

## WHITE HOUSE NEWS PHOTOGRAPHERS ASSOCIATION Lifetime Achievement Award RON EDMONDS

I decided to take a photography class in 1968 and it literally changed my life. Dick Fleming, a newspaper photographer turned college professor, encouraged me to shoot pictures of anti-war demonstrations in Sacramento and offer them to the wire services. United Press International paid me \$25 for one of my images. I saw it in the newspaper the next day, and I knew what I wanted to do for a living.

After freelancing in California, I accepted a job at the Honolulu Star-Bulletin. Working on the night shift allowed me to surf in the morning and shoot news and rock-and-roll concerts at night. After five years I was promoted to chief photographer.

For one of Elvis Presley's last big shows, televised worldwide from Honolulu, his manager, Colonel Tom Parker, wouldn't allow press coverage. We threatened an injunction to stop the show. The colorful, cigar-chomping Parker escorted me to my seat — along with a 250-pound Samoan security guard to keep me there. "The lawyers said I have to let you shoot pictures," the Colonel growled, "but I don't have to let you move around."

I met my wife, Grace, in 1975 after she joined the Bulletin staff. She covered the federal and state courts. We have been married for 34 years and have a daughter, Ashley, an attorney practicing in Washington, D.C.

Opting for a bigger pond, I joined United Press International in 1978 as newpicture bureau manager in Sacramento. When I first started, I met legendary photographer Frank Cancellare and told him I was looking forward to traveling. As he bit down on his ubiquitous cigar, he offered this advice: "When you get out on the road, remember you're shipping your film to a stringer working out of a [motel toilet] with a two-reel tank and his two reels are going in first." Most wire photographers know what he meant.

During Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign in 1980, the AP's Bob Daugherty approached me about taking an opening in the Washington bureau. It was a dream come true to work at the White House with legends in the craft like



PHOTO BY CHARLES DHARAPAK

Bob, Wally McNamee, David Kennerly, David Burnett, Chick Harrity and Dennis Brack. They generously taught me the ropes.

I was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in spot news photography for my coverage of the assassination attempt on President Reagan. March 30, 1981, it was only my second day as the AP's White House photographer covering Reagan. The most

important element of my job was to watch the president at all times, and I think, on that day, I did everything I was supposed to do.

Still, I was convinced I was in trouble with my bosses because I had failed to get a picture of John Hinckley Jr. When I got word to call the president of the AP in New York, I assumed the worst. He told me, "You nailed it, kid." I got a \$50-a-week merit raise. My bureau chief, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Walter Mears, jokingly complained that he had only gotten a \$25-a-week raise for his Pulitzer. I was one of the early pioneers in the testing and use of digital cameras. It's one of the reasons I have very little hair left. I was the first in our profession to transmit an electronic still image live — from the 1989 presidential inaugural — over the network to AP members around the world. I must admit I sometimes miss the days of trying to tell a story with two rolls of 36-exposure film. But I don't miss sleeping in a hotel room that reeked of developer and fixer from the makeshift darkroom in the bathroom.

When I retired in 2009 after 28 years, I was Senior White House Photographer for the AP. I was very lucky to have been part of the last 40 years of American journalism. The best part of this journey was that I met a beautiful reporter and, believe it or not, she married this grubby photographer and stuck with me.

No award warmed my heart more than the day my daughter came home from the third grade and proclaimed that she was so proud. When I asked her why, she said that she had raised her hand and announced to the class that her dad took the picture on the front of the Weekly Reader.