

A New Series: My First Camera

Elaine Herbert OAM ARPS

Well, not actually mine! But the opening paragraph of a book I was recently reading set me thinking about the first cameras our Chapter members possessed. And it suggested to me a theme for a new series in our monthly *Newsletters*.

The book by renowned travel writer Eric Newby was titled *What the Traveller Saw*. Now that's a bit of serendipity too, as the RPS Travel Group is featured in this issue of the Newsletter! The book was written some years ago and presents a collection of Newby's photographs taken on his many travels from the 1930s to the late 1980s.

He's a light-hearted and entertaining writer and begins:

My first camera was a pretty feeble affair. This much was obvious, even to me, when I received it as a present on my seventh birthday. It came from some far-off place I had never heard of up until then. I think it was Lithuania, but there were lots of places I had never heard of at that time. This camera took pictures the size of the smaller sort of Lithuanian postage stamp – that is, when it took any at all – with ludicrous results. It came in a carrying case made of cardboard, together with three rolls of film, and when these were used up the only way to get more was to buy a return ticket to Lithuania.

Eric Newby, *What the Traveller Saw*. Collins, 1989

Now we may not have Newby's touch as a writer, but we all had a first camera. Perhaps for many it was a Box Brownie. For others it could be a digital camera, or a smart phone.

So let's begin a series of nostalgia trips in the Newsletter, ***My First Camera***. Send your memories (even if not your first images!) to our Editor, Rob, and perhaps you'll also be able to include a shot of the camera itself. We look forward to hearing about your first steps on your photographic journey.

That First Camera

John Davies ARPS

The first camera used without supervision was a 35mm Exakta that I hired possibly in 1960. Up till then, I had been loaned various 620 cameras where the film was wound through, then the back was opened to remove the exposed film. Yes, I followed the same procedure with the Exakta and the film was exposed - completely. That was the start of a steep learning curve that has not stopped!

A bit of indulgence: the strangest still camera I have used was a Zeiss (Jena) UMK. This was a large format (5x7") photogrammetric camera built into a theodolite. It took glass plates. There were no code notches, you used the wet lip method of locating the emulsion side. I learnt to appreciate Agfa glass plates. The edges of their plates were ground and rounded while Kodak were snapped, with the odd fragment of glass shard remaining! The survey team consisted of a surveyor and me and we took just under a year to resurvey Liverpool Street Railway Station in London. The end product was a complete set of engineering drawings of the station. Happy days!

My First Camera

Gigi Williams ASIS FRPS



pocket money and saved up to buy the camera when I was about 13.

Above is one of my first pictures taken in the Flinders Ranges. Hopefully I have improved since then! And on the right is a photo of me that my mother took on the same camera.

My first camera was a polaroid land camera that took type 88 film. I had been admiring it for months in the window of the chemist next door to the shoe shop that my mother worked in as the accountant. I used to go in to work with Mum on school holidays and was given odd jobs and therefore extra



Images © Gigi Williams FRPS

My First Camera

Herman Lee LRPS

Welcome to one of our newest members Kwok-hung Herman Lee. Ed

To recall my first camera, I remember that it came to me in the 1970s. It was given to me by my family. It was a Japanese-made model called the Yoshika Electro 35, a film camera. Back then I was a mere teenager and since then I have gone through many cameras. From the year 2000 I began to employ the use of digital cameras, beginning with a Digital Single Lens Reflex.

In every life, the first experience of anything is hard to forget, whether it is the first time sitting behind the wheel of a car, a first job, or in this case my first camera. That film camera was a gift from my loving family, and even though I no longer have it, I have many fond memories of it.

One day, I went to the local Vinnies to browse, and I noticed an old camera sitting on the shelf. Upon closer inspection, I saw that it was a 1978 East Germany-made Praktica MTL3, fitted with a 1.8, 50mm lens. This camera has had over forty years of history, but it still looked new. I picked it up and pulled the film advance lever, and pressed the shutter. The sounds it made brought back nostalgic feelings of my old Yoshika and to my surprise, both of these cameras were 35mm film cameras and also both used a Zeiss lens. After seeing this, I immediately purchased it. In my spare time, I would take it out to examine it in my hands and listen to the sounds it made, letting it take me back to my younger days in photography.

