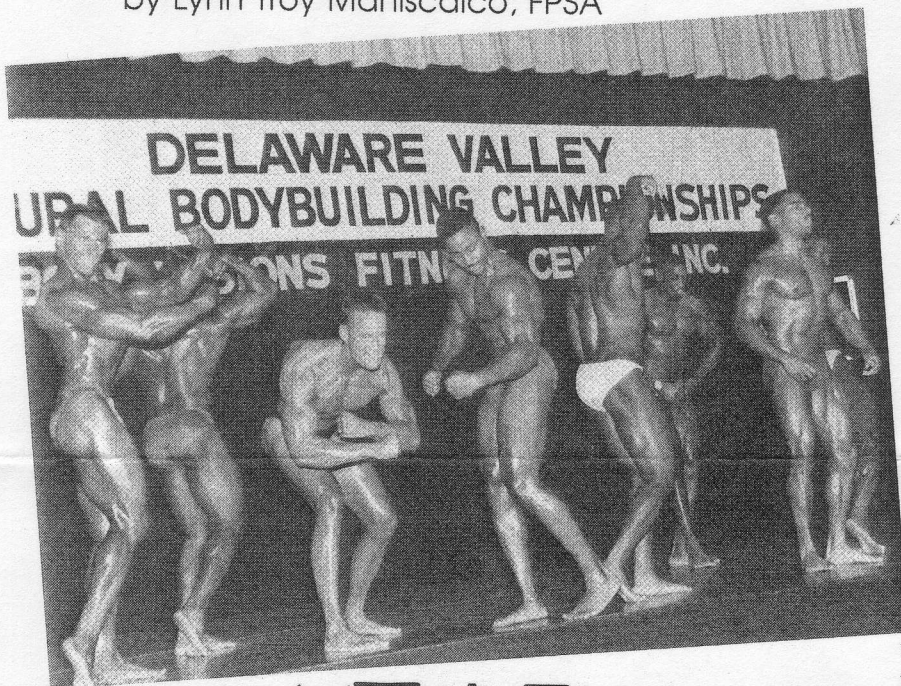


# The "Living Room Wall Test"

by Lynn Troy Maniscalco, FPSA



*We covered the Natural (i.e. steroid-free) Bodybuilding Championship, a regional competition held in our area. Probably most people would not want to hang this picture on the living room wall, but, as a news photo, it catches the eye of the reader and shows that bodybuilding without steroids can produce award-winning results. The print was sent out just once for exhibition, to a circuit, and was accepted at all six judgings.*

“Would you want it on your living room wall?” is not necessarily the ultimate test of greatness for a photograph. Contrary to the

belief of many of those who get involved in photography as a hobby, showing beauty is just one of many important uses for the medium.

For example, some of the most memorable, award-winning pictures of all time have conveyed invaluable information, have created a public awareness, and, in some cases, have even been able to change attitudes, thus actually affecting the course of history.

Are they great photographs? Certainly many of them have been recognized as powerful im-

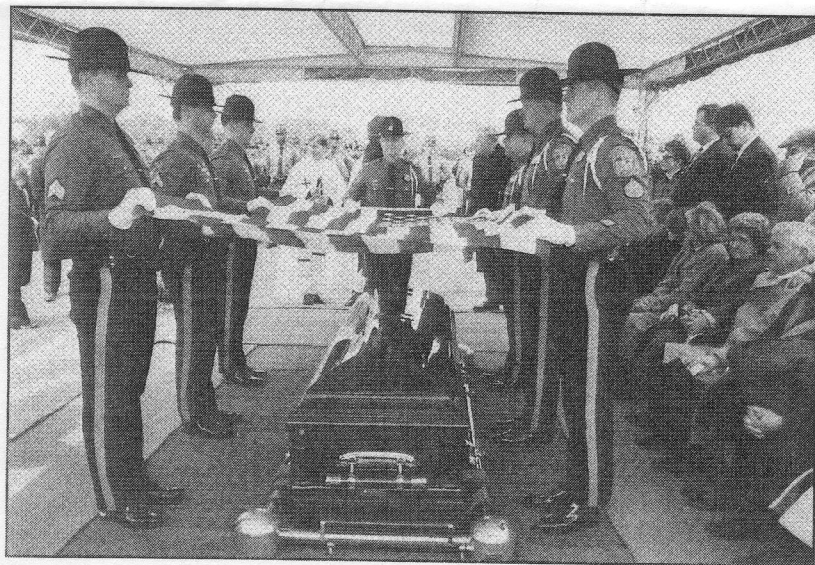
ages, and have a Pulitzer Prize to prove it, despite the fact that most of us would agree that they would be extremely inappropriate on the walls of a cozy, relaxing room.

Likewise, the photojournalism slides and prints entered in exhibitions or other PJ competitions are not intended to pass the “living room wall test.” The photographers are trying to show you special moments from life that they have managed to capture on film. The informative value is of greater significance in these photographs than the pictorial quality, and the more important the content, the less concern about technical perfection. What is happening, the impact of the event upon the people involved, and the emotional response of the viewer are what really count.

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.

Although it might appear that many PJ images are due to luck, more likely they are the result of 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. Determining the best vantage point and the most suitable equipment to use, as well as familiarity with the event itself, can improve the chances of being ready for the unusual, but the most important tools are an observant eye and a quick shutter finger.

So, widen your horizons and learn to appreciate a variety of subject matter, taking into consideration the intended purpose of each image. The next time you have an opportunity to see a photojournalism exhibition, try to appreciate the humorous, poignant, and exciting moments the photographers wanted to share with you, even if you wouldn't want it on your living room wall. ♦



*Hockessin native Sandra Wagner, the first female Delaware State Trooper to die in the line of duty, was honored by fellow officers at Saints Cemetery April 10. Members of her family were seated on the right. Hundreds of lawmen from forces as far away as Maine attended the funeral for the 28-year-old trooper, a December graduate of the police academy.*