**WILLIAM CLOYDE “BILL” GRIFFITHS**

Interview with: William Cloyde ‘Bill’ Griffiths

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Interviewer: Jill Lear

Transcriber: Jane Harding

JL: It’s Jill Lear. I’m a Friend of the Noosa Library interviewing Bill Griffiths regarding his career as a professional photographer in the Noosa area. Today is Wednesday the 11th of February and the interview is being conducted at Bill’s home in Cootharaba. Now Bill, just a little bit of info about you. Where were you born?

BG: I was born in Gympie on 5th July 1946. Where my mother was there at the time in hospital and I wanted to be near her. They didn’t know whether I was a boy or a girl so they lifted up the sheets and I had blue socks on so I knew I was a boy.

JL: Okay Bill. And where did you grow up Bill?

BG: In the Tewantin Noosa area. Originally at Gympie where Dad had a blacksmith shop and garage in Amamoor in the Mary Valley. He done his apprenticeship at Pomona as a blacksmith years ago and then he bought a business in Amamoor and build a house beside it, then when they got married and I was born in Gympie and then we moved down to Tewantin when I was Grade 3, I think, when I started at Tewantin State School. Dad’s father was a photographer and then Dad was always keen on it and that’s how the Griffiths Studio got started. When he came to Tewantin, they had a pineapple farm at where Lenehan’s Lane is and it wasn’t doing too good, the pineapple farm so he was always doing photography at the RSL Hall in Tewantin. There was a theatrical group and he used to take photos of the plays and people wanted to buy them because there wasn’t a photographer in the Noosa area and that’s how Griffiths Studios started.

JL: Where was Griffiths Studios located?

BG: In Poinciana Avenue next to the Uniting Church. That was our family home.

JL: Is the home still standing?

BG: No. It got shifted a while back and there’s a government building there now. Um…I’m not sure what. They need help, the people that are in there.

JL: Is it that new block of four units that they’ve put in on Poinciana Avenue?

BG: Yeah. 43.

JL: Just, just, yes.

BG: Right next to the Church.

JL: And just down from the police station?

BG: No, no. It’s up on top of the hill.

JL: Ah, okay, alright. And, Bill, did you have, have you got brothers and sisters.

BG: One sister, Rowena. She’s older than me. She lives in Tewantin.

JL: Right. Okay. And it was there that you went to school

BG: Yeah. Tewantin State School and still a lot of friends that went to school, school mates still alive some of them live around in the area still. Quite a few of us actually. Yeah, then I went to Nambour to high school and only we used to do, there was sub-junior, junior, sub-senior, senior which is, what is it now.

JL: Six and Seven

BG: Twelve is senior. But I did sub-junior there and when Noosa District High School at Cooroy started, I went there for half a year of my junior year which I think was 1961, when it opened. Then I left and worked for Dad. He had a studio at Cooroy as well. Went up there.

JL: Did you have any formal training in photography? Did you do any courses or was it just what you picked up from …

BG: No. What he taught me.

JL: Yeah.

BG: And he knew a fair bit and read a lot and learnt off other photographers.

JL: He would have learnt from his father too?

BG: No. He shot through.

JL: Ah. Okay. Alright. Everyone’s got one. So, you left school at what age and started working for Dad.

BG: What was I? Fifteen I suppose. Would have been fifteen, yeah I suppose. But I didn’t get on with him. Like father and son and so I went and cut timber with his brother, my uncle. They had 680 acres out Eumundi Road. So the pineapples went bust and then they cut timber off that block. And then I went and done an apprenticeship as a spray painter in Nambour. Then I built boats. I built the first Pelican Hire Boat fleet. I worked for Frank Davis at Northern Star Body Works and I built them boats. Made the mould and everything for them. Then I went back and worked with Dad after that when I grew up a bit.

JL: When you were a bit more..

BG: Mature

JL: …older. I nearly said the M word.

BG: [Chuckles]

JL: Yeah

BG: Yeah

JL: And did that work, Bill.

BG: See that’s when I got married to Sue and we got married in Nambour and that same year we started the Noosa News off which is 1968 and that kept us busy.

