My Life as a Photographer
by
Les Watts

Figure 1 Leo Forrest my Apprentice Master

Figure 2 Les with "Graflex" Camera
My Life as a Photographer

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As we grow older and retire, the novelty of all that freedom to do as we please soon fades. We are told that we should write our “Memoirs”, which is a very broad comment as there are so many facets to our life, and which one should I write about. I have already ventured into some of these areas, and have provided a lot of reading which may bore or fascinate some of our family. I have always been interested in history, and have come to realize, that your mother and I have created a unique history, and we have frequently shared our experiences and lifestyles when we were very young. One of the very important parts of my life was as a Newspaper Photographer with the “Bendigo Advertiser”.

As I fiddle with my digital camera, I realize the vast changes that have occurred in photography during my lifetime. It would be quite simple to “Google” photography and read all about its history, but I intend to tell my story, and my memories, technical and otherwise, in my life as a newspaper photographer. Many of the comments I will make will be of my memories, and may be subject to verification and correction.

My life as a newspaper photographer began on the 5th February 1948, my 16th birthday, and I feel it is very relevant to learn how I gained this position. I have written elsewhere that I was a studious child, possibly a result of childhood illness that prevented me from engaging in physical sport or activities. The only camera in our house was my sister Nancy’s “Box Brownie”, which I only on the odd occasion would be asked to take a photo (I will discuss this in detail later). Joy and I both agree that as children we rarely made a decision on our own, our parents (and in Joy’s case, also included her beloved Gran) would tell us what to do. When we started work, our pay envelope would be handed unopened to our mother, and she would give us a small allowance. We were quite content with this and readily accepted any arrangements without argument. I have already stated elsewhere that in 1946 my parents were forced to move, and our destination was a market garden in maiden Gully. This was a huge expense for my parents and left them in dire straits financially. I stayed with friends in Kerang and completed my year 9 studies. The majority of kids left school after year 8, at which stage they may have gained their “Merit” Certificate. On moving to Maiden Gully I was given the choose of working on the market garden, or elsewhere, or going back to school. During the war years there was plenty of after school work for us kids, but with rationing etc there was little to spend your money on, so I had accumulated a substantial bank balance. One of the condition of my returning to school was that I would have to pay my own way, which I readily agreed to. So 1947 was my difficult year, in many ways, and ended with me gaining my “Intermediate” certificate in 8 subjects, failing only in French.
Generally education beyond year 10, was “Leaving” in year 11, and “Matriculation” in year 12, which was required for entry into University. So by the end of 1947 my education was virtually complete, but it did not know what to do and no one told me. I suppose that during December and January I helped a little in the market garden, but thought little of my future. Late in January my mother said to me “the Bendigo Advertiser is looking for an apprentice photographer, and you like photography, so you should apply.” So on the given day, I rode my bike to Eaglehawk, caught the tram to Bendigo, and arrived outside the “Advertiser” office. There were about 45 kids waiting, and I was reluctant to mingle with them, so wandered around the streets for a while. By the time I returned the crowd had dwindled to a few, and I got my interview and the apprenticeship. I would like to think that my presentation and high educational level got me the job, but in hindsight I have my doubts.

The Managing Editor of the “Advertiser” was Bert Mundy, a non drinking and strict Methodist, I also was an eager Methodist, and would have received high accolades from the Methodist fraternity from Kerang. These factors may have swung the decision in my favor. Having come from a working class family my social graces and dress left a lot to be desired, and I was not a fast learner in these areas. I did not own a suit, and in the early days my clothes were mainly “hand me downs” and ill fitting, and shirts etc were cheap ones from chain stores. Their standards in those days were no as high as they are today. But with all these negatives I apparently was socially acceptable for the times.

In the second half of my first year I was taking photographs, and from then on I was attached to the social pages, and covered the majority of weddings, cocktail parties, christenings, Deb Balls and any other events printed in the social columns. I always remember that the rich people were nice, the middle class nasty, and I rarely seen the working class, except for weddings. I also covered other news stories, and women’s sport, and the big events were the Easter Fair, and the “Bendigo Thousand” a running event held over the Labour Day weekend in March.

