

Life in a Year

Nick Danziger

On being and becoming a photographer

I always wanted to draw and paint. At thirteen I left home alone to travel to Paris to visit museums and galleries, inspired by the adventures of Tintin, and the works of several painters I had only seen in books.

I went to art school with one objective – to become a painter (I did my Foundation, BA and MA at Chelsea School of Art) and soon after graduating I went back to teach at Chelsea and several other art schools and universities. I was also very fortunate to be taken up by the art dealer, Robert Fraser, who was about to open a gallery in Cork Street, and I had one of the first shows there.

At this point, in the mid-80s, I could never have imagined that I wouldn't spend a life producing works of art and instead would write books, make documentary films and shoot stills. In fact some of my peers at art school who also dreamed of life as a painter are now one of Britain's top designers, a successful theatre stage manager, gallery owner, curator and even a top masseuse for world class sportsmen – which flies in the face of several governments who don't see art schools as productive to society.

I am sure my interest in painting is part of the way I look to capture the world through my camera lens and my early interest in Tintin amongst others (Steinbeck, Jack London, C.S. Forester's *Hornblower* series) is responsible for the part in the photography that reflects my interest in adventure, people



and places – often on the margins of society.

On the rare occasions I am asked to talk to BA or MA photography students, I often suggest they look at Caravaggio, Pieter de Hooch, or Zubaran. 'Who?' they ask with blank stares, once I have told them who they are, there are always one or several students who tell me that they want to be

Right: *All Blacks in a classroom.* Nick Danziger broke new ground with the All Blacks rugby team with a never before seen view of the team 'behind-the-scenes'. Rugby has become infinitely more technical. Here the All Blacks study at Hamilton Boys' High School. Hamilton, New Zealand, June 2010



Left: *Women leaving the village church on their way to celebrate the baptism of a baby boy.* Wajerat, Tigray (Between Heaven and Earth), Ethiopia, 2007. Commissioned by the British Council to coincide with the Ethiopian Coptic Church's millennium celebrations Nick travelled to some of Ethiopia's remotest regions. Here, women are leaving the village church on their way to celebrate the baptism of a baby boy. Wajerat, Tigray (Between Heaven and Earth), Ethiopia, 2007. The resulting exhibition has been seen in the UK, the Middle East and Ethiopia.

photographers, not painters! Further to my initial suggestion to look at them for their use of light, composition, and storytelling, I suggest they take in some of David Lean's work, read, research, etc...

Whether 'producing' work, which is what I like best, because it involves being somewhere and meeting people which means I am learning something new, or subsequent storytelling (talks, exhibitions or books), I want to keep challenging myself, keep fighting to get the images that 'talk' and hope to inspire, entertain and challenge people and myself. I am often disappointed with the results in that I think of what I could have done if... and when... Equally, the people I work with also challenge me. There is no doubt that I am driven as are most of the people I work with, which often means Skyping in to the early hours of the morning, screen sharing across countries and continents, endless questioning, re-editing with good doses of stress and exhaustion thrown in.

Maybe it's the lack of a typical day that also keeps me on my toes and with the energy to face new challenges, although part of me craves for a planned diary beyond the following 24 hours and to keep to regular hours. There is no typical day, so I will now try to describe a typical year by mapping the last ten months.

Since the beginning of 2011 photographic projects have taken me to Honduras, Sierra Leone, Uganda and

Afghanistan. I have also had assignments from the UK, Russia and France. Exhibition openings at museums have taken me to the USA and Canada, and a recent gallery opening in France. I have given talks in Hong Kong and Ottawa, and am due to give talks at the Leatherhead Institute; at the Women's Forum, Deauville and in Montreal. I have also run a series of workshops for the British Council's 'Creative Enterprise Programme' in Nigeria and for the sixth year have been programme director for the Summer School in 'Cinema, Human Rights and Advocacy' at the Huston School of Film and Digital Media at the National University of Ireland in Galway.

This year, as in most years, I have given the occasional talk at schools for children from five years old up to school leavers as well as to clients of Japanese and British banks. For the last 13 years I have been an advisory council member for the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, which involves reading applications and sitting on an interview panel – this year has been no different and I spent three days in early January interviewing some remarkable people with extraordinary goals.

