

MY SON ROD TAYLOR

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Mona Taylor talks to Jim Fagan

A T O U S L E - H A I R E D kid rattling furiously along the footpath on a scooter with a red kelpie barking delightedly alongside him . . .

A soft-eyed boy using all his charm to induce his mother to go with him to the school sports . . .

A stiff-jawed youngster doing push-ups on the bedroom floor to build up his already muscular frame . . .

These are the sort of memories of her son that every mother cherishes.

And for a few hours one day last month I shared such treasured memories with a mother whose son has become known to movie and television fans all over the world.

His name is Rod Taylor, and his mother is Mrs. Mona Taylor, of Lidcombe, Sydney.

In the past year or so, Rod, a fine and sensitive actor, has emerged as a world star.

With films like "Young Cassidy," "36 Hours," and "Fate is the Hunter" bearing his name in top billing, he can afford to sit back in a £40,000 Hollywood home and contentedly say, "I've made it."

He was certainly helped to success with his rugged good looks, an aggressive independence, and, of course, acting talent.

But what about the man behind all this? And the boy who was to become the man? These are

questions only one person can answer fully. His mother.

Mrs. Taylor lives with her husband in a neat weatherboard home in Lidcombe. She is a pleasant, kindly person, and a short story writer and poet of some merit.

She is also very retiring and rarely gives interviews to any reporter who wants to talk about her son.

"Rod's life is his own. That's how it should be."

As a lad the young Taylor didn't say what he wanted to be. Like many another boy, every day he wanted to be something different.

"He didn't know it then, but he showed some acting ability even when he was 12," Mrs. Taylor said.

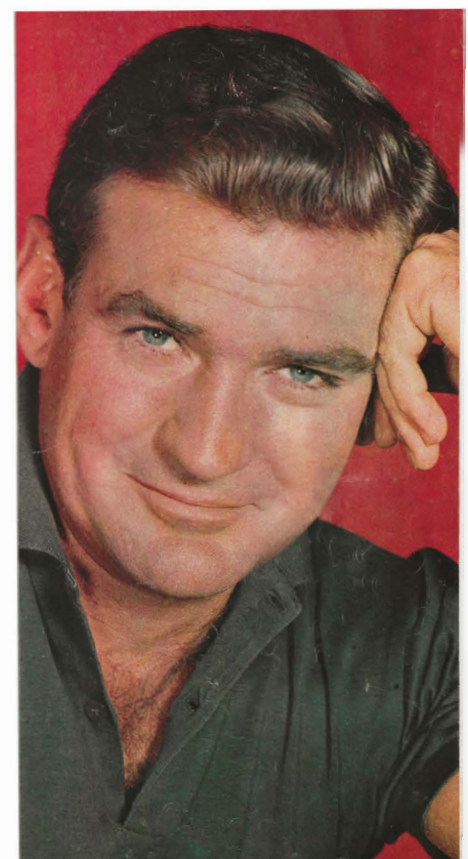
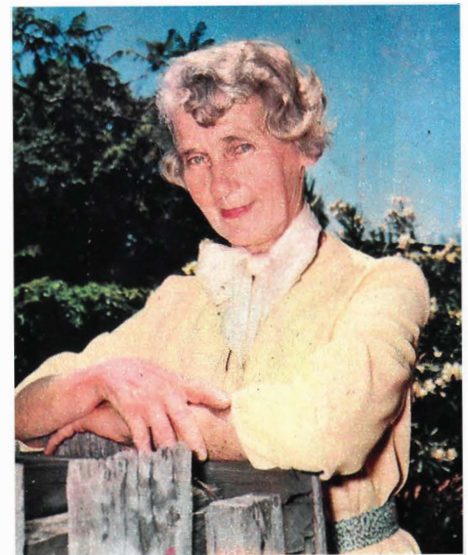
"A neighbor was telling me only the other day how she could remember Rod twirling around in the back garden, then clutching his heart and collapsing on the ground, pretending to be dead."

Born on January 11, 1930, Rod — an only child — was taken to Lidcombe by his parents when he was 18 months old.

He was a sturdy, independent, and enterprising boy who loved new experiences.

At school Rod was a good all-round athlete. He learned boxing, was a good shot-put, and ran and jumped a little.

"He also had a whole dose of charm, which he could turn on



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whenever he liked," Mrs. Taylor said.

"He would only be a little boy at primary school when he asked me to accompany him to the school sports. I said I didn't want to go as I had something else to do, but he pleaded with me, and then said I would have to go.

"I asked why and he said all the other boys would have their mothers there because they needed someone to hold the ginger beer mugs and carry the prizes!"

Rod's heavily-built, well-shaped figure is a direct result of his tremendous enthusiasm for physical training. "He was always doing weight training at Dick Wilson's gym at Lidcombe," said Mrs. Taylor.

"I wasn't very keen on the idea, because I didn't want him to look like a Clydesdale, but I must say it has not done him any harm. He was also a junior lifesaver at Mona Vale and the swimming, too, helped to develop him.

"I mentioned his charm earlier. Well, he had more than average. I would send him off on foot to get some messages and he would come back riding someone's bicycle, with the owner walking alongside carrying the parcels.

"The neighbors around here thought a lot of him. One woman has told me how she remembers Rod riding his scooter along the footpath with his kelpie, Tan, running with him on his way to get some milk. A billycan was rattling on the handlebars and Rod was laughing.

"It's nice to think someone remembers you that way, isn't it?"

Rod was 15 when he left Parramatta High to go to East Sydney Technical College to study art. He was there for three years, and at 18 left home to share a flat in Paddington.

A trip to the library with his mother—it is obviously Rod, even at 11.

"He made some lovely pieces of pottery while he was living in the flat. When he and Mary (his wife) came here two years ago, Mary saw the pottery—mostly bowls and platters—and asked if she could take some back with her. Naturally, I gave her some.

"Rod used to go to the Independent Theatre and I think that's how he became interested in acting. I don't now how true it is, but people seem to think he became more enthusiastic when he watched Sir Laurance Olivier and the Old Vic players on the Tivoli stage," said Mrs. Taylor.

After some stage and radio work, in which he played many varied roles, he made his film debut with Chips Rafferty in "King of the Coral Sea" and in "Long John Silver" at Pagewood, Sydney.

In 1954 at the age of 24 he got his biggest break. He won the Rola Award for the best actor of the year and received £500 as well as a trip overseas.

But when he arrived in Hollywood he found his big Australian build-up was something akin to winning a beauty contest in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and arriving



One of the pottery pieces Rod made while he was studying art.

in Hollywood expecting to have the world at your feet.

"When Rod stepped off the plane, the producers just said 'Hnnh' and forgot all about him. He has never really said very much about those days, but I know they were pretty rugged.

"His first film role was as a Welsh soldier in the 'Virgin Queen,' which starred Bette Davis. He just ran up a gangplank, said a few words, and then ran down."

Supporting roles followed one after another—with Debbie Reynolds ("Wedding Breakfast"), Liz Taylor ("Giant" and "Rain-tree County"), and Rita Hayworth ("Separate Tables"). Eventually he took the ideal, two-fisted role of Glenn Evans—the U.S. newspaperman in the TV series "Hong Kong."

Since "The V.I.P.'s" with Liz Taylor and Richard Burton, and "Sunday in New York" with Jane Fonda, his career has taken a vigorous upswing.

Both films prompted such a noticeable batch of fan mail that film executives looked upon him with new eyes. One of his most recent films, "Young Cassidy," which has not yet been released in Australia, could win him an Academy Award nomination. He plays Johnny Cassidy, a young Irish rebel, and his work in this is moving and skilful.