Compared to the Digital cameras used today, and even the 35mm SLR cameras using the now outdated chemical photo processing, the cameras we used on the “Bendigo Advertiser” were unique. The history of photography is well documented and I only intend to generalize on the cameras used and the processes in use during the 40’s and early 50’s. The comments I make are from memory only and may in many instances be subject to further verification. By far the most popular home camera was the “Box Brownie” manufactured by “Kodak”. It was a fixed focus camera, with a single meniscus lens, and used roll film. Fixed focus meant that there was no need to focus, it was point and shoot.
“Depth of Focus” was the distance range that a picture was in focus, and generally was determined by the lens aperture (that is the size of the hole that controlled the amount of light reaching the film), and the “Box Brownie” was about an f8. This enabled pictures to be taken in focus from a range of about 6 feet to infinity. Some of the better “Box Brownie” also had a portrait attachment which enabled close-ups to be taken. The distance from the lens to the film was its focal length, and the f-number was the number of times that the lens aperture diameter would go into the focal length. Each lens had an adjustable aperture control, which would range from full aperture to f-16 or more. The standard aperture sizes were f-3.5, f-4.5, f-5.6, f-8, f-11, f-16 etc, and each higher number halves the amount of light reaching the film. Therefore an f-11 allowed half the light to reach the film as an f-8.

Single meniscus lens was a one element lens, whereas the better cameras had multi-element lens, which of course produced higher quality pictures.

Roll film was a strip of film rolled around black paper with a red backing with numbers on it. The film would take 8 pictures (about 2-1/2 X 3-1/2 ins). The back of the camera would open, revealing the film carrier, you would then load the film and feed it to the take up spool, this was then put back into the camera, the door closed, and the wind off knob engaged. On the back of the camera there was a small red window, and you would wind the film until the No. 1 appeared. After taking your picture you would wind on to No 2 and so on till all pictures were taken. (It was very important to wind on immediately after taking a picture, otherwise you would get a “double exposure”). After the last photo you would wind the film off till the end, remove it from the camera, stick it down, and drop it off at the chemist for processing. Most cameras used a 620 or 120 film which took 8 pictures; the only difference between the two was the size of the slot in the take up spool. (Some cameras used a film which took 12 square pictures 2-1/2 X 2-1/2, which were used in the very popular “Roliflex” and “Rollicord” cameras.) On the top of the camera was a small viewing mirror (about the size of a postage stamp), in which you viewed the picture you wished to take.

The final part of the “Box Brownie” was the shutter, which controlled the flow of light through the lens to the film. The “Box Brownie” had a fixed speed shutter, with a duration of about 1/60th of a second, and it was very important to hold the camera steady and avoid “camera shake”, which would give you a blurred photo.
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The film used in box cameras was “orthochromatic” which was a relatively slow speed film, but ideal for the box camera. The 3 basic films were “Ordinary”, “Orthochromatic” and “Panchromatic”, which were basically slow, medium and high speed films. The speed of the film refers to its sensitivity to light, and there were various methods of measuring that speed, today the accepted measurement is the ASA, and a general purpose film is an ASA100. We worked on “Scheiners” and I am unsure of the ASA conversion, but I think our high speed panchromatic film was only about 64ASA. The second factor with various film were their sensitivity to colors. Whereas in pigment colors the 3 basics are red, blue and yellow, in the spectrum they are red, green and blue. Generally the “Ordinary” film was only sensitive to blue, the “Orthochromatic” to blue and green, and the “Panchromatic” to all 3 colors.( I am unsure if I have these colors correct, but the principle remains). This is very important factor as all 3 films were used together in the making of colored photos. Color photography was very complex, and comprised many processes, and I have no intention of trying to explain it from memory. The main principle in colors, and color photography are that an object appears red, because it absorbs blue and green, and transmits red. The various shades depend on the amount of color absorbed and the amount transmitted. In many box camera photos, a girls red lipstick would appear as black, because the “Orthochromatic” film did not recognize red.

Generally the “Box Brownie” was a still picture camera, you could not take action photos, as these require faster shutter speeds to freeze the movement. Many excellent pictures were taken with these cameras, and enabled a vital record of the history of many families.

