

Stanley Reilly – a life through the lens

Unassuming Stanley Reilly was dealt a tough hand as a youngster in Edinburgh but carved out a new life which led to him being up close and personal with some of the world's most famous celebrities.

Now The Edinburgh Reporter has helped Stanley stage a mini exhibition in The Cobbled Roastery on Thistle Street where some of his photographs are on display.



Stanley Reilly with one of his photos which is on display at Cobbled Roastery PHOTO ©2024 The Edinburgh Reporter

A childhood spent in care homes, a speech stammer and a period living rough on the streets of London would be enough to pull anyone under but Stanley Reilly pictured a different life for himself.

But even optimistic Stanley could not have envisaged that life would involve rubbing shoulders with some of the greatest stars of music, stage and screen from the Swinging Sixties onwards as he developed a passion for photography.

Born in The Royal Infirmary in the 1940s he lived with his mother for his initial years before a mental health breakdown led to her three children being placed into care. Sadly, the family was split up and Stanley never got to know his older siblings.

At 16 he went to live at Ponton House, a working men's home near the Palais dance hall in Fountainbridge, and found work as a labourer. The home managed money for their residents and

so he had some savings when he finally left care at 18, but he was very much left to find his own way. Looking back he believes that his severe childhood stammer deterred potential foster parents adopting him.

He first moved south in 1965 "around the time that Winston Churchill died". After sleeping rough for about six months he contacted the Salvation Army for help. Stanley had some experience of the charity, as "every Christmas they used to come to the home and play music for us and give us all a present". The Sally Army assisted in finding a bedsit in Tufnell Park in North London where he lived for the next five years.

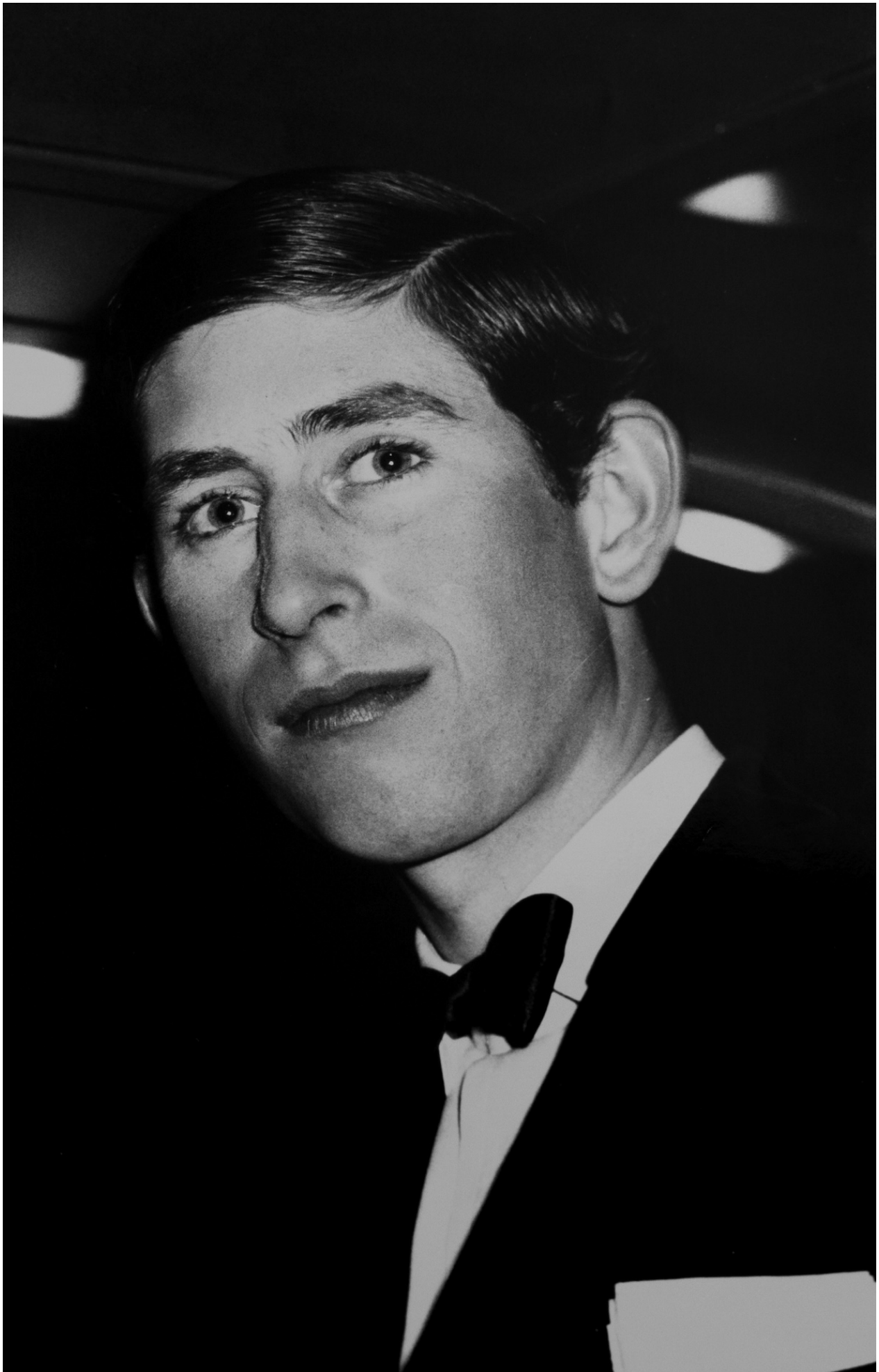
He liked to frequent Leicester Square watching the stars arriving at film premieres and it was there that he met well-known Spanish press photographer, Antonio Rios – a meeting which helped transform a young man down on his luck and kickstart a "career" in photography.

