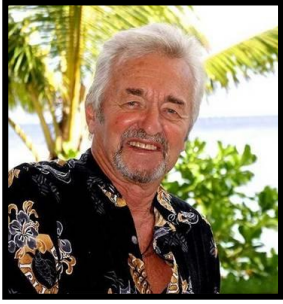


Ray Woolf MNZM



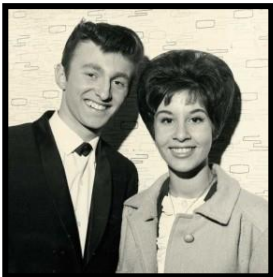
Ray Woolf was born on 13 November 1944 in Buckinghamshire, England, where his mother Edith (b. Potter) had been evacuated briefly to escape the bombing of London but they were back home in Dagenham within a few weeks. A house down the road was destroyed by a German V1 rocket. Pretty scary! Dagenham is a working class suburb in Eastern London, home to the *Ford Motorworks* on the banks of the Thames River. It has also been home to a number of English entertainers including Dudley Moore, Sandy Shaw and John Farnham. Ray's father Stanley Woolf worked as a toolmaker but during the war joined the *Royal Airforce*. Edith also did factory work, making bomb and tank parts.

Both Edith and Stan had good singing voices and her brother Alf played trumpet in local dance bands. She encouraged Ray to take an interest in music, getting him up to sing at family gatherings and taking him to see Johnny Ray at the *London Palladium* when he was 10.

Ray is an only child. He went to *Arnold Road Junior School* and *Goresbrook Secondary Modern* where he played soccer, becoming Vice-Captain of the First Eleven. He formed a skiffle band called the *Wild Cats*, even building his first guitar out of a biscuit tin, then in 1958 he was invited to join *Group Five* which had a manager who found them plenty of work playing early rhythm & blues and rock & roll standards.

When Ray left school at 15 his plan was to join the *Merchant Navy* as a steward but when that didn't pan out he took a series of low paid day jobs and sung at night. His mother suggested that he study at *Maurice Berman School of Modern Pop Singing* where he concentrated on breathing technique. Another student at the time was Helen Shapiro. In 1961 he joined *The Saracens* and recorded *Blue Moon* which although unreleased, received repeated airplay on *Radio Luxembourg*.

Things were starting to bode well for a future in the music business when Ray's father was offered a job in 1962 at the *Devonport Naval Base* in Auckland with free passage for his family to New Zealand, and 17 years old Ray decided to join them. On arrival Stan turned the Job down and found engineering work elsewhere. Edith found a job at *Bell Radio and Television factory* for herself and Ray, and the family settled into Mount Eden, home of Phil Warren's *Crystal Ballroom* featuring Herma Keil and the Keil Isles. Herma let Ray sing a few songs and he was invited back, then word got out and soon Eldred Stebbing offered him a recording contract with *Zodiac Records*.

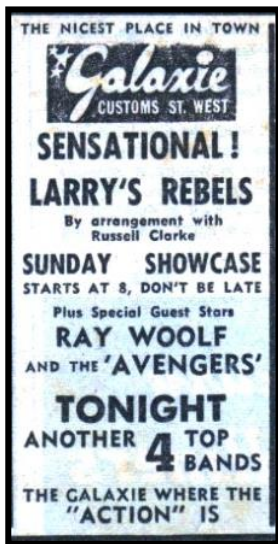


His first release, *Fortune Teller* backed by Pat McMinn and Esme Stevens, did moderately well and was followed by other covers. Stebbing and agent Benny Levin found Ray work on a number of tours; The *Howard Morrison Quartet's Starlight Spectacular*, Lou and Simon, Peter Posa, then a national tour with his old music school student Helen Shapiro, by now a successful recording artiste. He also visited New Caledonia when Freddie Keil fell ill. Stebbing got Ray some television work on *NZBC's In The Groove, Play It By Ear* and *On The Beat Side*.

Ray married Jean Smith in March 1964 and found a real job working at *Namco* making furniture, so Stebbing terminated his recording contract. Ray and Jean moved out to Karaka to be closer to her mother and baby Tyrone was born but at the age of 10 months he died from gastro-enteritis, devastating the family!