JL: And, um, when was your Dad born? Can you remember? This was Sam wasn’t it?

BG: Yeah, Sam the CameraMan. Or AdSam they called him at the Noosa News. Um, 1914. I think it was 1914.

JL: Okay.

BG: Yeah. He would have been a hundred. Mum would have been a hundred last year. So he was older than that.

JL: Did he come from …

BG: Gympie

JL: Gympie? Yeah, okay.

BG: Apparently, from my grandfather on Mum’s side said they all came from Cornwall and Wales and they all sort of intermarried, this mob who came out. Came to Brisbane and then got another little boat up to Tewantin. And then the women, they got the coach to Gympie. They were all miners from over in the UK. And then the men split up into two groups and they walked to Gympie. Coz Grandad said they, the first lot, they’d never seen a snake before and they killed it and they put it across the track and the next lot of fellas who came along, they killed it too, he said.

[Both laugh]

JL: Yeah. And when you started working with Dad, did you go out and take press photos and do weddings or were you perhaps working more on the technical side.

BG: No. No. We had to weddings, portraits, commercial work. The press stuff only really started when we started the Noosa News. I did have a Bolex movie, 16mm movie camera that I did the ABC and Channel 10 it was then.

JL: So you were a correspondent or a …

BG: Well, I was what they call a stringer, a movie camera. I used to do like accidents or news or the Festival of Waters or things like that and then it would be on the ABC News that night or the night after, if they put it on. Yeah. And Grace Clarey she was the Gympie Times correspondent and was also the ABC correspondent for the TV and radio. I sued to work through her with the movie part of it. Yeah, that’s how I did… and then yeah, it was mainly darkroom. Dad and myself were doing our own colour prints at the time. When Dad started doing colour prints there was only one other chap outside Brisbane, at Townsville, that was doing his own colour work. It was a bit antiquated, all the equipment that they had. Not long nowadays.

JL: We’ve been assessing a few colour negatives in this lot that we’re assessing. I can’t remember what the events were, but I just know they were colour negatives. So the colour negatives were not necessarily for press?

BG: No, they wouldn’t have been. There wouldn’t have been any colour negatives coz they didn’t have colour printing in the newspapers in those days. Um…no they would have been weddings or portraits or commercial work. A lot of those negatives, they will have gone off, especially the Agfa the ones. There was a batch of Agfa paper and stuff that came through in the seventies, I think it was, that was a bad batch. It came through for a long time.

JL: Yeah, we noticed you use Ilford…

BG: the black and white

JL: …Finegrain, what was it? Something chromatic. Most of your negatives are that film.

BG: Yeah, all the colour stuff was mainly Kodak, um, in the end it was all Kodak. Some Agfa which did it in the seventies and that. But all the black and white was always Ilford, paper, chemicals, paper.

JL: When your Dad got out of Noosa News or sold Noosa News, did he? Was that when…

BG: Yeah, we sold it.

JL: Yeah, so you were partners. Yeah. Okay. Did you get right away from Noosa News and just concentrate on photography

BG: Yeah, that’s what happened. We had all in the one building behind the family home. There was a shed and we had 13 people there and we had Griffiths Studio, a little studio set up on one side of it and three darkrooms [coughs… excuse me], um, and we had the Noosa News, Griffiths Studios, Noosa Printery which did books, invoices and stuff like that and Mum and Sue had another business called Noosa Plan Printing which they did mainly fed plans, that are big old fashioned blue prints used to get from architects and that.

JL: Yes. Yes. I’m old enough to remember them. [Chuckles]

BG: So, ah, that was what four businesses there. And Griffiths Studios was suffering because a lot we were trying to build up the newspaper and the printery side of it and, ah, I can tell you how that started too. The Noosa News. We bought a printing press, a little A B Dick 360 to print our own price lists and brochures and tell everybody what good photographers we were. Coz offset printing is another, it’s a type of photography you know. And, ah, I was down the pub one night, down the Royal Mail, somebody said ‘Why don’t you start up a newspaper?’. So I said, ‘Ah, that’s a good idea.’ So, a fellow called John Crear, there was Mum and Dad, and Sue and myself and we just started up with… and we had two girls Joan and Suzy worked with us in the photography part of it. So we started this newspaper. Didn’t have a clue what we were doing [chuckles]. And that’s how that started. But in the end it, ah, the studio, the photography side of it was starting to suffer. People were waiting too long to get their prints from it, that they’d ordered from their weddings and all that. So we split up the photography and the printery part, we split them up….

