THE NORTHERN RIVERS ECHO

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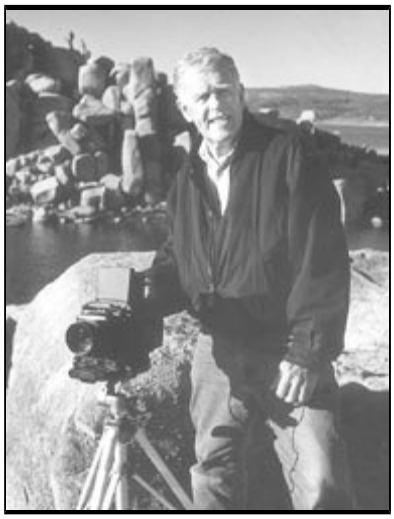
Mailing List December 26, 2005 Issue 904

Shaggy Dog Comments...

I want to tell you about a man who helped me see.

David Moore was a photographer. Many of you may not know of him, but you can bet there has been a moment when you have seen the world through his eyes.

David Moore died last Thursday, January 23, from cancer. He was 75.



Born in Sydney in 1927, David's introduction to his life's work came at age 11 when his father gave him a box camera. His first published photo, at age 13, was in the school magazine. The shot, of schoolboys sailing boats on a pond, hinted at his later fortune in documenting history - it featured a lad named Malcolm Fraser.

After a stint in the navy at the end of World War II, and a brief flirtation with architecture, he began photography in a commercial advertising studio, before getting the chance to work with the legendary Max Dupain, in 1947. It was the beginnings of a 55-year career that took him around the world seeking adventure and the never-ending challenge to fill his pictures with deeper meaning.

At just 20, he documented life in Sydney's CBD, and in his spare time, prowled the harbour and inner city. In a Redfern slum, he was mistaken for a press photographer and invited inside to photograph a poor family facing homelessness because their terrace was being demolished. Feeling guilty about not being 'from the press', he wrote to the council about it, and contemplated destroying the negative. Dupain convinced him otherwise. It was to become one of his most famous images, and included in Edward Steichen's 1955 Family of Man photography blockbuster at New York's Museum of Modern Art.

In 1951, David turned down Dupain's offer of a junior partnership and sailed for London to make a name as a freelance photojournalist. It was the golden era of picture magazines.

He believed it was just as important to "cover the simple things of life, as well as the extraordinary events". As a Life photographer at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, he turned away from the pomp and circumstance to document the people lining the rain-soaked route to see their new queen. During that time, his assignments for the Observer took him to Europe, Africa and the US. He wanted photos to tell a story - to capture context, as well as the moment in time.

Then, leaving the chance to become the Observer's picture editor, he returned to Australia.

His 1966 photo of US President Lyndon B Johnson and Australian PM Harold Holt - the latter appearing to bow his head in deference - has a familiar resonance four decades later. Another image from that year, 'Migrants arriving in Sydney' (see **Art News**), captures the hope,

trepidation and wonder of Italians seeing their new country for the first time. It was taken as part of a major feature on Australia for National Geographic. He visited aboriginal communities, industrial cities like Newcastle, and even cane farmers in this region to capture daily life. The photos reveal an Australia we all hold dear to our hearts. His photo of a dirt-smeared grape picker guzzling grapes was sent into deep space aboard the 1967 Voyager probe.

He was besotted by Sydney and its harbour, and spent a lifetime capturing its nooks and crannies, boats at work and play, and the dance of light across the water. At dawn on New Years Day, 2000, he photographed Sydney Harbour from the air for the front page of The Sydney Morning Herald. It was an echo of his shimmering 1966 black and white image 'Sydney Harbour from 16,000ft'. Like 'Migrants' it was originally in colour, but converted to black and white. David believed colour could be a "barrier" to the photographic message, and that black and white photos conveyed emotions more strongly.

He loved nature, but was also fascinated by the built landscape, maintaining the Moore family's architectural eye. He documented the building of the Opera House in the '60s, and in the '90s, the Anzac Bridge in Glebe, which became the photo book To Build a Bridge. Another book captured the faded romance of Sydney's Everleigh Railway yards.

In 1974, he helped establish the Australia Centre for Photography, which has helped thousands of young photographers hone their craft.

He also left a rich legacy of portraits of artists, writers, musicians and political leaders. In 2001, his photos of five scientists, including Australian of the Year, Prof Fiona Stanley, featured on Australia Post's Legends stamps.

It is difficult to sum up an extraordinary career that spanned the second half of the 20th century, amounting to more than 200,000 photographs, and 20 books.

As much as I admired David as a photographer, his humanity made him great. He laughed, regularly, with a deep, earthy chuckle. His sense of humour often manifested itself in playful sculptures. And while he could appear stately, he also knew how to take the piss, especially out of himself.

But his eyes also burnt with fierce determination when confronted with social injustice. He wasn't afraid of a fight, yet displayed restrained diplomacy when the moment demanded it. He also had a way with words that made this writer envious more than once. And he was generous to many, and offered wise counsel, not prescriptively, but by gentle questioning of your own beliefs.

Over the last decade, he spent a lot of time with his partner of 24 years, Toni McDowell, in a little Tasmanian village, where he restored an old house, made furniture, and even built a canoe. He bought a couple of acres of land by the river, then enlisted the help of the local community to build a wetland for everyone to enjoy.

David was someone I aspire to be. Through chance and love, I was lucky enough to call him a friend. He was also a mentor and a hero. And he leaves behind a powerful vision of how extraordinary, fraught, exciting, amazing and complex the world can be.

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