Stanley recalled: "I was working as a labourer on the building sites and later became a fitter's mate at the Royal Marsden Hospital where I worked for about 23 years. It was only five minutes from where I then lived in Chelsea. It was all thanks to Tony that I went to live at Ashburnham Mansions just off Cheyne Walk, with Bob Geldof living across the way who I became really friendly with."

Tony advised him to "go on a course" so Stanley attended the Camera Club and before long he was snapping models at photo studios, honing his skills first of all with his £100 Pentax Spotmatic camera and adding some additional lenses and flash as his skills developed. When he was aged ten he had been given a Kodak camera as a present and had to save his pocket money to buy film. Even now he has boxes and boxes of photos he has taken during his life – and some negatives which have never been printed.

He said: "After work, I used to go out at night and weekends taking pictures with Tony who asked me to be his assistant, either at premieres or at Pinewood Studios. I had a nice suit and tie and I was just so proud to be with all the photographers.

"I covered the premiere of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang when a young Prince of Wales arrived. The car had stopped and I went forward to take a photo of Prince Charles through the window – that photo was used all over Europe."



He photographed Princess Diana during a visit to the Royal Marsden and witnessed the way photographers followed her relentlessly which he found "quite sad". He also met huge stars, including Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor in 1969 at their house in north London, and later captured snaps of them outside a London hotel.

The cameras used by photographers at the time were expensive and heavy, but working with Tony as his assistant gave Stanley the chance to use the best of gear such as a Leica. Back then he had to get the film developed and then take the prints to the publishers, not like today when press photos are sent straight from the camera to newspaper picture desks.

Although photography was not his main job – and he admits it was always more of a hobby to him – it was one he loved. Asked to pick out a favourite photo out of the thousands he has taken over the years, Stanley said without hesitation: "I think the moment when I photographed John Lennon at an exhibition on the King's Road stands out. It was at the time The Beatles had been shooting the album cover for Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. I got this amazing shot – I was so close to him." Stanley also has shots of John and Yoko Ono with anti-war placards in his collection.

