



AUSTRALIAN BIOGRAPHY

STUDY GUIDE
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DIANE CILENTO

SERIES 8

(1932 -) Actor

INTRODUCTION

This program is an episode of *Australian Biography* (Series 8) produced by the National Interest Program of Film Australia. This well-established series profiles some of the most extraordinary Australians of our time. Many have had a major impact on the nation's cultural, political and social life. All are remarkable and inspiring people who have reached a stage in their lives where they can look back and reflect. Through revealing in-depth interviews, they share their stories - of beginnings and challenges, landmarks and turning points. In so doing, they provide us with an invaluable archival record and a unique perspective on the roads we, as a country, have travelled.

SYNOPSIS

Diane Cilento achieved international acclaim as a stage and screen actor in the 1950s and 60s. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, she won a Critics Choice Award for her theatre role in *Tiger at the Gates* in 1956

and an Academy Award nomination for *Tom Jones* in 1963. That was also the year her celebrity reached its height, with her husband Sean Connery as James Bond attracting feverish attention the world over.

It was far removed from her days growing

...she went to New York with her father, where she secretly spent her days at the museum and the movies instead of in the classroom, and where she discovered acting.



ISSUE 29 AUSTRALIAN SCREEN EDUCATION

1

ABOVE: DIANE CILENTO IN 2001



up in Queensland as one of six children to Lady Phyllis and Sir Raphael Cilento, both eminent doctors. But not necessarily surprising. Diane had been a rebellious child. Expelled from her school in Australia, she went to New York with her father, where she secretly spent her days at the museum and the movies instead of in the classroom, and where she discovered acting.

Young Diane was impetuous, passionate, dramatic. Her early life was marked by intense peaks of emotion: her elopement with a romantic Italian at the age of 23, a nervous breakdown and suicide attempt, and twice fleeing marriages without warning.

These days, Diane talks about balance. She has a happy marriage, spiritual contentment and a magnificent Queensland property where she runs a theatre amidst the rainforest. It's a place she has reached after turning her back on stardom in the 1970s and beginning a journey of self-discovery.

In a very candid interview, Diane talks about what she has learnt from her roles: as an actor, as wife and mother, and as someone seeking spiritual fulfilment.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Australian Biography: Diane Cilento will have interest and relevance for students at upper secondary and tertiary levels. Curriculum links include English, Drama, Media Studies, Society and Culture, Personal Development, Philosophy and Studies of Religion.

BEFORE WATCHING

Construct a timeline showing the major historical events in Australia in the 20th century.

Research news making the headlines in Australia in the 1930s and on the date Diane Cilento was born: 5 October 1932.

Find some statistics about her birthplace, Brisbane, from that year, eg. population, main industries, etc.

Discuss some reasons a person may have for wanting to become an actor and the skills that are required.

AFTER WATCHING

FORMATIVE YEARS

Diane Cilento doesn't believe that her childhood years were 'normal', in that her home was always full of visitors and she was given a lot of freedom by her parents.

She says that she became rebellious during her time at boarding school, where she was sent after her father was posted overseas. When she joined her father in New York she says her behaviour did not improve and she became a chronic truant.

- Do you think that there is such a thing as 'too much freedom' for a child?
- What attitudes are revealed by the statement Diane uses, 'You're not the boss of me'?

ROLE: WIFE AND MOTHER

Diane Cilento married three times. When she was 23 she eloped to marry Andrea Volpe, an Italian, with whom she had her first child, Giovanna. She married fellow actor Sean Connery in 1962. They had a

son, Jason, who is now a famous actor in his own right. Diane left Sean Connery in 1970 and divorced him the following year. In 1985, Diane married English playwright Anthony Shaffer (1926 – 2001).

- The first image we see of Diane's first husband is a painting. How would you describe it? What effect is produced by using this image? Why was this image selected, do you think?
- What were some of the issues that Diane faced in her marriage to Andrea Volpe? What does she mean by the reference to *Romeo and Juliet*?
- What was the effect of Sean Connery's success on Diane Cilento's life and on their marriage?
- What were some of the challenges that Diane experienced in trying to raise children in a 'normal' family environment?
- If you were the child of two famous people, what privileges and what problems might you experience?

ROLE: ACTOR

LEARNING TO ACT

The best part of learning any profession is when you're really going through those huge stretching escalated times of learning and energy, when you want to do it so much.

