

Behind the Lens

By *Laura Daily*

Photographers shed light on their work.

Being a professional photographer involves more than pointing and clicking. One day you might be photographing a no-hitter at Dodger Stadium; the next could find you shooting Green Sweater #346 for a fashion catalog. You may have to lug pounds of heavy equipment, be up hours before sunrise, or spend what seems like an eternity trying to get an unhappy toddler to smile—all for the perfect shot.

No matter what the subject, photography is an adventure. During the course of her career, documentary photographer Alison Wright, for example, has hitchhiked across Lebanon, captured the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, lived in the Australian outback, followed baseball's San Diego Padres, and gotten to know the Dalai Lama. *Career World* spoke with photographers who love what they do—capturing a moment in time.

Documentary Photographer Alison Wright, San Francisco

www.alisonwright.com

CW: When did you decide to become a photographer?

I got my first camera at age 10. But in high school, a great English teacher made me believe I could make a living taking pictures when he uttered the word *photojournalist*. Right after college, I started to travel. A visit to North Africa convinced me that my life's work should be documenting third-world countries.

CW: What project has been particularly meaningful for you?

I got a job with UNICEF taking pictures in Nepal. I was supposed to be there for three weeks and ended up staying for four years to photograph children's rights and issues. Before going there, I had only used black-and-white film, and UNICEF wanted color photos. That was the first time I used color, and it changed my work forever.

CW: Have you ever been red-faced?

The first time I photographed the Dalai Lama, I was so excited that I accidentally opened the back of the camera and ruined the film. I slammed the camera shut and asked if I could take a few more pictures. I was mortified, but it taught me not to be paralyzed when something goes wrong. A good photographer thinks fast on her feet and recovers.

CW: Ever tackle an assignment you hated?

I worked on staff at the San Diego *Union-Tribune*. The photo editor knew I hated sports, so naturally he assigned me to cover the Padres for a season. That first game I turned to all the other photographers and asked, "So when's halftime anyway?" The guys never let me forget that! But I learned the sport and got the shots.

CW: Do you continue to learn?

Absolutely. Even now I take workshops with other professional photographers.

CW: What would surprise students about your career?

All the self-marketing you have to do. I didn't take any business classes, and I regret it. I had to figure everything out by myself. Also, you have to be super organized. If you can't find the picture to sell, you might as well not have shot it. I was the kid who couldn't keep her room clean. Now I'm a neat freak.

CW: Why do you love photojournalism?

My camera is a key to getting into people's lives. I can work on projects that matter—like a photo essay that tells a story or a book that leaves a legacy. And ... I can go anywhere in the world I want and someone pays me to travel.

CW: What advice do you have for aspiring photographers?

Start as an intern or [a] photographer's assistant and work your way up. Get a serious feel for what you want to do, be it food, fashion, weddings, studio work, or portraits. Finding something you're passionate about is more important than technique. Being a travel photographer, for instance, is a lifestyle choice. You're on the road all the time away from family and friends. It sounds glamorous, but it's not. I'm never, ever home.

Photographic Artist

Moses Robinson, Snellville, Ga.

www.opmphoto.com

CW: What's your specialty?

I'm a generalist. Weddings, products, sports, fashion, studio work, CD album covers; there's nothing I can't do.

CW: Did you always plan to be a photographer?

I majored in industrial art technology and, for a few years, taught wood shop at a high school. In 1990, I moved to Atlanta and started taking pictures with an instant camera at a nightclub. One night I brought in my own camera, and people begged to buy my photos. Six years later, I opened my own studio.

CW: Do you have any formal training?

I'm selftaught, though I attend at least one professional workshop a year. And I'm not afraid to pick the brains of other pros. You can never stop learning.

CW: What advice do you have for aspiring photographers?

Be patient. A career in photography won't happen overnight. Expect the ups and downs. Be honest. Never shortchange your skills. If you love taking pictures and telling a story, then stick to it.

**Animal Portrait Photographer
Cat Lee, Colorado Springs, Colo.**

www.catklee.com

CW: How did you get started?

I've always taken pictures of my dogs, my neighbor's dogs, even stray dogs. And these days people are willing to pay for pictures of their pets. So in 2005, I started my own animal portrait business.

CW: What traits are required for a photographer?

Patience. You may have to sit for an hour waiting for an active dog to calm down. There's a lot of crawling, drool in the ear, and crotch sniffing. You have to let go of your ego.

CW: What advice do you have for aspiring photographers?

Always take pictures. The more you take, the more you can hone your craft.

CW: What's great about your job?

I get to hang out with animals all day and capture some great moments.

**Commercial Photographer
Rick Levinson, Burlington, Vt.**

www.rlphoto.com

CW: What kind of work do you do?

I take the pictures for Burton Snowboards' catalogs. That's every product they make in every color, maybe 3,000 to 4,000 photos over three months. I also work with other companies like Bogner, New Balance, and Rossignol. Plus I do concert photography and album art for bands like Phish and Ween.

CW: Has photography changed since you started working?

You bet! In the last few years, most commercial work has gone totally digital. So for an aspiring photographer these days, knowing software like Photoshop is as important as photography experience on your resume.

CW: What advice do you have for aspiring photographers?

Attend photography workshops. They're a great bridge between school and the real world. You can learn from the pros and be surrounded by those who share your passion.

Rising Photographer **Christopher Bowman, 18, Ellicott City, Md.**

Honors: *2007 gold (\$10,000) award in photography from the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts and a Presidential Scholar in the Arts. He now studies fine arts at The Cooper Union in New York City.*

How he got started: "I signed up for a photography class in 10th grade, and it's safe to say that whole year, I only took one or two good photos. But I stuck with it, thanks to my teacher, who made it fun and helped me look at the world in depth through my pictures."

What he likes about photography: "It has helped me meet new people and brings a lot out of me. Photography lets me be a little loud."