The main 2 cameras used by the “Advertiser” were a “Speed Graphic” (3 1/4 X 2 1/4”) using sheet film, and a 5 X 4 “Graflex” also using sheet film or glass plates. By today’s standards they were big and cumbersome and heavy to carry around. Both cameras used a “roller blind shutter”, which was a black blind of strong material, mounted at the back of the camera, and moved across the front of the film surface. Generally the blind had 4 openings, full, half, quarter and an eighth, and also 6 tensions. This in effect gave you 24 shutter speeds, e.g. a half opening on tension 4 may give you a shutter speed of say 1/60th of a sec. There was a small plate mounted on the camera which listed the various shutter speeds from the various openings and tensions. We did use “exposure meters” but generally we learned to “read the light” and select the required exposure setting.
Of course the aperture also had to be taken into consideration, and all of these factors would depend on the “action” in the picture to be taken, i.e. stationary, moderate or fast. The shutter speed would “freeze” the action, and the aperture would be determined by the amount of available light. With action photos you had to determine whether the movement was “across the lens” “towards the lens” or “on an angle”. The distance to the subject was also a consideration, and all of these factors had to be determined prior to taking your picture. An example would be an object moving towards the lens under good light conditions may be stopped at a moderate speed of say 1/125\textsuperscript{th} of a sec at f-11, whereas the same object moving across the lens may require a shutter speed 4 times faster, i.e. 1/500\textsuperscript{th} of a sec at f-4.5. Depth of focus was also the other consideration, as the wider the lens aperture the less depth of focus, and on close up portraits this can be as little as a few inches. The speed of the film also had to be considered, but this is only a generalization of the many decisions a photographer, particularly a newspaper photographer, had to make to obtain the desired picture. Generally in “Portrait Photography” several shots would be taken of the subject, and the best selected, but in a race finish you only have one chance, and you are expected to produce the required result.

The “Graflex” camera had a fold down “Funnel” which you looked down to focus and compose your picture. There was an opaque mirror behind the lens onto which your picture was clearly reflected (similar to the prism in a telescope) and when you pressed the shutter release the mirror flipped up out of the way, and the roller blind activated and made the exposure.

The “Speed Graphic” had a “DV” (direct vision) viewfinder, which had a “parallel correction setting”. The DV viewfinder gave you a view of the subject parallel to the lens, which was of little problem except for close up work. On close ups the picture would be to one side of the frame unless you made a parallel correction either manually, or using the parallel corrector. There was also a wire frame that flipped up and could be used in taking fast action photos, or photos in awkward positions. The “Speed Graphic” also had a shutter control behind the lens, which was generally used for “Flash Photography”. It was very important to ensure that this shutter was open when using the roller blind shutter, otherwise no light would reach the film (a disaster).
The flash gun was huge by today's standards, and required a flash bulb and reflector and a tube to hold the batteries. The flash bulbs came in a variety of sizes and types, and mainly comprised of magnesium ribbon, encased in a glass bulb with a protective shatterproof coating. When the shutter release was pressed the batteries provided the ignition for the magnesium, which burnt in a vivid flash, followed by the exposure. There was a micro-second between the ignition, the light throwing out, and pooling, before the shutter could be released. We mainly used 2 types of flash bulbs, PF-60’s which were about the size of an ordinary light bulb with an ES, and PF-15’s (“peanuts”) which were about the size of pilot light bulb, but tear drop shaped. The PF no. indicated the volume of light, and the smaller bulbs were quite adequate for most interior work, whereas the bigger bulbs were used outside, or for large interiors, or for “open flash” photography e.g. debutante groups. The “open flash” method, was camera on tripod, group arranged and focused, shutter opened, flash fired, shutter closed.

During the early 1950’s “electronic flash” became more common and eventually replaced the flash bulb. It is important to note the different “colors” of light, which were very important particularly with the advent of color photography. I am a little unsure of my ground in this area, but the basic principle remains the same. Generally daylight is “blue” light, and interior light with the old incandescent bulbs was “red” light. These variables changed with the advent of fluorescent tubes and other light bulb improvements. For this exercise the flash bulbs were “red” light and the electronic flash was “white” light. Because of these factors in the early days of color photography there were two main types of color film, one for daylight and one for artificial light.

The electronic flash was completely different to the flash bulbs, and during the transition period, most cameras had two flash settings, “M” and “X”, the “M” for flash bulbs and the “X” for electronic flash. Whereas with the flash bulb the process was ignition, pool then exposure, the electronic flash was completely different. The light values were measure by PF nos. in flash bulbs, but by “Joules” in electronic flash. We used one of the early “Dawe” flash unit with a capacity of 100 joules, which is huge and completely different by today’s standards. I believe the principles would be the same, and the “Dawe” unit was operated by a 4 volt wet battery (like a miniature car battery). The battery had to be trickle charged, and was good for about 100 flashes.
Simply the basic principle was the 4 volts was condensed many time, then released as one flash of energy with a duration of about 1/10,000 of a second. The voltage generated was lethal, and I believe there were cases of electrocution from some of these units in their infancy. The very short flash duration instantly froze all action and was revolutionary in high speed action photography. I recall on one occasion we were getting mysterious blobs on our negatives, until we released they were the frozen movement of raindrops. Shutter speed was no longer an issue with stopping action, and by “stopping” down the aperture in poor light, we were able to use the flash as the light source, and also gain depth of focus. The electronic flash was most certainly a revolutionary advance in photography.

