

# tells his story

## Port Credit photographer zooms in on the elderly

By LINDA REED

Photographer Bert Hofenrichter isn't zooming in on a pair of pretty legs these days.

Although he always keeps a lens ready for a Hefner girl his main concern is putting together a portfolio of people with wrinkles, false teeth and walking sticks.

He plans to make a feature film or prepare a book on problems of the elderly in a speedy, youth-oriented world.

Using his cameras, Bert hopes to communicate their fears, alienation, loneliness, poverty and despair. At the age of 33, the Port Credit photographer has tremendous empathy for people in the autumnal years of life.

It's an unusual quality in a man caught up in a tornado of success.

His retail photography business brings in a quarter of a million dollars annually. He and his family live in the Lorne Park Estates in a house which could sell for \$100,000. The walls of his modest office are papered with certificates and awards including Canadian Professional Photographer of the Year.

Every year he makes 6 to 10 trips overseas for his major accounts and frequently dines there with the wealthy and famous. Young girls who want to be models beg him to make test shots and often he is guest speaker at schools and professional photographic associations.

### afraid

Why this concern for old people when his own pension cheque won't be arriving for another 30 years?

"If you haven't made it by the time you're 50, nobody wants you. I suppose, in a way, I'm afraid of getting old. When you reach that age you can't do anything but wait for the end and there's nothing you can do about it."

Among Bert's growing photo collection of senior citizens is Old Henry of Clarkson. Last year, when he was looking for subject material for an advertisement for Time magazine, he made a visit to the 93-year-old gardener who lives alone in Clarkson.

"I tried to explain what I wanted and offered him money but his hearing aid was broken. So I took him to Bellone and got it fixed. Then we went up to a log cabin in Bolton and Henry was just great. He refused to take any money because he had so much fun."

Bert became interested in Henry and took more photographs than he needed for his advertising assignment. He hopes to include some sensitive shots of Henry in 20 pictures he plans to exhibit in a New York show.

Bert believes his social conscience started to



Bert Hofenrichter says he isn't your typical photographer. Instead of looking dramatic and bearded he prefers to wear business suits and ties on the job. He says it pays off when you're dealing with affluent executives.

develop when he arrived in Canada at the age of 18 with \$16. He left Germany when the army started to draft youths because "I didn't want any part of all that."

His first two years here were "sheer hell". He got a job as a bricklayer in Oakville and was fired two days later. Although that was his trade back home, he couldn't work fast enough to suit his Canadian boss.

"I started to cry like a baby. I was out in Oakville somewhere — lost — not knowing where I was with no money," recalls Bert who still flinches at the memory. Buring the next two years he got a variety of jobs paying about \$33 per week. He managed to put away \$20 per week. He didn't care how much he earned because he started to make friends and his situation improved when he met his wife.

Bert had always been a photo nut. At the age of 12 he used expensive camera equipment, owned by his brother, to photograph a family wedding.

"My brother never could use that equipment but I had no problems," he said.

### start

In 1960 he got his foot into the photo world when he landed a job with Anglophoto in Toronto working as a clerk-janitor for \$45 per week.

The people at Anglophoto were sympathetic to the bright, cheerful Bert and offered to loan him equipment on weekends. Soon he was making more money as a freelance photographer than he was paid at his job.

"I went to the big newspapers like The Star and The Globe and usually managed to sell my photos. I'd go to High Park and get a couple walking in the rain — some mood which the staff photographer missed," he recalls.

In 1967 he started Photoport, which he manages today with his brother and another employee. During the first two years he worked with his wife's help as they built up the business. He took a partner for a while but decided that he'd rather be his "own boss" so the relationship dissolved.

### busy

Since he won Photographer of the Year award in 1970 Bert has become extremely busy. He travels in North America and Europe for accounts who want pictures in their glossy annual reports.

Most of his work has taken a drastic departure from routine portraits and passport pictures.

He has moved far above the average income of a professional photographer. A recent survey revealed that 6,000 people employed in this profession earn less than \$6,000 per year.

He says people expect more of him because he's supposed to be "the best". His work is a continual challenge because each time he's expected to pull off a miracle and produce fantastic photographs.

"When people come to see me they are usually disappointed because they think I'll have a huge studio and a large staff," he says.

### uneasy

At times he's torn between creativity and earning a good buck. During an excursion to Armstrong for Time magazine he was uneasy about using photographs of Indians to sell products. He feels it is wrong to use people to promote consumer items.

He says he thinks photography 24 hours a day. Sometimes he can't sleep because he's planning an exhibit so he goes out with his wife for a walk.

He spends occasional weekends in the woods with a group of businessmen. He says it's surprising what happens to harried executives when they get into the bush with the camera. They become enthusiastic and creative and find themselves rejuvenated for the work week ahead.

In another 10 years Bert hopes he can get rid of the studio, retail store, assignments and deadlines and work as a freelance photographer.

Although he has made amazing progress in a short time Bert is still plagued by a problem he can't lick. No matter how hard he tries, he can't get a picture he likes of his three children together.

"They mug like mad — make faces and close their eyes. Maybe they've been photographed too often. I managed to get some decent ones this year because my wife threatened to go to the opposition if I didn't take their pictures."