Bill Belton had joined *The Cavaliers*, a 7 piece group which Eldridge Stebbing often used as a backing band. When Bill and guitarist Al Paget formed The *Newsounds*, another seven piece soul group with a brass section, they encouraged Ray to join on vocals and rhythm guitar and pretty soon they were busy working the Auckland club circuit. Reality set in a year later and when they disbanded Bill formed a quintet called *The Avengers* which by 1967 had become *Ray Woolf and the Avengers*. They dressed up in mod clothing and long hair and scored a recording contract with *RCA*, releasing three singles; *La La La Lies*, *You*, and *Crystal Ball* which became a finalist in the *Loxene Golden Disc Awards*. Ray hosted a radio show, *Pop-A-Long Special* on *1ZB* for 6 months.





Larry Morris's manager, Russell Clarke, talked Ray into going solo in 1968; he made regular appearances on the *C'Mon* television show and released *Be My Baby*. Clarke pushed him into a pop-singer mould but after being pulled offstage and mauled while supporting Normie Row at the YMCA, Ray decided this was not for him. By now his children Travis and Lisa had been born and money was tight so he joined fellow singer Tommy Ferguson painting houses, a much safer option.

Their first job together was for Eddie and Elaine Hegan and soon Ray was signed to *Hegan's Entertainment Agency* and back in business. For 15 years Ray would be Elaine's prime act until Billy T James turned up. In 1969 Ray began his annual Christmas visits to orphanages and children's hospital wards. After regular appearances on TVNZ's *Happen Inn* from 1970 – 73 and cabaret work at nightspots such as the *Dutch Kiwi* and *Trillo's* on Westhaven, he successfully auditioned for a children's program, *Play School*, with co-presenter Val Lamont, based on a BBC script.

When the production of *Play School* moved to Dunedin in 1975, Ray and Val continued working together on two television soap opera's; *A Going Concern* on TV2 and *Close to Home* on TV1, then in 1977 they teamed up on *Two On One*, a weekly television talk show which eventually evolved into his own variety program called *The Ray Woolf Show*. Two other 1977 TV series were *The Mackenzie Affair* and *Saddle Up*. In 1975 Ray Woolf received the NBOA *Entertainer Of The Year* award and in 1978 he won the VAC *Shure Golden Microphone Professional Performer of the Year Award*. *The New Ray Woolf Show* continued in 1980 but by the end of the season it was obvious that New Zealand had tired of chat shows.

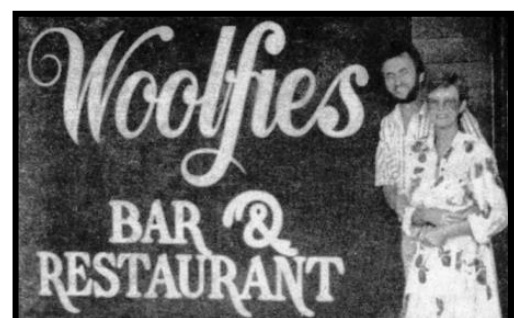


His daughter Trisha had been born in 1970 and the other kids were getting older so in 1980 the family moved north to a lifestyle block at Manganui and began renovating an old kauri villa which they had moved on-site. Ray was away a lot which led to the deterioration in his marriage and eventually he met Chrissy Butler while he was working the *TSS Earnslaw* in Queenstown during the Christmas holidays. Ray took a lead role in the *Auckland Musical Theatre Company* production of *Hans Christian Anderson* in 1980 then the next year he joined the cast of the *Hamilton Operatic Society's, The Music Man*. 1981 also saw him appear in *Under the Mountain*, a television drama.



Ray hosted a TV2 talent quest show in 1984 called *Starquest* which involved touring the country with his band; Murray McNabb (p), Billy Nuku (dr) and Bruce Kerr (b), presenting heats in hotels and other venues. Six semi-finals were telecast and the ultimate winners were *Hori and Hemi* from Mangataipa. Ray and Jean finally separated and he moved to Queenstown to be with Chrissy, initially taking a residency at the *Skyline Restaurant* then returning to Auckland to move in with Edwina Thorne and Murray McNabb, taking work at *Stanley's Nightclub* with Spike Walker, Billy Kristain and Kevin Strange. Finally Ray and Chrissy moved north and lived in a caravan at Coopers Beach then bought land at Mills Bay. They eventually built an adobe house near Manganui and moved into it in 2000.