Whereas modern photography has eliminated the complex factors to be considered before taking a photo, the modern day photographer, amateur or otherwise, has more opportunity to express their artistic talent. Therefore we see far superior portrait photographs, more creative candid photos, and the newspaper photographer vividly displays the action of the moment. There were some excellent photographers in the early days, and they used their technical skills to produce some brilliant photos. In the early days of portrait photography the subject was required to sit still for several seconds, whereas earlier still the duration was much longer. Consequently most old photos display our forefathers with a blank stare, but at least we obtained a lasting record. Many of us have family photos dating back over 100 years, but with modern digital pictures we can “lose” them in a few weeks. To maintain lasting records we need to make quality prints, correctly labeled and stored. Unfortunately the amateur photographer of today is much like those of yesterday, we fail to label our photos, and the subject remains unknown, or a guess.

The “Advertiser” also had a small portrait studio for taking pictures of local dignitaries etc, or young ladies for the social page. (We had a special portrait file which contained photos of all the local identities.) In the studio we had a camera on a tripod, a mottled backdrop, with a backlight, and red “drapes” made of Hessian. There was a plain old bench to sit on, and two banks of floodlights on a stand. They were in banks of 3, one each side and one on the top. The bulbs were “Photofloods”, were opaque, and produced a strong white light. They had a short life, and I think they were described as having an “overloaded filament”. They were only used to take the photo, and the focusing and composing were done with other lights.
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by

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Up until now I have given a general idea of the various cameras and films etc used. The next stage is in the Dark Room were the films were processed and the photographic print made. Most of our processing was manual and as carried out in the “Advertiser” dark room during the 40’s and early 50’s. You entered the dark room through a “light trap”, which was a small ante room, and you were in complete darkness when you closed the door behind you. This allowed you to enter the darkroom without allowing any damaging light in. The dark room was quite big and comprised a bench the full length of one wall, into which a large sink was fitted. The sink was about 5 ft long and a foot deep, and on one end was a large tray with running water to wash the photographs. The other end of the sink had a large tray full of “hypo” for “fixing” the photos, and over it was a duckboard with two trays on it, one for developer and the other an acid bath. To the right of the sink was a glazing machine for drying and putting a gloss on the photos. To the left of the sink was the enlarger, and to the left of it was a contact printer. In the extreme corner was a small room, about the size of a toilet, in which the negatives were developed. On the opposite side of the room was another bench for the sorting and storage of photos, photographing paper and film. During the printing process the room was lit by a “safe light”, which would not affect the sensitized photographic paper. We used 3 major safe lights, a yellow for photo processing, a red for orthochromatic film, and a dark green for panchromatic film. Our safe lights were a box about 6” X 8” with the safety glass in front and a small bulb (like a 10 watt pilot bulb) behind it.

Practically all our film and photo processing was done by inspection, whereas most commercial processing was done in tanks by “time and temperature”. All processing was done in a developer at a temperature of 68 degrees Fahrenheit, and in the colder weather the developer tray would be in a tray of hot water to maintain the temperature. We used the “inspection” method to give us greater control over the negative processing, and enabled us to stop the negative process early, or let it “stew”. Practically all our film was panchromatic, which required processing in complete darkness, and the occasional inspection by the dark green safe light.
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During the 40’s amateur roll film was hard to obtain, but as a newspaper we were able to obtain adequate supplies of materials. Even so we were limited to the number of photos we could take, as an example, 2 photos was the limit for a wedding. We used mostly sheet film which was loaded into double sided carriers. The carriers were loaded in complete darkness, and the film had a notch in the top right handed corner, which indicated that the film was emulsion side up. The film was loaded into the carrier, and a thin slide fitted in front of it. The slide had raised dots one side, and plain on the other, the dots indicated that the film was unexposed, and the plain that the film was exposed. Discipline in these and other processes was paramount, otherwise you would have “double exposures” and loss of vital pictures. The carrier fitted to the back of the camera, you removed the slide, took your picture, and then replaced the slide, correct side out. We usually carried about 6 of these double sided carriers. There were also “film packs” and we had a multi carrier pack which held about 10 negatives. With the multi carrier, you loaded your negative carrier and stacked them in, placing the slide in front to prevent exposure. The carrier had a soft material bag on the side (like chamois leather), and after your exposure there was a rod which pulled the exposed negative into the bag, and you slid it into the back of the stack. The “film packs” were a commercial product, and worked on a similar principle, but instead of the rod and bag there were paper tags attached to each individual film. After each exposure, you pulled the numbered tag, and the film moved to the back of the stack, you tore off the paper tag and disposed of it.

