

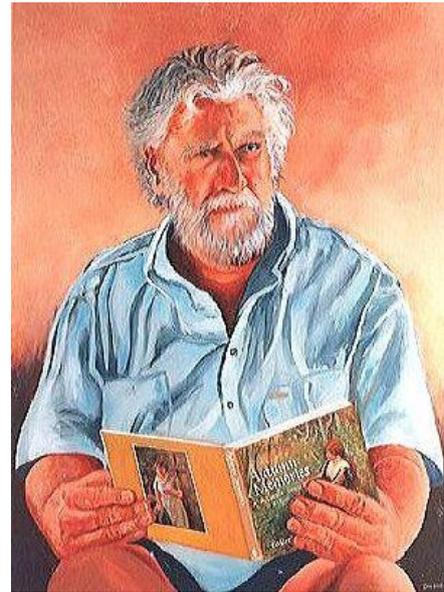
# “My Mother was a Photographer”

Kev. Franzi

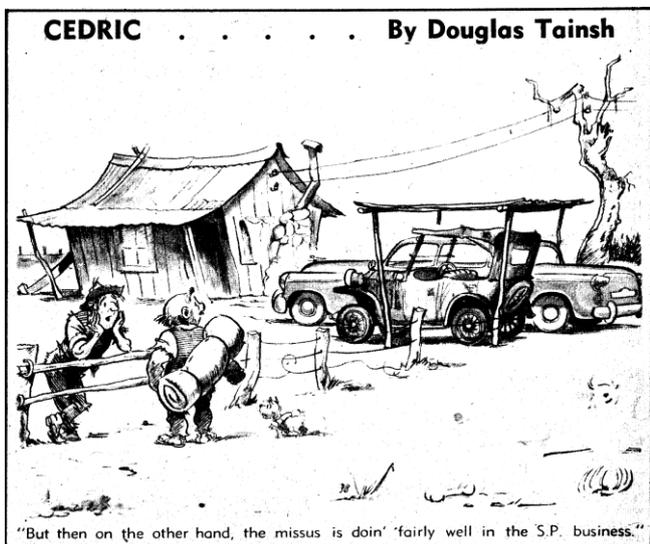
One of the highlights of my life as a filmmaker was the three and a half years I spent as Senior Film Editor at Crawford Productions in Melbourne. From 1966 on, I had the privilege of working on the pioneering series of *Homicide*, then on *Division 4*, *Hunter* and *Showcase*, together with a number of exciting documentaries as editor and/or director. During this time I was asked to edit a number of documentaries being made by Doug Tainsh (**Pic. 1**).

I soon discovered I was working with the very talented Douglas Tainsh—writer, documentary director, brilliant cartoonist and a quintessential Aussie who was to become my dear friend for many years (**Pic. 2**). As I edited his documentaries I learnt much about script writing and the film techniques he used, then, with Dudley Robinson behind the camera, we made a very good team.

There is a great story about Doug that has served me well for over 20 years. At one time, he mentioned casually that his



Pic. 1. Doug Tainsh in later life.  
Oil painting by Ian Grieve.



Pic. 2. ‘Cedric’ featured in *Australasian Post* magazine for many years.

mother was a photographer, at which point I jumped in with: ‘and so was mine, my mum always had a box camera with her and took most of the photos in our family’, etc., etc. Doug let the subject drop. Some 25 years later I’m reading a wonderful book *Australian Women Photographers* by Barbara Hall (ex-Crawfords) and Jenni Mather. The chapter on May and Mina Moore revealed that in the early 1900s these highly talented sisters, born in New Zealand, dominated the field of theatrical

photography with outstanding portraits of famous people.

Mina excelled in capturing superb pictures of her friend and patron, Dame Nellie Melba. The last line in the chapter states that Mina Moore married the poet William Tainsh. (**Pics 3 and 4.**)

‘William Tainsh’, Mmm, I wonder if he could be related to Doug? The phone call began with a short explanation about the book and the lady photographer who married a Melbourne



Pic. 3. Even the happy snaps of Mina with her daughter were done in the studio.



Pic. 4. Mina with husband William Tainsh: self-portraits.

poet called William Tainsh. ‘I thought he might be related to you?’ ‘Yes’, replied Doug, ‘William Tainsh was my father.’ A pause followed as the penny dropped. ‘Gee—that means Mina Moore was your mother!’ ‘Yes, I think I told you that.’ Damn—he remembered our conversation from all that time ago.

**(Pic. 5.)**

I asked if he had any prints of his mother’s work that I might copy for display at my Movie Museum? Sadly all the prints had been given away to Libraries and Galleries for safe-keeping and no record was kept of what went where. ‘We don’t have a single print—all we have are her cameras—would you be interested in those?’ ‘Would I ever!!!’ For over a decade, this story and the working demonstration of Mina’s cameras was a highlight of our shows, enjoyed by thousands of people.

Mina’s big 10 × 8 inch Fallowfield Studio Camera, c.1870, had one double-plate holder with it. In the holder I found a developed glass negative and proceeded to make some contact prints from same. A delightful photo emerged of a little girl in a garden: ‘Doug, I think we have a photo taken by your mother!’

The little girl turned out to be Doug’s sister. He asked why his mum would put a developed negative back in a camera plate holder? I suggested it was the safest place to keep her most valuable negatives, like family pictures, if you were shifting. ‘Oh’, said Doug—followed by a long silence. ‘To save space, I took a whole box full of plate holders to the dump—there must have been well over a dozen of them—I never thought to look. They all could have had negatives in them; I only kept that one to go with the camera.’

At least he had one photo of his sister—the lady who gave all of Mina’s prints away! **(Pic. 6.)**

***In the next issue of Back Focus, a detailed look at Mina Moore’s cameras and a very special lens.***



*Pic. 5. Mina playing with props—this was her favourite self-portrait and the ONLY photo that survived in the family, all the rest of her prints being given away.*



*Pic. 6. Possibly the first time published anywhere: Mina’s daughter in the garden c.1920. (I made this print from the sole surviving negative found in the Fallowfield plate-holder.)*



*Pic. 7.*



*Pic. 8.*

**Pic. 7.** This 1912 photograph of Thea Proctor is a simple theatrical pose—but what elegance—with no distraction from artificial props and painted backgrounds of that period.

**Pic. 8.** This beautiful profile portrait illustrates Mina's mastery in the use of a single light source (daylight through a large window) to obtain a dramatic but detailed result.



*Pic. 9.*



*Pic. 10.*

**Pics 9 and 10.** The success of the Moore sisters in attracting rich and famous stars of the theatre to their studios is illustrated in many simple but dramatic images like these.

**Pic. 11.** This study of Danish Ballerina Adeline Genée (with Felix), shot on location in 1913, produced a beautiful result in exactly the opposite key to her studio: light back

ground with dark clothing (and black cat) with amazing detail, soft daylight the single light source.



*Pic. 11.*



*Pic. 12.*

**Pic. 12.** With the outbreak of World War 1, May & Mina, like so many other photographers, shared in the explosion of business generated by that event. They photographed thousands of young Australians about to go overseas and in the process created the most valued image in as many family albums.