In 1989 Ray and Peter Morgan opened *Woolfie's Nightclub* in Taipa which suffered from a lack of holiday makers in winter but did well during the summer. Chrissy ran the restaurant and Ray performed and managed the stage where artists such as Tommy Adderley, Rodger Fox, Mary Yandall, Frank Gibson Jr, Midge Marsden and Bunny Walters performed. *Woolfie's* lasted two years then *Access*, a Maori education centre, invited him to front a music course, so they continued in the venue until it was sold then moved across the road to the rugby club. Ray and Billy Kristian still play in Manganui at the *Waterfront Café*, as a duo when they find the time.





So, back to the five hour trips to perform gigs in Auckland until in 1992 he took a role in a *South Pacific Pictures* television production, *Marlin Bay*, then signed on with the *Karen Kay Agency* and played *Shortland Street*. From 1995 he acted in the *Hercules* and *Zena* series' playing bad guys before taking a starring roll as General Marmax, then he continued his acting career with episodes in a number of successful television shows. His film appearances include *Back River Road* (2001), *King Kong* (2004) and *The Insatiable Moon* (2010).

Ray also sung in a number of touring musical productions; *A Slice of Saturday Night* (1994), *Sound of Music* (1994 – 2003), *The New Rocky Horror Show* (1995), *West Side Story* (1997), *The King and I* (2007), *Blood Brothers* (2008) and *Anything Goes* (2011).

Ray has been very lucky over the years, picking up work for product promotions. In the 60's he did ads for *Cambridge Clothing* and *Arrowmint*. Then in the 70's there was the *Hip High Pantyhose Campaign*, recording jingles, filming ads and touring the main centres with a stage show. He spent 12 years from 1977 promoting *Bic* pens and disposable lighters with Howard Morrison followed by a five-year contract with *La-Z-Boy* reclining armchairs.

In 1985 it was discovered that Ray had diabetes so he became involved with *Diabetes Auckland* promoting awareness, giving talks and performing. Then in 2011 he was diagnosed with prostate cancer and became an ambassador for *Prostrate Cancer Awareness*. Other causes he works with are *Downs Syndrome*, the *Multiple Sclerosis Society*, *New Zealand Orphans* and *Telethon*. He has performed for royalty a number of times; stepping in for Shane during the *Super Pop 70* concert at *Western Springs Stadium* to welcome Prince Charles and Princess Anne. He also appeared for Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip at the 1981 Royal Variety Performance and before Princess Alexander and her husband at the *Auckland Centennial Command Concert* in 1971.

Ray recorded *Heading For The Top* in 1982 to promote the *All Whites* in their *Soccer World Cup* challenge and sang on *Sailing Away* for the 1987 *Americas Yachting Cup* campaign. During New Zealand's millennium celebrations he assisted with local preparations and recorded *Children of the New Dawn*, singing it at the *Waitangi Treaty Grounds* with the *New Dawn Children Choir*. He helps with the annual *Waitangi Day Festival*, raised funds for the Northland flood victims and was Santa at *Christmas in the Park* at *Auckland Domain*. He received his well deserved *VAC Benny Award* in 2007 and his (*MNZM*) in 2008. In 2010 he received a star on the *Boulevard of Dreams* in Orewa.



Over the years he has produced 22 singles; a 1972 album, *Once Upon a Time*; contributed 7 tracks on a 1972 LP called *An Evening at Tommo's Place* and a 2012 compilation of his 1960s recordings called *The Sixties Collection*. Spike Walker has been his musical director for 20 years and Ray also tours with the *Roger Fox Big Band* doing a Frank Sinatra tribute show; they released *Rodger Fox Presents Ray Woolf* in 2007.

In 2015 Ray and Chrissy took a world trip, including a return to Britain for the first time in 53 years. His biography, *Hey Woolfie, Welcome to the World*, was published in 2018. He now has 3 children, 12 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.