Time is on Russell Maxey's side

By SCOTT PRUDEN
Staff writer

In this sleazy world of Oprah, Sally Jessie and Geraldo, the average person cruising along on the jet stream of life might seem quite boring. Face it, if you aren't half a pair of Siamese twins connected at the earlobe and nostril, a kindergarten neo-Nazi or a lesbian minister's wife, you probably rate pretty low on the excitement scale.

Fortunately, the muck-mongers don't know what the heck they're talking about. Despite what they might say on afternoon TV, it isn't necessary to be a genetic mutant or just plain weird to be a really keen guy.

Case in point, Russell Maxey, recent graduate of the USC College of Engineering with a master's degree of science in civil engineering.

Big deal. That happens all the time, right?

Right, except Russell Maxey happens to be 83 years old and the oldest graduate of any USC program — besides having traveled all over the world (a very exciting place) and recorded the history of Columbia in photographs since before your parents were twinges in the loins of grandma and granddad. And the best part is Maxey shows very little sign of slowing down.

Since he graduated from USC the first time in 1929, Maxey has worked for no less than eight different employers throughout his engineering career, including the Tennessee Valley Authority, the United States War Department Corps of Engineers and his college alma mater as an Associate Professor of Civil Engineering. During his stint with the War Department, Maxey worked with a famous World War II aviation hero and was active in surveying and photographing what was to become the Columbia Metropolitan Airport, coming under rifle fire from an irate farmer in the process.

"Retirement gets to be a drag." — *Russell Maxey*

Sound exciting so far? Wait, there's more. In his extensive travels around the United States and the world, Maxey was not to be caught without his camera, recording everything and returning to assemble it all in the synchronized sound slide shows which were shown free to the public. For one of these shows, entitled "San Francisco," Maxey (then well into his 50s) did a little in-depth research and spent the night with a roomful of counter-culture folks in the Haight-Ashbury section of the bay city at the very beginning of the whole hippie movement — a claim that not even the most fanatical '80s deadhead could ever hope to make.

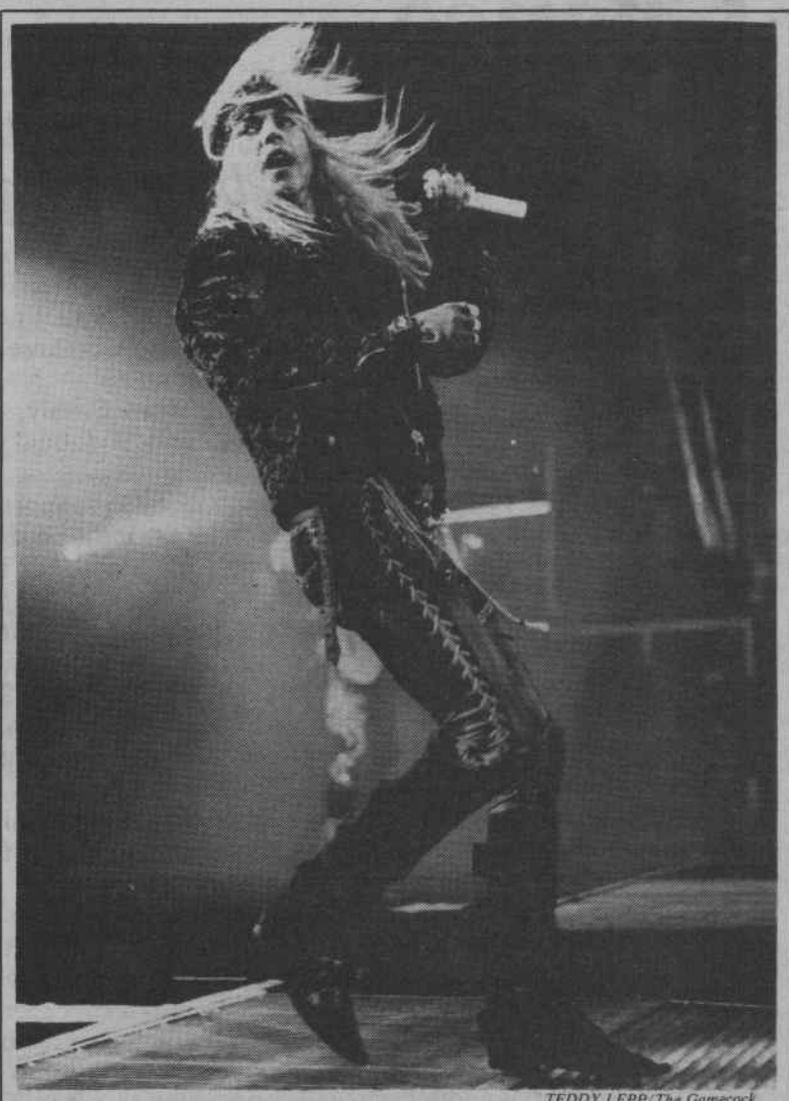
But, as has been said by many a wise man, life truly begins at retirement. Upon retiring from the Kline Iron and Steel Company in 1974, Maxey began channeling his energies toward even more creative pursuits, continuing his ongoing photography of Columbia and world travels while also preparing a compilation of his best photographs of the capital city for his first book, *Historic Columbia, Yesterday and Today in Photographs*, which was published in 1980.

Since then, Maxey has cranked out three more books and a hefty, one-inch-thick thesis for his engineering master's degree. The books, available in most of the Columbia libraries, are all historical in nature, but unusual in structure and subject matter. *The Columbia High School Story* (1984) is a collection of headlines and news stories dealing with the battle to save Old Columbia High School from demolition. Maxey was an active participant in the effort to preserve his alma mater and offers many personal insights and opinions on the struggle in the book. *Columbia's Bicentenial* (1986) celebrates the city's 200th birthday in photographs, and *Airports of Columbia, a History in Photographs and Headlines*, his latest effort, combines Maxey's photographs of local airports with newspaper stories dealing with area airfields since air travel began.

Why, at a time in his life when most people strive to be as unproductive as possible, has Russell Maxey burst forth onto the publishing and education scene in such a big way?

"Retirement gets to be a drag," Maxey says, certainly not one to beat around the bush, also admitting that his return to college "took more time than I'd expected." That time was obviously well spent, considering the extensive research and compilation that went into his master's thesis, *The Camera as an Engineering Tool in the History of Communication*, for which Maxey drew information from his earlier studies, his engineering career and his love of photography.

How's that for exciting?



TEDDY LEPP/The Gamecock

Keep out of reach of children

Brett Michaels of Poison flings his hair to that glam-rock beat at Sunday's coliseum concert. Fifteen-year-olds in white boots were reportedly having nothing but a good time and lifting their shirts in time with Michaels' hair.

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