JL: What year was that Bill?

BG: In the…..

JL: Approximate?

BG: We built a shed over in our place in Ada Street, in Tewantin. We built a studio there, would have been in the….

JL: In the sixties?

BG: No, no. We didn’t start it til ’68…

JL: Oh yeah.

BG: It would have been in the seventies. Can’t remember which year.

JL: No, that’s fine.

BG: Um…and then we mainly concentrated on the photography side of it. And Joan Burton, she came over with us. Um… that’s what we did. Coz we were doing 75-100 weddings a year, which is a lot. There was Robinsons Studio in Nambour. Murrays in Gympie. There was one at Caloundra and Maroochydore, but they didn’t have, they were what we called backyarders, and ourselves. That’s all there was on the whole Sunshine Coast.

JL: And did Sam continue with Noosa News?

BG: Yeah. Well he was the editor. There was Mum and Dad and Sue and meself. We were partners in it. And then, um, when, before we sold it, we switched the names over. I don’t know why. I can tell you why we sold it, I suppose. When Whitlam got into power we sold it [chuckles]. And most persons understand why. ‘Coz we were only a small business and a lot of places closed down because of what happened to wages and stuff.

JL: I understand that.

BG: Yeah. So that was one of the reasons. And Dad wanted to retire anyway. Which he didn’t but he wanted to. He was still the editor for a couple of years after we sold it to the Daily people.

JL: Yeah, who bought it?

BG: Well, Sunshine Coast Daily. It was a bit of good fun actually. Gympie Times wanted it and so did they. And so, whoever was the highest bidder got it.

JL: So, that was good for the family.

BG: And the reason we took my and Sue’s name off the thing when it was sold is that we could start another newspaper up. Dad was worried that they were going to close it down and just concentrate mainly on…there still was the Nambour Chronicle then and the Sunshine Coast Daily. And he thought ‘oh well, they might have wanted to close the Noosa News down, get rid of us and use that advertising with the Daily and that, but we could start another newspaper up, but he couldn’t see for three years. Anyway… [inaudible].

JL: And when you got going, what were the things you really liked to photograph? What jobs? Did you enjoy the press work or the portraits?

BG: I really liked the commercial work if there wasn’t any models involved, it was good [both chuckle].

JL: Right.

BG: That was good fun. I used to like doing the aerial work. Portraits. Of course we had young children ourselves and we enjoyed that. I couldn’t have done it without Sue coz, ah, one of them’s got to act the fool and get them to smile while the other presses the button. You can’t do it yourself. But it’s a lot easier with two.

JL: Well, your aerial stuff, I’ve assessed hundreds of negatives that you took for TM.

BG: Yeh.

JL: What sort of a plane…

BG: We used to hire a…

JL: … a little two seater, you know a single wing…

BG: Yeah, a Cessna.

JL: And did you hang out the window or?

BG: Sometimes we’d take the door off but, um, in the little 150 Cessnas. But most of the time we used to use Kevin Henebery. He was from Caloundra but we’d drive down to Maroochy Airport and when he was based at Caloundra, then he did come up to Maroochydore. But we’d use him and on some of the Cessnas you just undid the catch on where the pilot normally sat, which is the right hand side and just gently undo the window and it would stay out on its own, the wind would hold it out there and they could just lay the plane over so the wheel and strut got out of the way and the wings up above you, and you could do whatever you wanted to do out there. Shoot out there. Which was pretty good. It was a lot easier with the door off, but. A lot more room to manoeuvre ….

JL: Yes, yeah.

BG: …the camera

JL: And were you belted in?

BG: No, just sat there [chuckles].

