



"Still Sweethearts" (c) 1994 by Lynn Troy Maniscalco shows that photojournalism can be heartwarming as well as action-stopping.

Give Photojournalism a Try

by Lynn Troy Maniscalco

When your interests gradually expand to include the wider variety of events around you, try to get a press pass by offering your services to a local publication. If they are reluctant or unable to pay you, working for free in your spare time can help you build a portfolio, lead into a paid position, or, at the very least, allow you access to new picture opportunities. Much like the assigned subject in camera club, this will expose you to situations that you might not have thought to pursue on your own, each one a learning experience and an opportunity for award-winning PJ slides or prints.

To excel in the fast-moving world of photojournalism, it is essential to know your equipment intimately. One successful professional has suggested that you are not really ready until you can change film running in the rain! In any case, the sophisticated options available on many of the new cameras are useless unless you are able to activate them without thinking, since you haven't time to read dials and adjust buttons while the picture is happening before your eyes. This is why most photojournalists choose two or more identical camera bodies. And if you carry them at the same time, each fitted with a different focal length lens, you will maximize your opportunity to be ready for any photographic situation.

Look beyond the obvious. A competent photojournalist will present an accurate and informative portrayal of a situation, but a great photojournalist will also reveal the humanity within it. The goal is to communicate what you see and feel to those around you.

Whether you set out to capture newsmaking events on film or just prefer to record poignant family moments for fond recollection, let the division help you improve your photojournalistic skills. Even if you never proceed beyond upgrading the quality of your family photo album to include good, story-telling candids of memorable events and everyday happenings, you will be glad you gave photojournalism a try! ■

Trust me! You really don't need a press pass to capture award-winning PJ shots. If you enjoy preserving moments on film or if you joined your camera club or PSA to become more proficient at recording the events around you, you are probably already involved in photojournalism, whether you are aware of it or not. Even many longtime PSA members do not realize that disasters and action sports account for only a small fraction of the appropriate subject matter. All kinds of story-telling pictures or sequences including documentary and the humorous or poignant moments occurring in everyday life are in the realm of photojournalism.

The informative value of a PJ photograph is of greater significance than the pictorial quality. What is happening, and the impact of the event upon the people involved, should be immediately apparent to the viewer. Beyond that, a really successful PJ shot will usually be a technically excellent presentation of an emotional situation or an uncommon occurrence, often from a dramatic point of view. The journalistic, or story-telling, aspect of the shot is what it is all about. Of course, good technical quality is important in getting the message across quickly and clearly. Bright color can certainly enhance it and peak of action can provide viewer interest, but a shot of some routine happening, no matter how perfect by pictorial standards, is not good photojournalism if the subject matter itself is not powerful.

In the interest of truthfulness, photojournalism excludes contrived situations

which feature something that did not occur spontaneously and photographic manipulations which portray something that did not happen at all.

But how can you go about capturing these great moments on film? Although a certain amount of this ability is probably attributable to luck, some photojournalists are consistently "luckier" than others, due to careful preparation. To be where something interesting will occur and to be ready to take a photograph when it does happen really requires a combination of knowledge and intuition. Pondering an anticipated situation can help you determine the best vantage point and the most suitable equipment to use, and familiarity with the event itself can improve your chances of being ready for the unusual. But your most important tools for success are an observant eye and a quick shutter finger. A moment worth preserving can happen anytime, anyplace.

"F/8 and be there" is a maxim among photojournalists. It means that being on the spot with equipment that is ready to go is more important than all of the photographic technical knowledge in the world. If you don't have a loaded, preset camera with you at all times, surely sooner or later you will be talking about "the big one that got away," a really great picture that exists only in your memory because you weren't prepared for the opportunity to record that image for all to see. Even a simple point-and-shoot model, which certainly won't provide the flexibility that multiple settings and various lenses can offer, will increase your chances of not missing that once-in-a-lifetime shot altogether.