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Special report

## Script from the heart



Immortalised on film ... Maya Newell created a documentary about Richard Blackie (below) that has paved the way for a future in communications.

Photos: Lee Besford, Stephen Baccon

By JOSHUA MAULE

WHEN Maya Newell walked into a cluttered toy store in inner Sydney, she met a curious man who had been a Michael Jackson impersonator and had begun collecting vintage toys.

"[Richard Blackie] was the most interesting person I'd ever met. He was extraordinary, eccentric, had a really big heart [and was] incredibly passionate," Newell says.

Newell, 20, formed such an intimate bond with him that, after some coaxing, he allowed her to film a documentary based on his life. Then a Sydney Film School (SFS) student,

Newell sat with Blackie in the shop and recorded their conversations on a cheap handycam. But after three months of filming, her subject took his own life. Newell was 18 years old at the time and was overwhelmed by the tragedy. "I was devastated when he died ... I definitely considered not making the film," she says.

Newell found it hard to return to the footage given the close bond she had formed with Blackie. When she did, however, she decided to create the film as a tribute. "I realised I had the opportunity to celebrate his life," she says. She spent months staying up until four in the morning editing the

footage and finally finished *Richard*, a 50-minute feature documentary exhibiting the many intricacies of the tortured owner of the Antique Toy Company in Petersham.

Since then, the film has been shown at the Revelation Perth International Film Festival; the Cannes Film Festival; the Asian Festival of First Films, where it won Newell the award for best director; and this year at the Dungog Film Festival in the Hunter region of NSW. It has also just landed Newell a national DVD distribution deal, a first for an SFS student and something that makes school director Ben Ferris very proud.

He says the film shows future students what they can achieve with commitment and dedication. "They can see what has been done [and] what is possible if they throw their heart and soul into a project, which is what Maya did," Ferris says.

Newell is now studying communications at university but hopes to return to filmmaking. She has a number of film ideas she'd like to pursue, but is learning as much as possible first. "I'd like to know a bit more about the world before I make films about it," she says.

For more information, see [sydneyfilm.school.com](http://sydneyfilm.school.com).