Although the writing, photography and occasionally documentary filming aspect of my work can often be lonely, all my work is the result of having an excellent team as part of the process. I often work with the same editors, researchers,



Left: Reception hall, Hillsborough Castle, Tuesday, 8 April 2003, 2.30pm Tony Blair and George Bush bid their farewells. This is their last meeting of the first phase of the Iraq war. Within 24 hours, United States marines will famously topple Saddam Hussein's statue on the outskirts of Baghdad. Their is a brief discussion on the British side of a 'victory celebration'. Perhaps later. Perhaps never.

Below: *Young boys are holding their own camera/film crew equipment.* As part of a project on access to clean water and good governance for the non-governmental organisation One World Action, Nick took many photos of daily life, here young boys who had been watching Nick and his colleagues shooting a documentary and taking stills, returned within minutes with their own recording materials scavenged from a nearby rubbish tip. Luanda, Angola, 2003.

and designers. Photography now dominates my work output and this year sees the completion of two long-term projects. The first is about the effects of war on women, and was originally commissioned in 2001 as part of a study by the International Committee of the Red Cross – ten years later I wanted to know what had happened to the women I had photographed. I did manage to find all 11 women. Some, such as Dzidza, a mother from Srebrenica, I have visited many times over a period of years to document their lives. Some stories, such as that of Mariatu from Sierra Leone, have been of remarkable transformation, others haven't yet had a happy ending. This work will result in several exhibitions and a book *Onze Femmes* which is being published in France.

The second project is also a long-term project, which I began in 2005 about the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. This project involved years of fundraising which was achieved thanks to several foundations, an IGO, an NGO, grants and an award. An exhibition of this work will run from the end of November through to January of 2012 at the Royal Geographical Society in London and in New York to coincide with this year's UN General Assembly.

I often reflect on how lucky I am. Although I regret not having the time to paint, I still visit galleries and museums and am inspired by what I see. But above all I am inspired by the people I meet, people who often face a lifetime of hardships and hurdles which they overcome on a daily basis. I have become very attached to many of the people I have photographed and friendships in distant places such as Afghanistan can go back over decades. I think of all the

extraordinary places and events and people I have had access to, from heart transplant surgery to psychiatric wards, from victims of the Srebrenica massacre to Sierra Leonean Olympic hopefuls, from travelling with the Dalai Lama to seeing at close quarters the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair taking the decisions that took Britain and the United States to war in Iraq... But, as I write this and reflect, my happiest moments are with my family and children who are not on the other side of the planet but are currently sleeping soundly only a few feet away from me. ■



From art school to...

From his first solo journey to Paris to a recent return trip to Afghanistan with Oxfam, Nick Danziger has spent a life documenting what he sees. In 1982, having been awarded a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship, he traced ancient trade routes from Turkey to China, documenting his adventures in *Danziger's Travels*, the first of many best-selling books. His third book, *Danziger's Britain*, was a social and political commentary on Britain. In 1991 he made his first documentary, *War Lives and Videotape*, about children abandoned in an Afghan mental asylum, which won the Prix Italia for best television documentary. His photographic books include the award-winning *The British*, in which he returns to his roots in a divided Britain; *Missing Lives*, about people who went missing during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, and *Mana*, a unique behind-the-scenes look at New Zealand's All Blacks rugby team. His latest book, *Onze Femmes*, tracing the lives of 11 women from countries in conflict over the last 10 years was published in August 2011.

His photographic work is held in museum collections worldwide and earned him the Royal Geographical Society's Ness Award in recognition of raising public understanding of contemporary social, political and environmental issues. His 'mirror' image of Tony Blair and George W. Bush won the 2004 World Press Photo award. In 2007 he was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by the Royal Photographic Society.

Recent and current exhibitions include *Between Heaven and Earth*, a study of traditional Christian rituals and practices in Ethiopia, commissioned by the British Council and currently on a world tour, and *Guerre et Paix*, showing at the Salle d'Expositions du Quai Antoine 1er, Monaco. The forthcoming exhibition *Revisited* focuses on 23 individuals from eight countries who Nick first photographed in 2005 as part of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals project. In 2010–11 he returned to each country to revisit the same individuals and discover how the project had changed lives. *Revisited* is at the Royal Geographical Society in London from 21 November 2011 to 11 January 2012.

Below: *The burial of people who went missing years ago remains a common occurrence in the Balkans (Missing Lives).* Over 32,000 people went missing in the Balkans during the recent Yugoslav wars. Approximately 15,000 remain missing. Here 500 recently identified remains are finally buried over a decade after they were massacred at Srebrenica. Potocari, Bosnia-Herzegovina, July 2009.

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