A meeting with Neil Armstrong, the first person to walk on the moon, was also a high point for him. He had read in the news that the Apollo 11 astronauts were to visit Downing Street – a street that was open to the public at the time and minus the current day anti-terrorist high security measures which are in place.

He recalled it was night time but he saw the astronauts arriving and posing at the front door of 10 Downing Street with Prime Minister Harold Wilson. He said: "I got the shots printed up quickly because there were only about three or four photographers there."



He also had the opportunity of meeting and photographing Edinburgh's own 007 Sean Connery at The Savoy hotel. Stanley

said: "Sean was always so nice to me. I've got some lovely photographs of him and I met him in Edinburgh with actor Michael Caine."

Stanley explained that he went through a "very bad patch" of depression and anxiety when he took early retirement and moved back to Edinburgh some 30 years ago. He became involved with Scotland's HIV and Hepatitis C charity Waverley Care, eventually becoming a volunteer and then he took up photography again.

When he became well enough, Waverley Care helped him to stage an exhibition of his photos and publish a book, "Being There", which raised funds for the charity. Sir Elton John kindly wrote a foreword for his book – Stanley had met him and photographed him and others like Ken Dodd, Dickie Henderson, Jimmy Tarbuck and Bruce Forsyth at press calls at the London Palladium. He said: "Elton John was very shy and wore big fur coats and t-shirts and big glasses. He was terrific playing the piano."

Stanley, who is modest about his achievements, said: "Since I moved back to Edinburgh people have been so nice to me. I raised money for Waverley Care with my exhibition in Harvey Nichols, and there was another exhibition in The Dome. I would quite like to do another exhibition – some photos are still in frames ready to be hung."



Stanley Reilly with some of his photos which are on display at Cobbled Roastery PHOTO ©2024 The Edinburgh Reporter

For the last 10 years he has taken photos with a small Nikon digital camera and he prints some of these to keep. There is hardly an important occasion in Edinburgh when Stanley is not present – particularly during the Fringe and Film Festival over the last three decades.

At the 2023 Assembly Fringe launch, a silver-haired man was invited onto the stage by comedian and compere, Jason Byrne, who thought he had just plucked an unsuspecting member of the public from the audience. Little did the Irish comic know that every member of the press pack recognised that the real star on stage was Stanley Reilly, the photographer who once lived next door to Engelbert Humperdinck.

Grant Sugden, Chief Executive of Waverley Care said: “Stanley Reilly has been an integral part of Waverley Care for many years. He began volunteering for Waverley Care during the 1990s, and his dedication to fundraising and supporting the charity has had a lasting impact in Waverley Care’s history.

“Stanley’s passion for photography led to the creation of his book ‘Being There’, providing a photographic insight into the glamorous world of politics and celebrities of the 1960s and 70s. We are honoured that the proceeds of ‘Being There’ have been donated to Waverley Care with the intention of supporting those affected by HIV.

“Stanley believed that the volunteering he undertook with Waverley Care gave him the ‘confidence to look ahead with optimism’ and through publishing this book, wanted to share his optimism with the world. Stanley’s work, and his passion for supporting the charity holds an important place within Waverley Care’s legacy, and we are extremely grateful for his steadfast support of the charity.”

Stanley said: “I wouldn’t change anything. I had a hard time when I went to London but a lot of my friends from my time in care joined the Army. I couldn’t do that as I was dyslexic. Now life is very good for me. I still get invited to parties you know! I couldn’t have it any better. I was very lucky and it all worked out for me, especially with the help of the Salvation Army and then Waverley Care.”