Mostly our photographic materials were “Kodak”, but as supplies became a little easier to obtain, we did use some “Ilford” materials from England. We used a general purpose developer D-72 for both negatives and film. The developer came in powdered form in a tin, which made a stock solution of about 1 gallon. Generally we used a 1 to 4 for printing, and anything from 1 to 1 to 1 to 4 for negatives, depending on the light conditions experienced when the pictures were taken. The light sensitive base of film and paper was various silver salts. From memory the negative emulsion was silver nitrate, the contact printing paper was silver chloride, and the enlarging paper was silver bromide. These can be easily verified, but the main point is that there was a different emulsion for various processes.
As previously mentioned we used mostly panchromatic film, and some of the names were “Super XX” and later “Tri XX”, and we also obtained a film called “Super Pancro Press”, which was made exclusively for newspaper photography. This film was coarse grain, and could be left in the developer for longer periods without chemically “fogging”. Film or paper left in the developer for too long, got a grey “fog” over it which ruined the negative or photo. Generally the faster (more sensitive) the film, the coarser the grain, but this could also be controlled by different developers like a DK-60.

When the negative was developed to a suitable density it was placed in a fixing bath, which was acidic and stopped the developing process and “fixed” the negative image. After the negative was fixed it was washed and hung out to dry. Frequently we could not wait for the negative to dry, and needed to print it more quickly, and we would gently sponge the excess moisture from the negative and place it in a special carrier in the enlarger. After the photo was printed the negative would finish its wash and be dried in the normal manner. We occasionally soaked the negative in methylated spirits which helped dry the negative sufficiently for printing.

Negative were graded from high contrast to low contrast, and this determined the grade of paper to be printed on and give the best result. Paper came in 4 grades, grade 1 for high contrast and grade 4 for low contrast. High contrast was when the black were black, and the whites were white, low contrast was when black and most colors were grey. “Ilford” put out a grade 5 for extremely low contrast. Most photos were printed on a grade 2 or 3, although grade 4 was used extensively for back light subjects. Paper was also available in single weight and double weight, and a variety of surface types:- e.g. glossy, matt, semi matt, luster etc. The paper type was identified by a letter, such as “F” for glossy, “G” for luster etc, therefore a F-2 paper was glossy for normal contrast negatives.

Prints were made in 2 types, contact prints and enlargements. We used a contact printing box, which was about 10” X 10” and 15” deep, the top was of heavy weight glass, with a spring loaded lid. In the bottom was a frosted globe of about 60W. The negative was placed on the glass, emulsion up, and the “Velox” contact paper placed in contact with it, emulsion down, the lid was brought down firmly and the light turned on for a couple of seconds. Many amateurs used a contact printing frame, which was just as effective but much slower. Like the negatives there was no image on the paper after the exposure, and it contained a “latent” image which required the developer to bring it out.
The exposed paper was placed in the developer, and the image miraculously appeared. When the photo had finished developing (which took a couple of minutes) it was placed in a “stop” bath of acetic acid for a short time to stop the developing process, and then into the “hypo” bath to complete the “fixing” process. After the fixing, the photos were washed for about an hour in running water, then though the glazing machine for drying and glazing. The glazing machine was a stainless steel drum, about 15” in diameter, and about the same wide. Inside the drum was a heater element, and a soft canvas endless belt wound around the drum. The wet photos were placed on the conveyor belt, emulsion side up, and a small electric motor fed the photos around the drum, and they were dry and glazed by the time they had circled the drum. To manually glaze a photo you needed a sheet of cleaned glass, onto which you applied an even coat of beeswax. Next you placed a wet photo, emulsion side to the beeswax, and squeegeed until it stuck to the beeswax. After it had dried naturally the photo would fall off with a glazed surface.