Image by Herman Lee LRPS



Early this year, my daughter undertook a course at her university in photographic creative arts, and her results were very good. Unexpectedly, she also wished to purchase a film camera to use. Therefore, I instantly brought out the storied Praktica and bequeathed it to my daughter. This brought back the clear memory of how my own family had once gifted me with my first film camera.

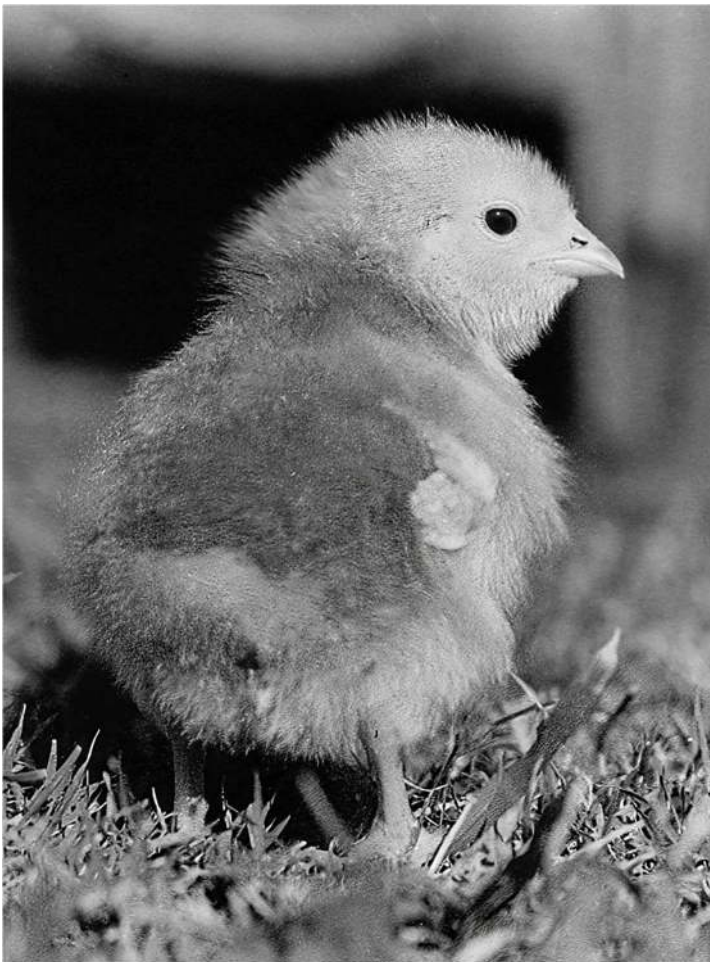
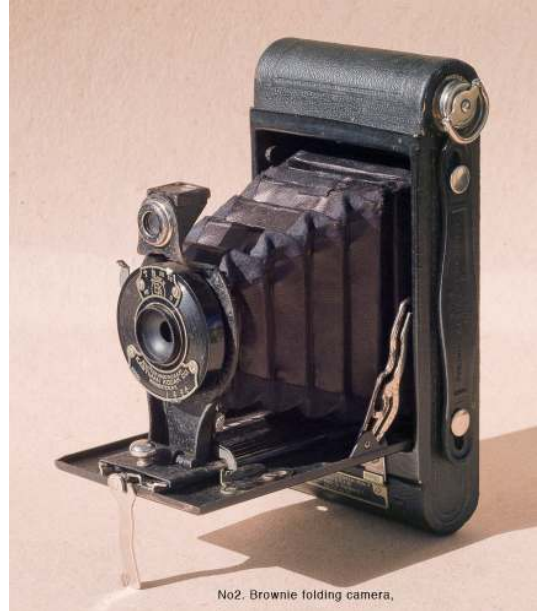
Time passes quickly, just like the 'click' of a camera, and just like there is only one of these cameras in my world, there is only one life that can be lived. It is my wish that my daughter can use both these things to create even better results and photos.

