



2011

WHITE HOUSE NEWS PHOTOGRAPHERS ASSOCIATION

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

DENNIS BRACK



PHOTO BY JAMES SCOTT

OFTEN PEOPLE THINK that they are living in the perfect time to be in their profession. I am one of these people. In the Fifties, the men lugging Speed Graphics and making \$65 a week were at the top of the profession. There were the lucky Life magazine staff photographers, the one staffer each for Time and U.S. News, but that was it. I wanted to continue my love of photography, but my practical side said law school, so my 1956 pink-and-gray Chevy headed to Washington. Fortunately, George Washington Law School had only two tests a year and my best friend, Fred Welther, took excellent notes, so I had time to shoot picture stories and cover news events.

In surveys, magazine editors found that it wasn't the clever writing that sold the magazines. It was the color pictures. Time and Newsweek started hiring photographers to cover the riots, the protest marches and the historic events of the Sixties. I was in the right place at the right time.

The news magazine competition was at its peak during the Watergate story, and Time wanted an exclusive on my pictures. Yes, Wally McNamee, there was a contract hidden in the drawers of picture editors John Durniak and Arnold Drapkin and safe from the eyes of Newsweek. The Four D's — Dirck Halstead, Diana Walker, David Hume Kennerly and I — had the great luck to climb aboard the Pan Am 747 press charters and follow presidents around the world. I was the most fortunate because I met Cindy Campbell, a Pan Am flight attendant on one of these flights, and we have been married for more than 11 years.

In the Eighties, corporations were proudly printing glossy annual reports. They wanted the pictures to be in the style of photojournalists. Black Star's sales representatives showed my portfolio, and I received great assignments. My favorites were Mobil Oil travel assignments and the ads for the U.S. Marines ("We Didn't Promise You a Rose Garden," J. Walter Thompson Advertising).

For years the magazine photographers had Defense Department beeper duty. The beeper would vibrate and in

a few hours you were at Andrews Air Force Base ready to cover whatever. In August 1990 the beeper vibrated for real. Soon, Scottie Applewhite and I were on a C-141 reading an instruction manual for a heavy machine that Scottie had thrust at him as he was walking out the door of The Associated Press. His instruction: "It makes something called a 'jpeg file.'" We had an exclusive on the first Gulf War until Sam Donaldson and his crew showed up.

Like all photographers I suffered though the pink pictures in those early digital days. Now I enjoy the superb digital cameras of today. The equipment has changed and improved the way we cover the White House, but the people have not. Sure, the faces come and go, but the people are basically the same as when I first walked through the Northwest Gate 48 years ago. There is a continuing succession of men and women competing to get the best images, the exclusives, but they are also friends who work together.



I think that the White House News Photographers Association has contributed to making these friendships, and I am honored to be a member — and honored to receive this award.