- Do you agree with Diane Cilento's statement? To what extent can the power of a burning ambition help someone to achieve their goals? Do you think there is also a downside?

Instead of going to school while in New York, Diane fuelled her passion for performance and the arts. Cilento's acting career began when she stumbled into an audition session at Carnegie Hall where she took dance lessons and instantly won a part. She then studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and in New York.

Diane's stage and screen careers seemed to fall into place when director Alexander Korda saw her work and signed her on a long-term contract. In 1963, she played Tom's promiscuous, mud-stained lady friend Molly Seagram in *Tom Jones*, and

was nominated for an Oscar for the role. As well as acting, Diane has directed and worked as a crew member on a number of films.

- What does Diane say she learned at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art?
- Where does she say she really learned to act? Why were movement studies and observation so important to her development as an actor?

CELEBRITY

For some actors, fame and fortune seem to go hand in hand. By the time she was about 18, Diane says she was earning more than her parents, which was a great surprise to them.

- What is celebrity? What lifestyle changes do you think it might bring to someone who becomes famous at a young age?
- How did Diane Cilento help Sean Connery break into acting?
- How did Diane Cilento cope with the pressure of her celebrity status?

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

When talking about the media attention she received, Diane emphasizes the word 'huge'.

- The image of Diane Cilento on the cover of the magazine *Picture Post* was not glamorous. Was this an appropriate image for the accompanying story?
- View the piece of news footage about Diane's return to Australia. The coverage mentions her hair but not her pregnancy. Why is this? How might this be reported differently today?
- Why does she say that living with the press attention was 'worse than living in a fishbowl'?

CAREER

- Why was Sean Connery not acceptable to the film and theatre world of the time?
- Is a career something that you have for your whole life?
- What transferable skills do you think actors in general would have?
- Do you think that the large perform-

ance fees actors who have 'made it' receive are justifiable? Why/why not?

ROLE: SEEKING SPIRITUAL FULFILMENT

LIFE CRISES IN REVIEW

What I realise is that I probably am a person who skips off when things get a bit difficult and I can't hope to get them in order.

In the program Diane reveals several occasions when she literally ran away from the challenges that she was facing in life. During her first marriage she also attempted suicide.

In the wake of her break-up with Sean Connery, Diane Cilento asked herself 'Who am I?' and 'What am I doing here?'

- Why did she ask these questions? What was it that she wanted from life?

A NEW DIRECTION – THE SUFI EXPERIENCE

Diane began going to philosophical and meditation classes with a group of people whom she described as 'bizarre'. While open to new ideas, she initially didn't think that she'd continue attending, but after a short while felt that she was interested in pursuing the pathway.

For a year she studied under John Godolphin (J.G.) Bennett, an English Mystic and teacher (1897-1974). Bennett utilized ideas from Sufism in his teachings.

Mysticism is described as the search for direct personal experience of the divine. A mystic may use prayer, meditation, invocation, chanting, recitation or various ascetic practices as part of the discipline. Sufism is generally understood by scholars and Sufis to be the inner, mystical dimension of Islam. Traditionally, it is regarded as the esoteric aspect of Islam, rather than a separate religion. Today, however, many Muslims and non-Muslims regard Sufism as being outside the sphere of Islam.



DIANE CILENTO IN A STILL FROM
HITLER: THE LAST TEN DAYS

In Sufism, ascetic practices commonly include standing, sitting or night vigils. The turning of the whirling dervishes, about which Diane Cilento made an award-winning film, is practised by only some Sufi Orders.¹

Poetry and odes are also a feature in Sufism. An insight into Sufi philosophy can be gleaned from the writing of Shaykh Necmeddin of the Naqshbandi Order:

When you are everywhere, you are nowhere.

When you are somewhere, you are everywhere.²

- Discuss what is meant by the above statement.
- Spiritual belief is a very personal issue. From what you have learnt from the program and about the philosophies of Mysticism and Sufism, what do you think may have resonated with Diane?

A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

- What three stages does Diane Cilento believe our lives are divided into? Do you agree with this? Give reasons for your answer.
- Robin Hughes, the interviewer, says that Diane is 'still a risk taker.' What is the evidence presented to support this assertion? What is Diane's response?
- Why does Diane Cilento say that she felt she had to prove herself? Is it important to prove oneself?
- Why do you think Diane says that she thinks she is a bit of a freak?
- How is the phrase 'living your own vision' reflected in the laser show?
- Diane uses the following words to describe her life: 'bizarre', 'flowed', 'right' and 'cohesive'. What does this say about the way Cilento sees her own journey?
- What lessons can be learned from the life of Diane Cilento?