There were many other processes carried out in the darkroom and included:

- If a negative had too much contrast, you could reduce, or “cut” the contrast in a bath of potassium ferricyanide.
- If a negative was too “thin” (contained little detail) it could be intensified in a chromium intensifier.
- To sepia tone a picture, firstly you “cut” all of the dark parts of the photo with potassium ferricyanide until only a faint outline remained. After a quick wash you then immersed the photo in a bath of, I am unsure, but I think it was calcium carbide, and it stunk like egg gas. The result was a sepia toned picture, which quite frequently was the base used for hand coloring photos. Toning in other colors could be obtained with a similar process and different compounds.
- The enlarger we used was custom built, and had carrier for the many different size of negatives we used. The emulsion of the enlarging paper was silver bromide, which is probably why earlier enlargements were referred to as “bromides”. The exposure time for enlargements varied greatly, and we used a watch with a big second hand for timing. Generally we would exposure a test strip, with varying exposure time, with say 5 second intervals. After developing the test strip we would be able to determine the appropriate exposure required.
Writing about my life as a photographer, in this year of 2009, has been totally engrossing for me, and I believe has been a lot more beneficial for my mind than doing crosswords, or playing cards. My “editor”, Joy, has said that the first few pages were interesting, but then it became boring with all that technical stuff. There is so much more to tell about the progress in photography in the post war years, and those that are interested can look it up in the history books.

The advent of color photography was absolutely fascinating to me, and it is worth a read about its progress and development. Briefly, but not technically, during the early 60’s color transparencies became the vogue, by which stage the box camera was replaced by the smaller and more versatile 35mm cameras. These cameras had been around for years, and the famous German “Leica” was the “Rolls Royce” of 35mm cameras. During the post war years the Japanese copied the Leica, and produced, among others, the “Canon”, which was not only more versatile, but cheaper.

By the early 50’s the popularity of 35mm of film processing, was increasing rapidly, and the smaller dark room film processing was replaced by the big commercial giants. With their machines, you fed the film in one end, and the prints came out the other end, all dried and sorted. I can recall a big Queensland firm that dominated the market, had a mail order service, and a turn around of only a few days, and the cost was low, and the quality excellent.

The first move into color photography was the “transparency”, these were 35mm mounted slides, which you could view with a small portable viewer, or project onto a screen or wall. They were excellent, and gave a 3D effect, and were a popular part of a visit to friends. The move to color prints followed fairly quickly, and soon progressed to the cheap overnight service, or for a little extra a 1 hour process. But now, those days have past, and we have moved into the age of Digital photography. To one whom has marveled at the old black and white film processing, digital photography is real “Jules Verne” stuff.

But let us now return to the 40’s and the budding apprentice photographer. My “Master” was Leo Forrest, ex army, and a former amateur boxer, and winner of the coveted “Golden Gloves” title. He continued his boxing by training and coaching young boys at the YMCA in Mundy St. He coached such Bendigo greats as Des Duguid and Brian Cahill. Both these Boys reached the pinnacle in amateur boxing, and represented their country, I think, in the 1948, or 1952 Olympics, and the 1950 Commonwealth Games in Canada. Brian Cahill made it to the finals of the “Golden Gloves” about this time, but was beaten on points. He is still living in Bendigo, at Kangaroo Flat. Des Duguid went on to become a singer of note, and he also conducted some sort of a restaurant here in Bendigo. Des died in Bendigo last year.
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by

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Back to Leo, he did try to get me into boxing, but gave it up very early, and instead used me as doorkeeper, or general hand on his fight nights. He was not very tall, solidly built, and wore glasses. It was disappointing to note that in the recent history of photographers on the “Bendigo Advertiser”, he did not get a mention, although he was there for many years.

I understand that Leo was in the army with Tom Patullo, a Process Engraver, who after the war started a business, “Clearads” on the 2nd floor, corner of Bull St, and Pall Mall, diagonally opposite the Law Courts. The lower floor was occupied by the Commonwealth Employment Agency. The “Advertiser” had its darkroom, on the 2nd floor with Tom, as he was contracted to process all the photos for the “Advertiser”. Tom had an apprentice, Neil Reeves, and also a qualified engraver, Ron Wright?. Leo was the only photographer on the “Advertiser”, and I was the only apprentice. We had a small kiosk in the “Advertiser” office in Pall Mall, from which we sold copies of the various photos we had taken. We mainly sold wedding photos, football, cricket and other sporting teams, deb groups etc.

