

Gary Kildea — Biography

Born December, 1948, Sydney.

Joined Supreme Films (Sydney) 1965 in sound department. In 1967 moved into editing department.

Freelanced as Assistant Editor 1968-69 working on features and at Film Australia.

Joined Cameo Films as editor 1969-70.

1970 moved to Papua New Guinea and worked as Director/Cameraman for the Department of Information.

Moved to England 1974. Later entered the National Film School of Great Britain to study fiction direction.

1976 returned to Australia/Papua New Guinea and since worked as an independent documentary filmmaker.

MAJOR FILMS AS DIRECTOR:

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------|
| BUGLA YUNGGU The Great Chimbu Pig Festival | 45 Minutes | 1972 |
| BILONG LIVING BILONG OL Concerning the Lives of the People (in Papua New Guinea) | 54 Minutes | 1973 |
| TROBRIAND CRICKET An Ingenious Response to Colonialism (co-directed with Jerry Leach) | 54 Minutes | 1974 |
| WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? An Arts Festival and Cultural Dilemma in Papua New Guinea | 48 Minutes | 1976 |
| ILEKSEN Politics in Papua New Guinea (co-directed with Dennis O'Rourke) | 58 Minutes | 1978 |
| CELSO AND CORA A Manila Story | 109 Minutes | 1983 |

OTHER CREDITS:

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------|
| KAMA WOSI - TROBRIAND ISLANDS MUSIC by Les McLaren/Steve McMillan (Nomad Films) 54 Minutes | EDITOR | 1979 |
| GOGODALA - A CULTURAL REVIVAL? by Chris Owen (Institute of PNG Studies) 58 Minutes | EDITOR | 1980 |
| YAP - HOW DID YOU KNOW WE'D LIKE T.V.? by Dennis O'Rourke (for WGBH-Boston) 54 Minutes | CONTRIBUTING FILMMAKER | 1980 |
| ANGELS OF WAR by Andrew Pike, Hank Nelson, Gavan Daws (A.N.U.) 54 Minutes | CONTRIBUTING FILMMAKER | 1981 |
| SHARKCALLERS OF KONTU by Dennis O'Rourke 54 Minutes | CONTRIBUTING FILMMAKER | 1982 |
| YIRRKALA PROJECT by Ian Dunlop. | CINEMATOGRAPHER | 1982 |
| HUMAN FACE OF THE PACIFIC (Series) Film Australia | SOUND RECORDIST ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY | 1983 |

GARY KILDEA has been associated with many feature documentaries. Notable among these are **TROBRIAND CRICKET** and **ILEKSEN**. The former was shown on BBC 2 in Britain, on PBS in the United States as well as French, German and Italian television. It was awarded the Grand Prix George Sadoul. It won the first prize in its category at the American Film Festival. It was well-received at numerous other festivals including Sydney, Filmex (Los Angeles), Lyon, Florence, etc. It has had theatrical distribution in some countries and is presently one of the most successful documentaries in non-theatrical distribution in the United States, being distributed there by Extension Media Centre. When it was screened on the BBC, *The Listener* reviewed it in the following terms:

"The only documentary of the week which brought a really fresh view to its subject was ... **TROBRIAND CRICKET** ... it illuminated the lives of the people it filmed. It revealed their wit and humour ... it fulfilled a basic function of the documentary. It gave us a new framework through which to perceive not just the subjects of the film themselves, but also something more universal about one aspect of the human condition. Almost nothing else in the week did that."

Jean Rouch, interviewed in *Film Quarterly* (Spring 1978) referred to it as one of the best ethnographic films of recent times.

ILEKSEN (co-director Dennis O'Rourke) was also successful critically and commercially. It sold both to the BBC and PBS (U.S.), was accepted at a dozen or more international festivals including Edinburgh, Mannheim, Filmex (Los Angeles), Hong Kong, Sydney and Melbourne. In London, *Time Out* said that:

"(the film makers) display a singular talent of constructing a political vision using simply extraordinary images and observed contradiction ... (the film is) rich, complex, fascinating ... made with insight and skill rare on any channel ... Don't miss it."

Tony Rayns, a prominent British film critic, called it:

"excellently photographed, cogently assembled and compulsively interesting - a model in fact, for documentaries of its kind."
(Hong Kong Film Festival notes.)

