



## A TALE OF ENDURANCE

Alumnus Tim Griffiths (BA '78, LLB '80) discusses his journey writing a historic novel about the life of photographer Frank Hurley.

**F**ighting against rising panic, I pushed the camera forwards using a leg of the tripod and dragged myself towards a lump of berg that was wedged in the plate ice. The iceberg had solid hand holds – grabbing it I dragged my frozen body out of the sea. I lay prostrate only momentarily as I knew I would die of exposure if I did not make it back to shelter quickly.”

This is a snapshot from *Endurance* (Allen and Unwin, 2015), a novel written by lawyer and first-time author Tim Griffiths from the perspective of the legendary Australian photographer and filmmaker Frank Hurley. *Endurance* was the name of Sir Ernest Shackleton’s ill-fated ship which was stranded on the Antarctic ice in 1915.

Griffiths’ book offers a first-person fictional account of Hurley’s experiences documenting the Antarctic expeditions of Sir Douglas Mawson and then Shackleton, and also as the official Australian photographer in World War I.

Although he has not had experiences on the scale of Hurley, Griffiths says he wrote the book because he shares Hurley’s sense of adventure – he is a keen cross-country skier and bushwalker himself, and has lived in Papua New Guinea where Hurley made documentaries in the 1920s. He’s also intrigued with Hurley’s complex personality.

“I read all the biographies of Hurley and they were very comprehensive, but I just had a sense that there were some big parts of his life that were

unknown, that you could only speculate on,” Griffiths says.

**“So I made an attempt to explore and imagine his character. He was someone who was a loner, a misanthrope, who had a limited emotional register and probably had Asperger’s, and yet documented some epic events in Australia’s history.”**

Griffiths spent five years researching and writing his book. He travelled to Bowral to see Hurley’s original cameras, to feel the weight of the heavy equipment he had to lug around and understand the cumbersome process to take photos on glass plates, each the size of an A4 notebook.

As well as faithfully reading Hurley’s diaries and the accounts of his companions

in the Antarctic expeditions and World War I battles, Griffiths examined records in the State Libraries of NSW and Tasmania and National Library in Canberra.

Griffiths gives voice to Hurley’s revulsion when he arrives on the Western Front and sees a crater of decomposing German corpses: “Until my dying day I shall never forget this haunting glimpse down into the mine crater on Hill 60, and this is but one tragedy of similar thousands and we who are civilised have still to continue this hellish murder.”

**At the front, Hurley clashed with Charles Bean, the official Australian war correspondent and historian. Bean criticised him for creating composite photographs – combining several plates together to create one scene – castigating them as “fakes”. This would dog Hurley’s career and lead to debate about his legacy.**

Before embarking on this novel, Griffiths trained as a lawyer at UNSW and then enjoyed a 30-year career in litigation law. As a uni student in the mid 1970s, Griffiths saw great change and upheavals in the legal system. “I was there during Whitlam’s dismissal, which was a very exciting time. I also witnessed changes to the Family Law Act – when previously you had to prove fault – and also the removal of the crime of vagrancy.”

He loved studying at the new UNSW Law School. “To be part of such an innovative approach to legal teaching, that wasn’t the ‘establishment’, really appealed to me,” he says. “They used the Socratic method. We had small classes and you had to participate and do lots of research.”

For further information, see [www.timgriffiths.com.au](http://www.timgriffiths.com.au). The Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney is currently displaying Hurley’s photos in their “Shackleton: Escape from Antarctica” exhibition. See [www.anmm.gov.au](http://www.anmm.gov.au)