My First Camera

Tony Healy ARPS

There are worlds bigger than ours, and there are worlds smaller than ours. It is the smaller one that has always fascinated me. So far, that has been obvious in my 'Characters' series Rob has been running. Walking around the bush and seeing all the little things in life was exciting, but I couldn't show what I saw to either my family or friends. It would be easy, so I thought, if I could take a picture of what I saw, but that was difficult without a camera.

My mother had a No.2 Brownie Folding camera which was used for family events and I wondered if I could use that. I had read that if you placed dioptre lenses in front of the camera lens you could get closer to your subject and still have it in focus. With no reflex viewing, the challenge was how to have the dioptre lens on the front of the



camera, at the same time as using a tape measure to get the right distance from your subject, and press the shutter. Three arms would have helped. We had some chickens in the backyard and they were fairly tame. So I set the camera up at chicken level, measured the distance of the focal point and marked the ground. I picked up one of the chickens, plonked it down on the spot and fired the shutter. The result is shown here – my first macro photograph in 1952. It was the beginning of an adventure into recording the little things in life.

Images by Tony Healy ARPS

My First (and Last) Cameras

Alan Hodgson ASIS HonFRPS

This image was taken in North Wales in the summer of '69 (song in there somewhere). I am stood in the centre of the frame aged 12 with my first camera. The camera carried no brand but only a label which read "Future Scientist".



Future Scientist was a brand used by Waddington's, a toys and games manufacturer in the UK. They had produced a flash photography kit that contained dish processing trays and chemistry, contact printing frame, safelight bulb and thermometer. And a roll of black and white 120 roll film and the camera.

The camera was wholly plastic, including the lens. The only metal in it appeared to be the two contacts for the detachable flash gun. The base and camera back slid away from the body and as the plastic hardened with age the light seal degenerated. Mine lasted a few years before it became inoperable.

The camera was manufactured in Hong Kong as a novelty item and wholesaled at around US\$0.50. It was sold elsewhere as the Diana F camera and subsequently become something of a fashion with photographers such as Jo Ractliffe HonFRPS. Never thought of myself as a trendsetter . . .

Ever tried processing curly roll film suspended on two clips, moving it through three small plastic trays of chemistry in complete darkness on a board balanced on the bath? Then printing the 43 mm square negatives in a plastic contact frame held up to the light on the stairs? At age 12 I ended up with very few useable prints but learnt a great deal about photography.

The image at the top of the next page is the sole remaining print from my first camera. The Waddington's kit came with Ilford powder chemistry (likely ID-11 developer) and Ilford may well have been the source of the film and fibre-based paper too. Just under 13 years later I joined the Ilford R&D group as an image physicist and shed the first word of the "Future Scientist" label.

Image by Ronald Hodgson



The guy in the white shirt was Ronald Hodgson, my father and the photographer of the colour image above. He had received an Agfa Billy camera for his 21st birthday, another 120 roll film unit. This remained our family camera for over 30 years and as my Diana died my photography transitioned to Billy and I proudly carried the beautiful leather case (see image below).

The Diana is long gone and over the last 50+ years it has been followed by many others. I built technical cameras at Ilford, repaired more and explored many. But I still have the

working Agfa Billy and for pure sentimental reasons it will be (among) my last cameras. The main question is for what sort of photography?

The Billy was configured to take eight images on a 120 roll film so has a pretty large image plane and as a result has plenty of room in the film back. I am toying with a digital conversion, mounting a Rasberry Pi single board computer and infra red



sensor in the back, which would make for a pretty cool camera. Another option is to use it for astrophotography down a big telescope as I have long thought of replicating the Warren De La Rue 1850s moon camera. I have a 2000mm f/6 mirror that needs a project wrapped around it.



After a 20 year gap I am planning to rebuild a darkroom space and pick up where I left off. I have some unfinished business with photographic chemistry to explore and I am looking forward to just as many failures as last time. But as much fun and learning points as I had 50 years ago!

Images by Alan Hodgson HonFRPS and Ronald Hodgson