See Stanley’s photos at [The Cobbled Roastery](#) 48 Thistle Street Edinburgh EH2 1EN



Stanley also worked as a model as well as a photographer



007 star Sir Roger Moore with his family at Pinewood Studios



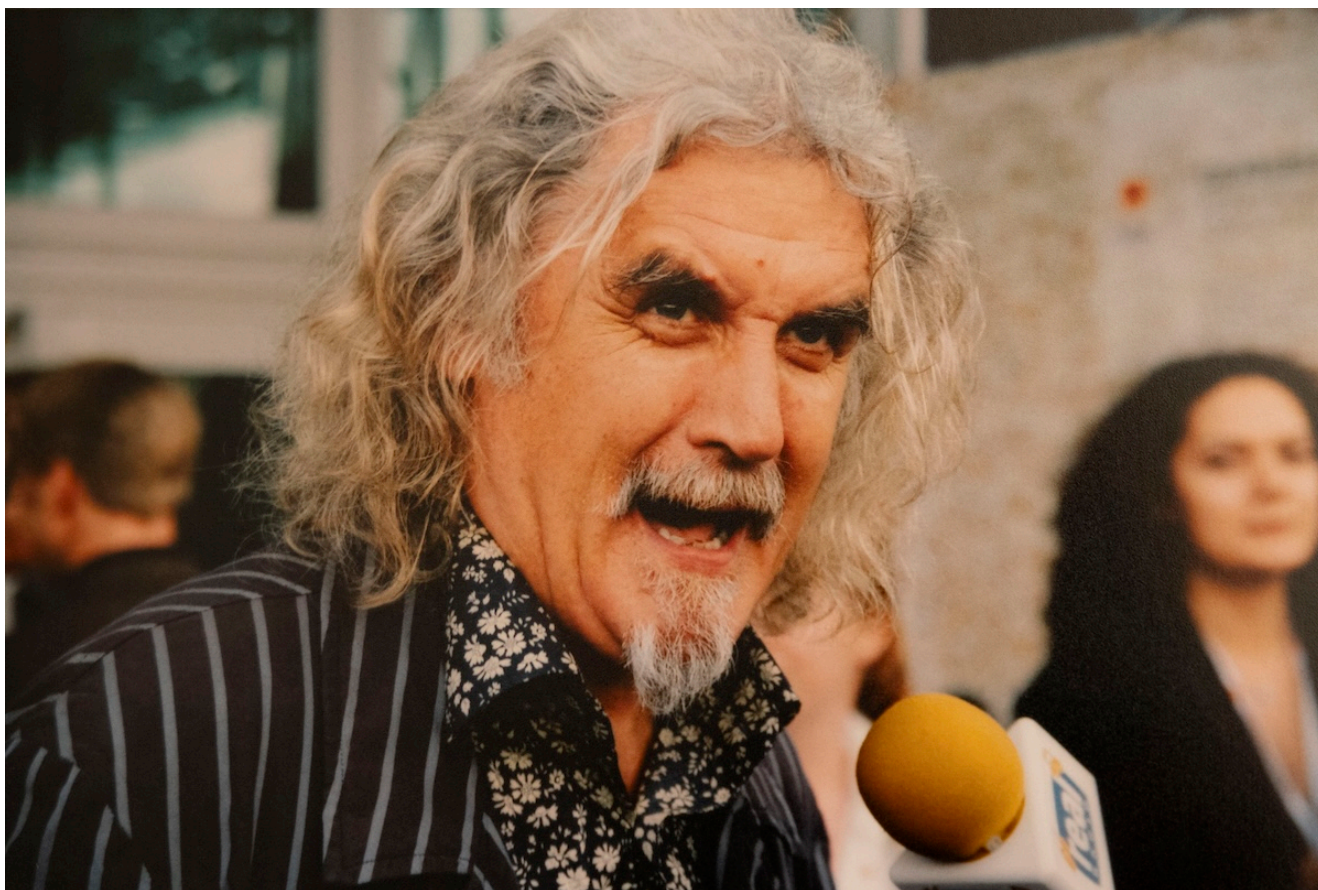
Richard Burton



Stanley said Elton John was quite shy during his earlier career



Stanley with Elaine C Smith



The Big Yin



Sir Sean Connery and his wife Micheline at a Film Festival event at The Odeon, Edinburgh



John Lennon



Stanley Reilly with one of his photos which is on display at
Cobbled Roastery PHOTO ©2024 The Edinburgh Reporter