JL: Okay

BG: I can tell you one time we, the wind was blowing a different way, apparently, and we came in to land at, on the gravel part, which is the east-west part of Maroochy Airport. It was just gravel then and as we landed the tyre blew out and rocks and stuff went flying everywhere and dust and that [chuckles].

JL: That would be a bit scary.

BG: Oh, it went up and down that, yeah. I was… it was scary. And [inaudible – name of pilot], all he said, the pilot says ‘Oh that was interesting’ [more chuckles]. I won’t forget that.

JL: How long did you have the photography before you retired? From when you split with Sam, when did you retire?

BG: When he retired? When we sold the Noosa News? He was still shotting weddings and that.

JL: But you, when did you? How long did you work?

BG: Well altogether it was 33 years.

JL: 33.

BG: 33 years Griffiths Studios went for. So I’d have been in that 30 straight years. I’d had enough of it.

JL: Again, the studio was in Poinciana?

BG: No. That was in our place. In Ada Street in Tewantin…

JL: Yeah. Okay

BG: …near the House of Bottles.

JL: Which is no longer there.

BG: No.

JL: And I think, did you get the invitation from Jane via email? Actually, she’s got three photos she’s pulled out and one of them is a picture of the House of Bottles. Did you get that email?

BG: No when Sue walked in the library the other day, she seen it come up on the screen and inquired about it and booked us in then.

JL: I’m seeing Jane tomorrow so I’ll make sure she sends you. You’re booked in anyway, the invitation.

BG: I told John Withers about it too. Because there’s another chap lives up… um, what’s the name of that road that runs, Firewheel Road, runs off Louis Bazzo Drive, Rob Roy is his name. He’s a really good photographer, but he’s an artistic photographer. He plays around with the digital stuff. It’s brilliant what he does. But he’s down in Hobart for a holiday. But I rang up John Withers who’s a famous banjo player, and he’s done photographer when he was in the UK. I think him and Brenda are going to come.

JL: I think it will be a terrific affair. It’ll be really good. What type of camera did you….did you have a number of cameras…

BG: Yeah, we had…

JL: …for different

BG: A big Linof, a German camera…

JL: Linof?

BG: Yeah, was bellows, like an old-fashioned bellows one.

JL: Yeah, the, yeah

BG: If you’re doing buildings, like a high-rise building of something like that, you can alter the bellows and all that so you could just virtually take photos around corners with it and straighten the parallax error and all that out of buildings. That was, it was a 5 x 4 inch plate roll film. And then we had Hasselblads that we did weddings and portraits with.

JL: And they would be on tripods?

BG: It was portraits, yeah, weddings like. The electric one, it was quite heavy. Um. And then we had Rollies. Rolleiflex and Rolleicord for backup cameras. They were two and a quarter square like the Hasselblads for backup cameras and we also had Nikon 35mm cameras that we did press photography. We used to do a lot of beach photography, there’s thousands and thousands of those negatives [inaudible], of like before people had their own little cameras and that. We’d go down and take all the beach photographs and then put the proofs in ah, Jeffrey Tannen, he had a shop in the arcade in Tewantin and people would come and have a look at the proofs and order photos and then a couple weeks later they’d get their beach photos. People wouldn’t put up with that now, they want everything straight away.

JL: Straight away.

BG: And they were only black and white too.

JL: Yeah. Yeah.

BG: Some of our weddings when colour came around we were still using black and white and colour which was a bit difficult for Sue when she started because she didn’t know that much about it, um, she come home after having a baby [chuckles] and give her a camera and she come home from hospital on the Friday, give her a camera, and she went and shot a wedding on the Saturday. [chuckles] It was one of the kids. Anyway, because it was a different ASA setting on the colour and black and white there was, you had to be careful what you did because you didn’t want to mess anybody’s ….. Out of all the photos, all the weddings I did, I only messed one up. And it happened to be one of the local minister’s daughters.

JL: Oh. [chuckles]

BG: The setting on the lens was moved. Nearly all the lenses I had ‘em glued so they couldn’t get bumped, so the flash didn’t synchronize with the lens. Anyway, we got enough out of it, but it was a bit embarrassing.