Leo was a good “Master”, he spoke little, and was away most of the day, and left me to my own devices. My main duties were to wash, dry and file negatives, print order photos, and many other darkroom duties. Very early in my 1st year, after lots of reading and study, I went home with a camera and a few films to take some photos over the weekend. I think I photographed the horses around the dam, a railway line, and my father and his dog. These were apparently acceptable, as shortly after I done my 1st of many weddings. Although I was concentrating more on focusing and all that stuff, I wasn’t watching the subject, but nevertheless, produced a photo that excited the social editor, and my future on the social page. Wages for an apprentice were very low, but now I was working Saturday afternoon, and getting overtime, and occasionally “tea money”. Tea money was 5/- (50c), and I could get a decent fed for 1/6 (15c) thereby making a decent profit.

During my 1st year I rode my bike to Eaglehawk, left it down the lane beside Farnell’s butcher shop, ( where “Priceline” is now) and caught the 8.30 tram to Bendigo. Then I found by catching the same tram in Cal Gully, I could have an extra 10 minutes in bed. So I left my bike with a Mrs Pollock, a widow, who lived across the road from Truscott’s newsagency and general store. Next step was that I could ride my bike to Bendigo and save another 5 minutes. Although I enjoyed the tram ride, and for a short period had a romance with a high school girl, the bike exercise done a lot for my general health. By this time I had grown out of my childhood illness, and was a much healthier young man.
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Les Watts

I enjoyed my work on the “Advertiser” and was involved in many news events of the time. Some of these were the flooding of the Bendigo Creek in 1949, I think February. I understand there was a cloudburst in the early evening of the Big Hill area, the source of the Bendigo Creek, and the creek burst its banks and flooded all the way down to Epsom (which was sparsely populated in those days). Although the flooding was very quick, the damage was quite severe. Many homes along the creek were flood damaged, and when it raced down Pall Mall many of the shops and their cellars were inundated, and stock losses and flood damage was acute. This was the 1 in a 100 year flood which affected the building regulations along the creek for many years to come. Our home in Kangaroo Flat is built in that area, and our floor level was required to be built 300 mm above that flood level.

Another big event was the rediscovery of gold in Wedderburn, about 1951, and people had floodlights set up and were virtually “digging for gold in the street”. The Presbyterian Church (I think) was in the line of the digging, but was “saved” from excavation. Compared with today, photographic processing for newspaper use was slow, and as this was long before television the newspaper was the top media outlet. The Melbourne “The Sun” and “Herald” were the bigger of the many Melbourne newspapers and periodicals. “The Sun” was the morning paper, and the “Herald” was mid afternoon which printed many editions up until early evening. Most newspapers had a “Stop Press” section on the back page, which was printed in red. This enabled any late news to be added while the edition was been printed. “The Sun” went to press about midnight (the “Advertiser” was about 3 or 4 o’clock in the morning), and as the Wedderburn Gold Rush was early afternoon, it was impossible for the “The Sun” photographers to travel to Wedderburn and back and get pictures for the morning edition. At this time the “Advertiser” was an independent newspaper, but we were not in opposition with the Melbourne papers, and supported one another on many occasions. The deal was we would race up to Wedderburn, get the pictures, process them in Bendigo, and pass them on to a “The Sun” courier to return them to Melbourne for the morning edition. It was important for any newspaper to be “first with the news” and there was a lot of rivalry between the various newspapers. Compared to the digital and electronic technology of today, our days were real “pony express” stuff. Never the less we got the news and the pictures to the eager public.
**My Life as a Photographer**

by

*Les Watts*

The “Bendigo Thousand” was the big athletic sporting event in the 40’s and 50’s, over the Labor Day weekend. The running was the main attraction, and cycling was an added secondary event, quite the reverse of today with the “Madison”. The “Thousand” attracted runners from overseas, and the final was run about 3pm on the Monday. The “Herald” needed to get a picture of the finish in the afternoon edition, and about 1952 technology had made a step forward and this might be possible. The “Herald” had a darkroom on the back of a truck at the showground (now the “Tom Flood Centre”), and after the picture was printed it was raced up to the Bendigo Post Office, they were ready and waiting, and it was transmitted to by a process I cannot recall, ( was it a “teleprinter”) and made the evening edition. Real “landing on the moon” stuff for those days.