Scott Meek in Britain's *Monthly Film Bulletin* rated **ILEKSEN** as one of the 10 best films (of all kinds) of 1978.

Celso and Cora

press
comments

Grand Prix Winner, 1983 Nyon International Film Festival, Switzerland

Best Feature Documentary, 1983 Chicago Film Festival

1984 RAI Film Prize, London

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Gary Kildea's ethnographic film *Celso and Cora* was my favourite [documentary at the Sydney Film Festival]. Two hours long and shot faithfully in the observational mode ... this account of a family of poor street vendors in current-day Manila managed to gain an intimacy and honesty rarely seen on film, giving the audience an understanding of the social structures of the poor in the Philippines."

Gillian Leahy, **Filmnews**, July 1983

"Kildea draws our attention to the fact that the film is composed of fragments taken out of the lives of his subjects. He edited the film himself and refuses many aspects of conventional film editing. The illusion of continuous time, except within shots, is avoided — one might say, purposefully destroyed — by the interpolation of short lengths of leader. At one point he shot footage from the driver's window of one of the trains that regularly pushes through Kahilom, the quarter in which the family live. In the end he felt unable to use any of this material because it was too alien to their experience, a view of their quarter that they would never see. Kildea is clearly a privileged observer, a white, middle-class film-maker in one of the innumerable microcosms of the Third World, but his camera style reaches out to the subject and to the audience, in an attempt to make our analysis of what he is doing less problematical."

excerpts from an article published in **RAIN**, 1982, by David MacDougall, director of the Film Unit, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies

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- **International Jury** on awarding the **Grand Prix**, 1983 Nyon International Film Festival to *Celso and Cora*

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- **Professor John Blacking**, chairman of judges, on awarding the 1984 Royal Anthropological Institute Film Prize to *Celso and Cora*

"In the beginning the poverty is striking but after a while, we get to know the main characters better, the poverty slides to the background and general questions in life, marriage, children, work, start to dominate. The dignity of these really poor people does not vanish — it grows as the film goes on." - Heimo Lappalainen, **Lehtiset** (film magazine), Helsinki, February 1984

"*Celso and Cora* is the first feature film by Australian documentarist Gary Kildea whose earlier shorts have won him an international reputation. Kildea is clearly creating his own documentary style, and this portrait of a young couple and their two children living in Manila is indeed remarkable."

- **Ken Wlaschin**, at the 1983 London Film Festival



Royal Anthropological Institute of
Great Britain and Ireland

**ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE
FILM PRIZE 1984**

awarded to "CELSO AND CORA"
by GARY KILDEA

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56 Queen Anne Street
London W1M 9LA

telephone 01-486 6832

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date
27 April 1984

The Royal Anthropological Institute Film Prize for 1984 was awarded on 26 April to "CELSO AND CORA" by GARY KILDEA.

The RAI Film Prize is awarded biennially for the most outstanding film on anthropology first shown during the previous two years. The first two Prizes were awarded in 1980 to *The Wedding Camels* by David and Judith McDougall and in 1982 to *Waiting for Harry* by Kim McKenzie. The Prize is international and this year entries were received from seven countries. The Judges, appointed by the Institute, were John Blacking, Richard Burghart and Shelagh Weir.

Celso and Cora is a powerful and technically innovative film about a young couple and their two children in Manila, Philippines. The couple scrape a living by selling cigarettes illegally outside a downtown hotel. Professor John Blacking of Queen's University, Belfast, chairman of the Judges, said, "This is a study in the ethnography of poverty, and especially of the ways in which poor people are forced to live in the short term from day to day. The camera follows a Filipino husband and wife, whose fortunes the filmmakers followed for several months, along narrow passages between shanties and cluttered houses, with an almost permanent background of transistor radios, barking dogs and playing children. There were poignant scenes when the young couple took their sick and undernourished little boy to the General Hospital and then had to scrape together the money to pay for medication. The judges felt that the technique of cutting to blank spacing was extremely successful and helped crucially to put over the message and to engage their attention and feelings."

