

# Frank Cricchio

## The Master's Master

by  
Bill Hedrick



Once in awhile, a photographer comes along who is blessed with the gift of teaching the craft to his fellow photographers. Frank Cricchio has made it his personal mission to help professional photographers around the world to understand the technical and artistic aspect of our profession. With well over 1,000 PPA Merits to his name, he has the proper credentials and proven ability that has gained him the unofficial title as "The Master's Master."



If you ask any photographer who has been in this profession for any length of time at all if they know Frank Cricchio, they will tell you "yes!" Frank has travelled the world and likely has forgotten more about photography than many learn in a lifetime.

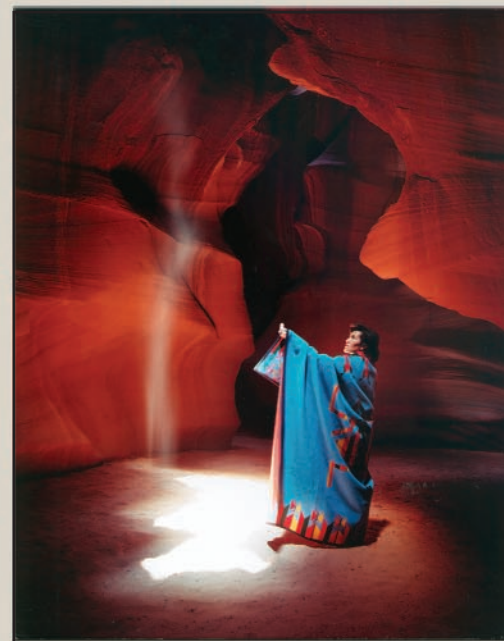
His interest in photography began at the age of twelve while growing up in Port Arthur, Texas. In a darkened room, he experienced just how long it took to process a single roll of film in a tray of Microdol Developer... 16 minutes in the developer and another 10 minutes in an acid fixer. But that original enthusiasm for creating an image from the snap of the shutter to the final image has never left Frank Cricchio.

The road to the top was not always easy. From the start, his parents could not afford to send him to a photography school. Frank had to learn the craft on his own. By the age of 14, he was pouring over any

books he could find at the Port Arthur Public Library that had anything to do with photography. After he had read all of the available books, he began reading magazines and trying techniques he learned. Then, a local camera store owner noticed Frank's gift and encouraged and guided him during those early stages. By the time he was 16, two of Frank's high school teachers helped mold and guide him toward a career in photography. He's never really known anything else.

It was a real sacrifice for his parents to buy him his first "expensive" camera, a 2 1/4 x 3 1/4 Graphic camera he named "Theresa." His parents allowed him to set aside some space in the family garage for a darkroom. This was the beginning of Frank Cricchio's long and successful career. As many of the rest of us have experienced, his first clients were friends and relatives. In the beginning he gave them images for free but soon they began paying him in order to keep his new business alive. By the time he graduated from high school, Frank Cricchio had saved enough money from his photographs to start college.

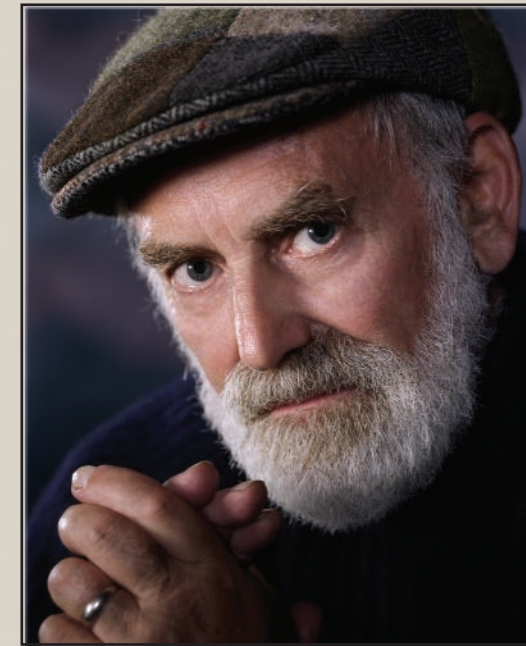
His sights had already been set on the University of Texas, but when he arrived, he had no place to stay, no job, nor any idea of what college life was really like. Before the end of his first day, Frank found a job, a home, and had selected a new major... chemical engineering. It just so happened that the University of Texas did not offer a photography degree.



For the next four and a half years, Frank would switch from one major to another, chemical engineering to journalism to business management. Eventually he would end up graduating from Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. His very first job after college would be doing ad layouts and statistical projections for a Sear's advertising department in Port Arthur.

But Frank Cricchio never stopped learning about photography. By the year 1958, his burning desire to open his own photography business finally became a reality with a 15 x 30 foot building in Port Arthur. The building was so small that Frank had to move equipment out the back door in order to do a portrait sitting. If the client was unfortunate to book a session on a day when it rained, the session was cancelled.

Over the course of his new career, Frank would gain encouragement and inspiration from several individuals. "Two people stand out in my mind for encouraging me the most during those years... Leonard Duckett, the city editor of the Port Arthur News... and Doug Thompson, manager of our local television station," explains Frank. Thompson put Cricchio on retainer to photograph news events and gave him a credit line on newscasts where his photography was used. Duckett used Cricchio's photographs in the Port Arthur News and gave



him a credit line, and encouraged Frank to research printing Run-of-Press (ROP) color with plastic engraving plates. After many hours of research and testing, the Port Arthur News ran its first ROP color photograph on Christmas Day, 1960. As a reward for his work, the

newspaper gave Frank an assignment of one ROP color photograph per week for the front page with his own credit line. Then, in 1966, the United Press International awarded Frank Cricchio and the Port Arthur News the ROP National Color Award. He was on his way!

That same year, Cricchio attended Winona International School of Professional Photography and enrolled in a basic portrait course taught by Leo Stern, Buster Orman, and Doug Pasley. This was a black-and-white lighting course but Cricchio brought color portrait samples to class for his instructors to critique. "All three of these gentlemen encouraged me to enter them in PPA competition and to start working on my Master of Photography degree," says Frank. He took their encouragement to heart and went on to earn that degree by 1970, in only four short years.

Today, Frank Cricchio holds the Master of Photography,



Photographic Craftsman, and several other degrees both in the United States and abroad. In 1998, he became the first photographer to receive one thousand merits from the Professional Photographers of America.

Over the years, Frank Cricchio has served his profession well. He is a Past President of Texas PPA, Southwestern PPA, the Professional Photographers of America, and the American Society of Photography. He is also a member of the prestigious Camera Craftsmen of America, which is limited to only 40 photographers worldwide. In 2004, he was the recipient of the "Leadership Award" from the International Photographic Council of the United Nations. Also, his articles on exposure techniques have been translated into as many as eight different languages and are read by photographers around the world.

When someone once asked Frank why he worked so hard to get to the top of his profession, his answer was, "From down at the bottom, I can help only a few. But, from the top, I can help so many more." It is this drive to share his vast technical knowledge with other photographers that has earned Frank Cricchio the reputation as one of the greatest teachers, photographers, and authors of photographic techniques. Of course, all of us here in Texas already knew that.

