he worked all night."

Yet Toby found time to help Vetalea raise a daughter, Carol, and three sons, Joe, Toby Jr. and Chris. He sponsored Little League teams that played in a

field he helped build off Levee Road and built a basketball court and a boxing ring in the second floor of the Livery Stable. Throughout his life he supported Halleck Creek, a ranch where handicapped kids learn to ride horses.

## Oranges for all

During the 1970s Toby began trucking fruit from the Central Valley to Point Reyes to sell at his Feed Barn: apples from Sebastopol, oranges from



Toby Giacomini with son Chris in June 1976 in front of the Feed Barn's new location on Main Street.

Winters, corn from Brentwood. Those that he bought fruit from remember him with fondness.

"There was something about his eyes that just sparkled," said Brentwood farmer Mark Dwelley, who sold Toby sweet corn and peaches and remembered his good humor.

"Shake you double or nothing—your game?" Toby ritually asked Dwelley in a playful attempt to get free fruit.

"You always wanted to give someone that's nice like that your best," said Dwelley.

Back at his store he tirelessly rearranged the fruit, turning the best sides forward. His produce gained local fame and there was often a line of people waiting for him at his store when he returned from the valley. Drinkers at the Western ditched their beers to head across the street to Toby's, said Judy Borello, who has owned the bar for nearly forty years.

"You'd here people say, 'Oh my god you gotta go and get some of Toby's oranges, they're so good!'" Borello recalled.

Even after Toby acquired a litany of drivers he continued to make fruit runs, in later years accompanied by his grandson, Nick Giacomini.

"He waved at everyone on the high-

way," said Nick, who now runs a yoga studio in a wing of Toby's Feed Barn with his wife Amanda. On the way back to Point Reyes, Toby always gave the tollbooth attendant a freshly picked peach or apricot.

In his later years, Toby's sons took over different parts of his business. Joe ran the hay, Toby Jr. the trucking and Chris managed the feed store. Oscar Gamez, who began as a clerk at the store in 1989 remembers Toby's unwill-

ingness to quit working.

## Best side out

As he worked less, he spent more time around town. He loved the calamari at the Station House and at the Pine Cone Diner he sat at the counter with cobbler pie a la mode and talked to everyone who came in. "He was the official greeter of West Marin," said owner Joannie Kwit. "He was a really, really good person."

Many recall how he often sat in a rocking chair outside the Feed Barn, which under his son Chris grew into a group of stores, including an art gallery, a coffee bistro, a gift shop, a yoga studio and an event space that features hay bale seating.

Toby wore his trademark beanie, eyes twinkling, and motioned to passersby.

"Gimme five," he told kids, and pulled off his beanie, revealing his bald head. "Oh, you knocked my hair off."

He'd then hand them an orange or melon sliced with his pocket knife, or an apple polished on his sleeve.

"Always put your best side out," said grandson Nick, remembering a lesson his grandpa taught him about arranging oranges to be sold in the store, "it makes all the difference in the world."

Toby is survived by his wife, Vetalea Poiani Giacomini; his daughter, Carol Nunes; sons and daughter-in-law, Joe and Carol Giacomini, Toby and Sheelah Giacomini; his son, Chris Giacomini; his brother, Ralph Giacomini; his sister, Esther Giacomini; his 15 grandchildren, Tom Nunes, Melanie Nunes, Todd Giacomini, Denise Mulas, Nanette Anderson, Michelle Plumbtree, Joe Giacomini, Renee Brewer, Heidi Noonan, Laura Foster, Jody Giacomini, Jillian Giacomini, Nicholas Giacomini, Melissa Giacomini, Adam Giacomini and 18 grandchildren.

Family members and hundreds of friends remembered Toby at St. Vincent's, in Petaluma, last Monday. One of his trademark beanies rested on the coffin and flowers arranged in the shape of one of Toby's trucks decorated the church. "It was the first funeral I've ever been to that was pure joy," said longtime friend Joyce Goldfield.

*The family requests that donations go to the Point Reyes Community Playground. Checks should be made payable to County of Marin, with "Giacomini memorial" on the memo line and mailed to: Committee for a Family-Friendly Point Reyes, PO Box 881, Point Reyes CA 94956. Contact 663-5497 or [prplayground@horizoncable.com](mailto:prplayground@horizoncable.com).*

*The family plans to hold an event honoring Toby at the Feed Barn in November.*

ingness to quit working.

"He had the touch," said Oscar, who explained how Toby moved 150-pound hay bales long after he retired. "To be a 70-year-old and handling the bales the way he did was amazing."

In 1986, the Point Reyes Business Association threw a party in Toby's honor at the Red Barn. Several hundred guests anointed him godfather of the town and presented Toby with an engraved antique clock and a cake decorated with hay bales.

He drew criticism too. Toby was often in favor of developing the town, which pitted him against many of his friends on issues like the building of storage units in downtown in the mid-1970s or the installation of a sewage treatment plant.

Missy Patterson, who raised eleven children in Inverness and disagreed with Toby over how to redistrict the schools during the early 1960s, still remembers his impassioned speeches at town meetings.

"We were on opposite sides of the fence," said Missy, "but we ended up being really good friends."

For children, Toby was an especially good friend, sharing candy with kids who stopped by his store. At Christmas, he dressed as Santa Claus and rode into