Gary Kildea is an Australian independent filmmaker, already well-known for his film *Trobriand Cricket* made with the anthropologist Jerry Leach. The film is in colour and runs for 109 minutes with no commentary, Tagalog dialogue and English sub-titles. It was independently produced with investment from the Australian Film Commission, NAV Productions Tokyo, and support from Ateneo University's Institute of Philippine Culture and from the University of Sydney. Kildea worked with one collaborator, a Filipina, who helped with sound recording and language.

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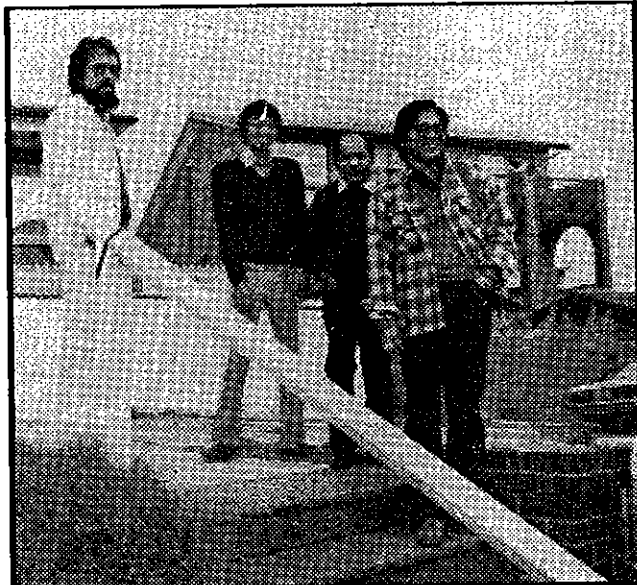
Australian filmmaker among Filipinos

By DOMINGO LANDICHO

TO those who have seen the film "Celso and Cora" shown recently in Manila when the filmmaker Gary Kildea came to show the film to Filipino audiences in Ateneo, UP, and Ramon Magsaysay Center, the personality of the young and highly-intelligent filmmaker was a mystery.

During an open forum after the showing of the film at the Magsaysay Center, some film enthusiasts even doubted the motive of the filmmaker, calling the reality of poverty portrayed in the film as dehumanizing for the characters who happen to be Filipinos. Kildea readily replied that such a reality as typified by the life of Celso and Cora is a filmic expression of portraying a universal truth obtaining in all countries of the world. Such artistic expression in whatever form is something one should not be apologetic about as it has a cleansing effect on the receiver, a catharsis that is humanizing in essence.

Gary Kildea as an artist has a natural affinity with the downtrodden. A product of a prestigious London film institution, he embarked on a journey of making important documentary films about the lives of the oppressed and interpreting for them the meaning of such life with optimism. For example, in an important documentary of the post-colonial society of Papua, New Guinea, he portrayed the effects of colonialism in cricket games, a popular sport of the Papuans, and how through such a sport a



Gary Kildea (left) with writer (3rd from left) and two Filipino friends in Sydney.

people struggled and grappled with the effects of colonialism to attain a certain degree of national dignity.

And with Kildea's exposure on Philippine realities, he imbibed an acquired affinity with things Philippine. While I was in Sydney, I saw him closely linked with Filipino intellectuals in Australia. Many times, during the post-production process of the film "Celso and Cora," he would invite Filipino students and intellectuals to view his work, entertained their comments and perceptions which helped Kildea in trimming down the more than six-hour long material

into a two-hour film masterpiece which sociologist Randolph David called the work of a genius. There were times when he would go with us to a pub owned by a Filipino businessman in Sydney or see with us an Indonesian play or just simply invite us to his house in suburban Sydney for some food and drinks.

Kildea's style of *cinema verite* or direct cinema blends beautifully with his personal closeness to the subject matter of his film. In "Celso and Cora," he befriended the couple. Celso even made him a *compadre* and with this sociological tie, the obstacle of inhibition or

the conscious portrayal on the part of the couple has been removed. With an intimate access to the private lives of the characters, Kildea became a participant in the film, and the camera became not only an instrument of art but an eye of raw reality. Hence, Celso's dialogue like "Wala, documentary lang 'yan, 'wag n'yong pansinin' when he was buying medicine in a drug store near PGH for his sick child, or "Makakarating kayo sa Australia" when he was buying plywood in a lumber store, are elements of rawness and reality, making a spectator later involved in the unfolding of dramatic truths. In his style, there is no difference between art and life.