MEDIA STUDIES

- The program is an interview interspersed with still photographs and some film footage. Assess the effectiveness of this form of program. What could be another way to present biographical information in an audio-

visual form?

- When she is speaking about the process of learning to act, what is the effect of the zoom into the extreme close up on the picture of the young Diane Cilento? How does this image reflect the ideas expressed in the voice-over?
- If you had the final edit decisions on this program, would you make any changes? If so, what would they be and why?
- View the footage of Diane Cilento riding a mower. What effect does this image have on her overall image in the program?
- What catchy titles can you think of that would be appropriate for this program?

ACTIVITIES

- Summarize Diane Cilento's achievements.
- Stick a picture of Diane Cilento in the centre of a page and write a series of statements about her to surround the picture. Choose the events in her life that you consider to be most significant. Construct a similar page using the events that you consider to be trivial.
- Choose one section of Cilento's life and rewrite it as a play.
- Write a newspaper report of a significant event in Diane Cilento's life.
- Draw a storyboard of the events that led her to be auditioned at the American Academy of Dramatic Art.
- What questions would you ask Diane Cilento if you had the chance?
- What were the main turning points in Diane Cilento's life? Give reasons for your answer.
- Write your own short biography of Diane Cilento.
- Imagine you are Diane Cilento. Write a letter to someone you are close to, explaining your decision to give up acting as a career.
- Design a cover for the video of this program.
- Research one of the following topics and present your findings in the form of a speech:
 - 1 The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art
 - 2 The life and career of Sean Connery
 - 3 The life and career of Jason Connery
 - 4 The life and career of Anthony Shaffer
 - 5 The Oscars

6 Sufism

7 The life and career of John Godolphin Bennett

8 Whirling Dervishes

- Write Diane Cilento's school report from Toowoomba Boarding School.
- Write a letter from Lady Cilento to Diane while she was living in New York with her father.
- Write a letter from Diane to her mother after she had been accepted by the American Academy of Dramatic Art.
- Write several diary entries for Diane Cilento. Select times which you think would have been the most significant for her.
- Write a letter to Diane Cilento in which you discuss the program and tell her your views on what you discovered. Include your opinions on her philosophy of life.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Write your own autobiography.
- Write the biography of someone you know well – a friend or a member of your family.
- Write questions for a member of your family and interview them about their life. You can tape this and edit it if you have the necessary equipment.

DIANE CILENTO: ROLL CREDITS

FILM & TELEVISION FEATURES

- ACTOR

- 1 **Boy Who Had Everything, The** (1984)... Mother
aka *Winner Takes All* (1984)
- 2 **Duet for Four** (1982)... Margot Mason
- 3 **For the Term of His Natural Life** (1982) (TV)
- 4 **Tycoon** (1978) TV Series ... Diana Clark
- 5 **Hitler: The Last Ten Days** (1973) ... Hanna Reitsch
aka *Ultimi 10 giorni di Hitler, Gi* (Italy)
- 6 **Wicker Man, The** (1973) ... Miss Rose
aka *Anthony Shaffer's The Wicker Man*
- 7 **Spell of Evil** (1973) (TV) ... **Clara**
aka *Thriller: Spell of Evil* (UK: series title)
- 8 **Z.P.G.** (1972) ... Edna Borden
aka *Edict*
aka *First of January, The*
aka *Zero Population Growth* (UK)
- 9 **Negatives** (1968)... Reingard

