



2021 Lifetime Achievement Award Winner CAROL GUZY

Carol Guzy all but stumbled into photojournalism after earning a degree as a registered nurse. Now in her fifth decade in the profession, the native of Bethlehem, Pa., was the first journalist to receive four Pulitzer Prizes, either individually or as part of a team: covering a devastating mudslide in Colombia, the U.S. intervention in Haiti, refugees in Kosovo, and a catastrophic earthquake in Haiti. She worked for the Miami Herald, 1980-88, and the Washington Post, 1988-2014, and is now a freelancer as well as a contract photographer with ZUMA Press. To her many honors she adds the lifetime award from the WHNPA.

I wanted to be an artist. Born with that creative spark in the soul, I found a sanctuary in my high school art room. But my dad had died when I was 6, we were poor and watching my mom struggle it seemed impractical to be a starving artist. I worked 3 jobs through high school and then college just to get by.

Nursing school began for altruistic reasons, but it was not a good fit—too hands-on. Getting an RN provided something to fall back on and a path to school for photography.

I played around with a little instamatic camera when young. While in nursing school an old boyfriend gave me a real camera and I took a darkroom class. That first time the print came up in the tray was unbelievably magical and a defining moment. The Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale offered a little bit of everything. Studio, fashion, architecture—and one photojournalism class, which finally felt right.

The instructor, Walt Michot, was a working photojournalist and he took me under his wing, a mentor for sure. An internship at the Miami Herald evolved into a staff position. Journalism was initially never a thought, but storytelling became my life, my oxygen.

When you're young you think you can save the world. With your work, with photos, you realize that you can maybe—maybe—promote change in small, incremental ways. In Kosovo there was an abandoned psychiatric hospital with horrendous conditions, like a Hitchcock film. We did the story and immediately aid groups rushed in and helped these desperate people. I think that's our most important role—to amplify those voices that are lost in the shadows.

I was born with an overdose of empathy, especially for animals, though it can be a blessing and a curse. It helps make compelling images, but it certainly makes your heart break a million times harder, too.



It has been said when you make a photo, you take a piece of the soul. As well, you give a part of yours. There are pieces of my soul scattered all over the earth. Indeed, it's what makes me whole.

My love affair with the Haitian people is such a part of my heart. There is a resiliency of spirit that transcends adversity. But at a certain point it was deeply frustrating and seemed nothing was going to change in Haiti so I decided, OK, I can't save the country, but I can save one. I made a lifelong commitment to help some kids I'd met at a burned-out police station in Cite Soleil, trying to make their lives just a little bit better—for their sake and for my sanity.

I've photographed the first breath of a baby and the unmistakable expression as the light leaves someone's eyes. Profound. Primal. Poignant. A privilege.

Long-term stories with depth require immersion in those lives. For my editors it was usually a thorn in their side—I wanted to stay longer and dig deeper. They thought it was obsessive; I'd rather call it dedicated. We're challenged not only to report news but also document the poetry of everyday heroes. They teach us lessons about living with principle and dying with grace, like Miss Classie, a 104-year-old dynamo taking care of her sister with Alzheimer's in DC. I pretty much moved in, and she became like my grandma—also teaching me how to make a mean peach cobbler.

There are always more stories to do, but you only have one family. Through personal ordeals, I've learned moments are fragile and transient. We spend so much time photographing other people's lives, sometimes we forget to live our own.

Photojournalists are storytellers, we just 'write' with light. Total objectivity seems a myth. We're subjective beings and can be fair, truthful and accurate—but of course you are going to feel. We're human, not walking cameras, though it does take a toll. Sometimes ours are the only ears that hear silent screams. There is vulnerability speaking about emotional trauma but hopefully it helps others feel less alone, especially young journalists. This business is about so much more than pictures. We all sometimes need a collective, compassionate embrace.

We spend our lives expecting people to reveal their most intimate moments to our cameras, the least we can do is offer the same courage of transparency.

As storytellers we can offer those who feel invisible in the darkest shadows of despair—that intangible and invaluable essence—hope.

BE the light.