I recall the famous Panamanian runner, Lloyd La Beach, being invited to run at the “Bendigo Thousand”, ( about 1951) and he certainly drew the crowd. He held the world record for 220 yards, and ran in the final from “scratch” and against local runner Bernie Hogan, who was on the limit, something like 20 yards. I am pretty sure they dead-heated, and equaled the world record, a real thriller for the crowd. One of my best pictures was of Lloyd La Beach coming out of the blocks on that occasion, an enlargement of which hung in CAC Club Rooms for many years.

The “Herald” and “Weekly Times”, which included “The Sun” employed several photographers, each specializing in a specific area, e.g. sport, social, crime etc, whereas the “Advertiser” only had the 2 photographers covering everything, and published as many photos daily as “The Sun”. We supported the police, and took many pictures of crime scenes for them. These were the days of the manual telephone exchange, and all calls were connected through an operator, even emergency calls, and included the Fire Station. If you wished to report a fire, you rang the exchange, gave them the details ( or connected you to the Fire Station), and they reported it to the Fire Station. We had an arrangement with the exchange to report all significant fires to us, and thereby we received the information immediately after the Fire Brigade. I recall we received a call of a major fire just on the outskirts of Bendigo, I grabbed my camera and was off. I arrived *before* the Fire Engine and got a photo of it arriving. I don’t think we published that photo or details for ethical reasons.
My Life as a Photographer

by

Les Watts

Although newspaper life was exciting and interesting, in hindsight I am pleased I didn’t continue in that vocation. There are many interesting stories, too numerous to mention, but just a couple more come to mind.

We had a reporter, Bill Webster I think, who joined us from the “Kerang New Times”, and he covered, inter alia, official functions and the like. I recall on one occasion I was sitting beside him at some official do, he had his notebook out but wasn’t writing anything down. I enquired why he wasn’t writing down what the speaker was saying, and he replied “I know what he is going to say”, and started quoting ad verbatim the whole speech, and I was really impressed. I later found out that reporters obtained written copies of most speeches, and from then on I reckoned that a reporter’s life was boring.

Another special memory was when a young Golden Square lass, named Claudie Little, came to join the social page staff. From memory she was tall, dark straight hair, and nice looking. The social page staff consisted of the social editress, Miss Millane (Milly), and her assistant, Ann Luderman. Ann was tall, quite spoken, with frizzy blonde hair which she gained from her German descendants. The introduction of Claudie to this group was electric, she talked a lot, was vivacious and full of fun. I recall that on one of the rare occasions that we went out with reporters, Claudie and I attended a social function, possibly the Mayoral Ball at Eaglehawk. We usually only stayed long enough to get a story and a few pictures, then it was back to the office and home. The suppers at these functions were a major highlight, with tables laden with delicious and appealing cakes and pastries of all descriptions. Claudie and I passed through the supper room on the way out, and Claudie’s eyes brightened up and she said “We are not going to miss out on all this scrumptious food” and immediately started to load my ample camera case with lots of goodies.

Another country boy that joined the “Advertiser” staff as a reporter, was Geoff Wright, a tall blonde haired bloke with buck teeth. I don’t recall much about him, except that he went on to “Fleet St.” in London, and on his return to Australia he wrote a column for the “Weekly Times”, an agricultural paper. His column was amusing anecdotes of his visits to little country towns. One of the stories he wrote was, “I have been to Tumba Bloody Rumba, shooting Kanga Bloody Roos”. He always wore a battered “Akubra” hat, faded and torn jeans, and “Blucher” boots, emulating the look of the typical Aussie farmer. In later life Geoff published a book, “The Wright Road”, which he launched in Bendigo, and I had the opportunity to meet up with him again.
**My Life as a Photographer**

by

*Les Watts*

Geoff probably courted Claudie Little while on the “Advertiser”, because they eventually married, I don’t know how long the marriage lasted, (I do know that they separated at some stage) or if they had children. On occasions I would read an article by Claudie, probably in the “Women’s Weekly”, as I believe it was part of the “Herald and Weekly Times”, which is where Geoff worked. Claudie was very outspoken in her writing, and was a staunch supporter for women’s lib, and went on to be a powerful name in the media. I casually followed her career over many years, as I was supporter of the principles of women’s lib., and generally liked what she wrote. I was deeply moved and saddened to hear that this great women was stricken with “Alzheimer’s”. Her wonderful and courageous interview on television when she was in the advanced stages of the disease will forever remain a powerful memory. I feel honored to have known and worked with her, if only for a short time.