Celso and Cora

a Manila story

Introductory Narration from the film - spoken by the film-maker Gary Kildea

"Celso and Cora and their family are the subjects of this story which has been constructed from fragments of their lives taken over a three-month period.

At the time, their daughter, Marcel (Che-Che) was two years old and their son, Armando (Totoy) was one.

There were two of us doing the filming, myself, an Australian, and Rowena Katalingkasan, a Filipina.

I could speak and understand a little Filipino but relied on my collaborator for language assistance.

I had come to Manila to make a film about street vendors and it was on a street in the city's nightclub quarter that I first met Celso. He occupied a selling position outside a hotel, a position he and Cora shared with Cora's mother, Placida.

After becoming acquainted, I asked to visit them at their home in the nearby suburb of Pandacan and later asked if they would be willing to have me film their daily lives over a period of months.

Subsequently, I rented a room and moved into the neighbourhood myself. By the time we started filming, I had known Cora and Celso for four weeks."

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Honest look at Manila life



Family life in a Manila shanty-town: a scene from *Celso and Cora*

FILMS

Neil Jillett

WITH a cool eye, a warm heart, a steady camera and only one assistant, Australian Gary Kildea has made an extraordinary documentary, 'Celso and Cora' (State Film Centre, East Melbourne), about three months in the life of a family of Manila shanty-town dwellers.

Celso and Cora just survive by illegally selling cigarettes at night on the streets of Manila's nightclub district. When Kildea met them in 1981, shortly before starting his film, they had been together for six years and had two children. The feature-length film opens with the family moving delightedly into a new "house". It is made of palm matting, corrugated iron and packing cases and lacks such elementary services as running water; but Cora soon brightens it with plastic curtains, holy pictures and red polishing wax.

Kildea, who was backed by the Australian Film Commission, Sydney University and the Institute of Philippine Culture, records the family's story — trouble with by-laws, moments of domestic happi-

ness and anger, strife with mother-in-law, the children's sickness, the eternal scrimping — with a detachment that never becomes callous.

He does not take the easy way of contrasting his subjects' poverty with the wealth of other parts of Manila. Celso and Cora are given the dignity of people existing in their own right, not as case studies for anthropologists or as ammunition for political pointscoring. The film will be used for those purposes of course, but its primary purpose is clearly to give ordinary people (a cinema audience) an insight into the lives of other ordinary people.

Although his camera never blinks, it also never probes. It bides its time, waiting for Celso and Cora to reveal themselves. They sometimes acknowledge its existence. ("Don't worry about Gary," they tell their friends. "He's making a film. They'll see you in Australia.") But most of the time — notably during the filming of a slow, sullen row that leads to a break in their marriage — they seem to be unaware of the camera.

'Celso and Cora', honest, compassionate, unsensational, is perhaps the best Australian-made documentary from original material.

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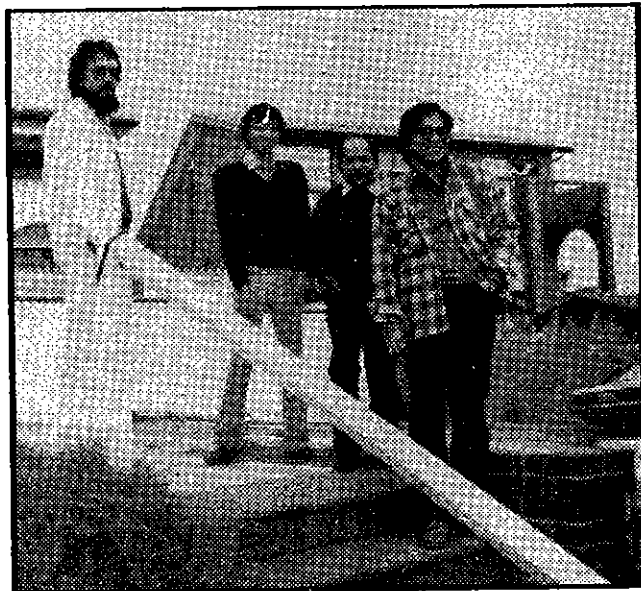
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Celso and Cora

a Manila story

Documentary that digs beyond the skyscrapers

IF YOU needed proof that the way to see a country is not to stay in four-star hotels, Gary Kildea's Philippine story, *Celso and Cora*, is the sort of documentary to put you to rights.