- 10 **Another Moon Called Earth** (1967) (TV).... Penelope
aka *Thirty-Minute Theatre: Another Moon Called Earth* (UK: series title)
- 11 **Hombre** (1967).... Jessie
- 12 **Once Upon a Tractor** (1965)
- 13 **Agony and the Ecstasy, The** (1965).... Contessina de Medici
aka Irving Stone's *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965)
- 14 **Rattle of a Simple Man** (1964).... Cyrenne
- 15 **Third Secret, The** (1964).... Anne Tanner
- 16 **Tom Jones** (1963).... Molly
- 17 **I Thank a Fool** (1962).... Liane Dane
- 18 **Naked Edge, The** (1961).... Mrs Heath
- 19 **Full Treatment, The** (1961).... Denise Colby
aka *Stop Me Before I Kill!* (1961) (USA)
aka *Treatment, The*
- 20 **Jet Storm** (1959).... Angelica Como
aka *Killing Urge*
- 21 **Truth About Women, The** (1958).... Ambrosine Viney
- 22 **Anna Christie** (1957) (TV)
- 23 **Passionate Stranger, A** (1957) (uncredited)
aka *Novel Affair, A* (USA)
- 24 Admirable Crichton, *The* (1957).... Tweeny
aka *Paradise Lagoon* (USA)
- 25 **Passage Home** (1955).... Ruth Elton
- 26 **Woman for Joe, The** (1955).... Mary
- 27 **Passing Stranger** (1954).... Jill
- 28 **Angel Who Pawned Her Harp, The** (1954).... The Angel
- 29 **Meet Mr. Lucifer** (1953)
- 30 **All Hallowe'en** (1952).... Harriet
- 31 **Moulin Rouge** (1952) (uncredited)
- 32 **Wings of Danger** (1952).... Jeanette

TV DRAMA - NOTABLE GUEST APPEARANCES

- 1 **Persuaders!, The** (1971) playing 'Kate' in episode: 'Death in the Family, A' (episode # 21) 2/4/1972
- 2 **Espionage** (1963) in episode: 'Festival Of Pawns' (episode # 1.10) 12/11/1963
- 3 **Alcoa Hour, The** (1955) in episode: 'Small Servant, The' (episode # 1.2) 10/30/1955

MISCELLANEOUS

- **You Only Live Twice** (1967) (body double: 'Kissy') (uncredited)
aka **Ian Fleming's You Only Live Twice** (USA: complete title)
Source: Internet Movie Database - <http://us.imdb.com>

THEATRE - ACTOR

Diane Cilento performed in many theatre productions over the span of her career. Most notable was her role as Helen of Troy in *Tiger at the Gates*, for which she received the Critics' Choice Award for Best Actress in New York. Other plays in which she has had major roles include *Heartbreak House*, Tennessee Williams' *Orpheus Descending*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *My Place*, *A Castle in Sweden*, *To Clothe the Naked*, *Altona*, *The Idiot* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.

FILM - DIRECTOR

Turning, BBC, London, c. 1980.

NOVELS - AUTHOR

- *The Manipulator*, Hodder Paperbacks, London, 1967.
- *Hybrid*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1970.

RESOURCES

DIANE CILENTO

The following links give brief biographical details and filmographies.

Chix In Flix - www.chixinfix.com/diane_cilento.html

Hollywood.com - www.hollywood.com/celebs/detail/celeb/198750

Internet Movie Database - <http://us.imdb.com/>

SEAN CONNERY

The Official Web Site of Sir Sean Connery - www.seanconnery.com

There are many informative Sean Connery fan sites. This is a selection:
<http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Guild/7634/connery.html>
<http://www.ianfleming.org/mkbb/guide/seanconnery/>

JASON CONNERY

<http://www.klast.net/bond/jason.html>
<http://einstein.et.tudelft.nl/~tirza/RoS/rosbios/page3.html>

ANTHONY SHAFFER

www.hollywood.com/celebs/bio/celeb/344027

MYSTICISM AND SUFISM

Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sufi: Expressions of the Mystic Quest*, Thames and Hudson, UK, 1976.

Ira Friedlander, *The Whirling Dervishes*, Wildwood House, London, 1975.

Shaykh Fadhalla Haeri, *The Elements of Sufism*, Element Books, UK, 1990.

Sufism's Many Paths – article by Dr. Alan Godlas, University of Georgia
<http://www.arches.uga.edu/~godlas/Sufism.html>

John Godolphin Bennett has many web sites which detail his life and his philosophy, including:
www.bennettbooks.org/AboutJGB.html
www.themystica.com/mystica/articles/b/bennett_j_g.html
www.disinfo.com/pages/dossier/id142/pg1/

ENDNOTES

- 1 Shaykh Fadhalla Haeri, *The Elements of Sufism*, Element Books, UK, 1990.
- 2 Ira Friedlander, *The Whirling Dervishes*, Wildwood House, London, 1975, p. 19.

Australian Biography: Diane Cilento

A Film Australia National Interest Program

Director/Producer: Robin Hughes

Executive Producer: Mark Hamlyn

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