JL: And when think back, are there any really memorable events that you remember more than others, like events…. I mean we’ve done, we’ve looked at the elephant race, races negatives. Oh you know, was it the aerial stuff that you really loved or…..

BG: Yeah. Well no. It was all good. But I can’t… there was a lot of famous people you get to photograph especially with the press side of it, ah, was good. Was good fun when they opened Surfair; I was there all day with that. And the Duke and Duchess of Bedford and all those flash people. They were all there. That was good.

JL: I don’t know if we’ve come to them yet.

BG: No. There was, I got a good shot in one of the albums here of Dad and the Duke of Edinburgh. Up at Maryborough. He came up to present, there is a medal. A Duke of Edinburgh award.

JL: Yes.

BG: And somebody at Maryborough received it and I got a good shot of Dad talking to the Prince.

JL: Yeah.

BG: Sir, he is now.

JL: Yes. He is. Yeah.

BG: Up there and all of tv so-called celebrities. I’ve got a skite book with them in.

JL: Well we did a whole lot of negatives when Sir Joh and Lady Flo visited Tewantin in nineteen-seventy-something.

BG: Him and Dad were sort of friends.

JL: Okay

BG: Yeah. After Dad had retired he did pottery and Joh had a property out at Kingaroy that had this white clay. It was like, they used to make china out of it.

JL: It was that fine.

BG: It was like chalk. He used to go out there in an old ute he had and get a load of this clay. Joh would give it to him and he’d come it. And being involved in that part of the politics, that Dad was, you know.

JL: And, not much longer. Are you happy? Are you comfortable?

BG: Yeah, I’m alright.

JL: You’re alright? Good. Um, how much…

BG: Here he is.

JL: Okay

BG: That’s him there.

JL: Right

BG: There he is.

JL: Well, I’ll have…

BG: Arab Blacksmith there.

JL: I’ll have a look at those in a minute.

BG: That’s Dave Low. That’s Mum there.

JL: Alright, leave them there Bill. I’m wrapped to see them.

So, how much has Noosa changed for you. I’m talking the area.

BG: Noosa area?

JL: Yes.

BG: It’s changed a lot. Um. You can’t live in the past.

JL: But you have memories.

BG: Yeah, yeah. Well I used to do a lot of surfing and sailing. The river. It’s crowded now. What with all the unused boats and that that are on the river. They should get rid of them. Um. I couldn’t go surfing anymore coz there’s too many people, even if I could. Too many people, but that just happens, you know. Yeah, but Pomona, is still a nice town. It’s busy coz you don’t realise how many people live in the little estates in the bush around Pomona. And Cooroy it’s grown. Tewantin certainly grown all out around Noosa Outlook and all that out there. Yeah. I reckon we had a good time when we were young. Most of the mates that we used to sail and surf with, we still have a get together every now and then and…. Yeah, it’s good. But mostly have given up boating now and gone to caravans and stuff like that. The grey brigade.

JL: I note the caravan

BG: Yeah. Got a bit of work to with it when I can walk [??]

JL: And, moving out here, um from Tewantin. This is a beautiful place.

BG: Yeah, it’s a nice property.

JL: It’s lovely. And it’s just what you want. You want to be…

BG: It’s got a nice big shed, I’m restoring an old… I restored a Halveson boat, a while back. A wooden boat. I like wooden boats. And I’ve got a little Clinker out there now that I’m restoring and David, our son, that’s what he does for a living, restores old boats, but he’s down the Gold Coast.

JL: Okay. Yeah. Well, Bill, thank you for that. It’s a great story and I hope, you know, it’s probably rejigged a few memories.

BG: yeah, well I often talk about it. I don’t see my sister Rowena that often but we often talk the, what’s the saying, you’re living in the past and you’ve got no future [chuckles]

JL: But, you know, when you get to a certain age, you have memories…

BG: Yeah.

JL: …of things that have been good.

BG: Funny part about it is that I can remember what happened, some of the things I did that I shouldn’t have done but what I did half an hour ago [chuckles], it’s a bit fuzzy.

JL: Okay. Thank you.

BG: Thank you.