With a strong background in documentary and ethnographic film-making, Kildea's approach to his subject — the life of a young couple in a squatter settlement in the capital, Manila — is serious, concerned and determinedly uncompromising.

Those qualities won't endear him to hard-hearted film buyers. But it's an approach that brings rewards not readily available to those who seek real insights into the lives of people in the places that haunt the headlines.

Kildea wants to go deeper than just a superficial sweep of the tin-roofed shanties, and offer more than just glib observations on the poverty behind the malaise of the Philippines.

His film attempts literally to drop in on the young couple just to watch how their lives go — what they do, what's bad, what's good, what's fun (not much

CELSE AND CORA, Documentary. Directed by Gary Kildea. Opera House Cinema ★ ★ ★

when you're living with a family of three in a space of a laundry, with no water, no sewerage and the constant racket of neighbours only a balsa wood partition away on every side).

What's interesting is that he offers no contrasts with what might be happening elsewhere. And you're so immersed in this lifestyle that it comes as quite a surprise when toward the end of the film the young man takes one ailing child (malnutrition, pneumonia, skin disease etc. are unremarkable events) down to the bay for some sunshine.

Suddenly there are skyscrapers and flash motorcars whizzing by, and the shock of the contrast makes it a very effective moment of truth.

The film goes on a bit too long, but it's a small price to pay for an unusual and engrossing study.

Celso and Cora

a Manila story

THE ARTS

Film

Capturing the dignity of a super optimist

Celso and Cora

JOHN BAXTER

COMMENTING in this paper not so long ago on his considerable satisfaction with a mail-order Filipino bride, a local farmer extolled her domestic diligence and fidelity before adding the final overwhelming argument for importing a wife from a more tractable Asian society. "Who else do you know who would clean your toenails with a toothbrush?"

Without ever obviously attempting to do so, Gary Kildea's moving and acute *Celso and Cora* decisively dispels the illusion many Australians harbor of the Philippines as a cockpit of political violence interesting to us only for its off-the-hook brides, toenail brushes in hand.

Setting out to film Manila's street markets, Australian documentarist Kildea became friendly with a couple who sold cigarettes from a tiny stand outside one of the city's hotels, and asked to detail on film a few months of their lives.

With the astonishing generosity that is one of the most engaging Filipino traits, Celso and Cora let Kildea and his sound recordist-collaborator

into their world. The result is a touching insight into the everyday satisfactions and tragedies of life where the poverty line is a tightrope, to be walked daily in the quest for survival.

With their two small children, Celso and Cora struggle to survive in a congested Manila shanty town. Each day's income is used to buy more cigarettes, which Celso sells with tireless good humor through the night.

Their energy is prodigious, but it gets them nowhere; milk and medicine for the under-nourished and sickly kids; rent for a tiny room hardly larger than the average Australian kitchen, and the system's casual ruthlessness in maintaining their chronic poverty.

Bitterness

The low point comes when Cora, apparently coaxed by a mother who never approved of her marriage to a street vendor, is lured back to the family home. With his tiny daughter ailing from yet another infection, Celso cycles to Manila Bay to wait for the sunrise and what he hopes will be the healing effects of sun and salt air.

Utterly without bitterness, and informed with a sunny optimism, he rationalises his life, still to him far more fortunate than those of the dispossessed sleeping under straw mats in the park around him. The fact that he has slept in the park himself that morning, that his street pitch has been lost, his daughter is ill and his wife has left him, all count for little.

The sun rises, his tiny daughter begs a kiss of the "uncle" and "aunty" behind the camera, and Celso cycles off into the morning traffic, an object lesson in hope and resource.

Kildea achieves documentary's most difficult feat in *Celso and Cora*. He reveals without patronage or sensationalism the extraordinary dignity of ordinary people. Amid the gimcrack sensationalism of today's cinema, it's a work of true and gripping drama.

Celso and Cora

a Manila story

FILMS

★ ★ ★

Celso & Cora is a moving and powerful film about a young Filipino couple with two children who scrape together a living as illegal street vendors.

But while the social structures of the poor in the Philippines serve as a constant backdrop, the film is also about the universal human condition — individuals experiencing everyday life, its joys and struggles.

Filmmaker Gary Kildea was accepted as part of Celso & Cora's family and consequently the filming of their daily routines is relaxed, intimate and overwhelmingly honest.

Celso & Cora is a film whose apparent simplicity belies the power of its political conviction. A keenly observed aspect of Filipino life rarely treated in such depth, this impressive documentary is highly recommended.

— LYN MCCARTHY

NATIONAL TIMES, AUGUST 17 to 23, 1984

R O N I N F I L M S

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WEEK IN FILM(JOHN HINDE) 2FC Monday 13.8.84

Gary Kildea's CELSO AND CORA is one that really does get its story told. This one 's a rare documentary, of high conscience—a cinema verite documentary but almost in a class of its own—that tells the story of how life is during three months of a young Phillipines couple's struggle for aliving in the street markets of Manila. There's nothing fictionalised in Kildea's almost two hours of film, nothing even "creatively controlled" (as some documentarists sometimes say) except for the cuts between sequences. And these are always clearly marked by either going to grey between the uncut sequences, or putting in a subtitle to outline the march of events. And yet the film shows a coherent story of Celso and Cora being slowly pulled down and almost destroyed by their society, and yet struggling up again, towards the end.

Cora and Celso are young...They look like skinny kids in the opening shots but they're married and they already have a two year old daughter and a one year old son. They live by sharing the work at a more or less illegal pitch outside a big Manila hotel, selling cigarettes. From the start it's clear that Kildea really has become their compadre, their good friend, before all this has begun. And at the start Celso and Cora are not doing too badly; they're even looking around for an apartment of their own, with maybe even a real window in it, instead of the single room they have. And they find an apartment ... it's upstairs, away from the stink, so it's great for the kids even though the ceiling lining is rotting away and the plywood walls are not too good ... Also there is a window.

So everything is looking pretty good. But then the hotel puts a ban on street vendors working anywhere near its entrance. So there's less money; and then one of the kids gets too sick to be just left to get better. The diagnosis is scabies... and pneumonia; and there's a half funny half heartbreaking set of sequences of Celso's shopping around to save a few pennies on the life saving drugs that have been prescribed by the General Hospital.

A time comes when Celso and Cora have drifted apart because of tensions and quarrels that have sometimes been urgent enough to break out while Kildea's camera has been running, and Celso is down to just about no money and he's sleeping out on the seafront under some palms, with the baby boy but mainly so as to help the boy's cough with fresh air and sunlight.

And so it goes. It's a marvellous documentary I wish I'd left more time to have brooded over the enormous problems there are in the so called documentary form, and how close Kildea has come to solving them here. But all there's time for is to say that CELSO AND CORA is recommended without any real reservation. Don't miss it. It's being opened in about 1/2 an hours' time at Sydney's Opera House Cinema, with an introduction by Father Gore. It'll be in other capital cities soon. That's CELSO AND CORA. Don't miss it.

Celso and Cora

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- **Ken Wlaschin**, at the 1983 London Film Festival

Celso and Cora

a Manila story

Life in the slums of Manila

Australian film-maker Gary Kildea has made a remarkable documentary film of the life of a young couple, *Celso and Cora*, living with their two small children in the slums of Manila, capital of the Philippines.



* Celso and Cora ... a scene from the film of the same name.

So often we have merely glimpsed in passing such a life, and environment as this as background to some feature film. Here is the real thing. It has won prestigious awards in Switzerland, Chicago and London.

Gary virtually lived with the family over a three-month

period, his camera an extension of his compassion and sensitivity.

The poverty-stricken couple make their living selling cigarettes outside one of Manila's luxury hotels. They, their children and their in-laws are quite natural and unselfconscious of the intruding camera that follows them around.

It is an intensely moving human experience, the dignity of these poor people shining

through as they go about their daily routine of laughter, love, indignity, petty quarrels, getting on with the problem of existing. Don't miss it. *General Exhibition.*

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