

My Photographic Life

I stood on the steps above the Damascus Gate, Old Jerusalem. A thousand personal images. So many people I wanted to photograph. Palestinian. Jewish. Bedouin. Arab. Israeli. European. But I was nineteen and did not have a proper camera.

I sat at a table in a pavement café deep in the souk of Marrakesh, my camera concealed. Veiled women. Men in flowing djellabas. But the photos were rubbish. The objects (for that, in reality, is how I viewed them) rushed by. They (rightly) guarded their own images. There was no consent. There was no contact. No relationship. It was wrong.

I interrogated my heroes. Kertesz, who taught me light and composition. Cartier-Bresson, who showed me culture and context. McCurry, who portrays beauty with great power. McCullin, stark and brutal. Hockney, who sees and records what I fail to see. And, above all, Nan Goldin who opened up her life, shared her tragedy and showed me how to photograph people.

I travelled. I saw. I listened. Magazines published my travel writing. I researched and wrote *English Roots: a family history*, published by Alan Sutton. And I photographed the people I met. I curated a permanent exhibition of my portraits *one world one view*, ascending the central circular staircase at Harrow Crown Court. The photographs reflected the diversity of the court users. It exhibited at the Jam Factory, Oxford. I published it as a book. One hundred photos of people from thirty countries, reflecting how much we, as humans, have in common. (And the exhibition and the book raised over £25,000 for charity.)

I was a human rights solicitor. I was a judge. I wrote legal text books. I published learned legal articles. The law was a framework and an intellectual challenge. But it was always the people, the clients, the witnesses, the criminal defendants who were vital.

In the heat and dust, I knelt down on the streets of Dhaka. I sat in mosques. I hung out with rickshaw drivers. I walked muddy lanes and river banks in Sylhet. I talked with tea pickers and women in niqabs. Over one hundred street photographs. People in context, going about their everyday lives. *Faces of Bangladesh* was shown as a slide show in the BP Lecture Theatre at the British Museum. It exhibited for a month at the Swiss Cottage Gallery.

I walked through villages in the Omo Valley, in remote Southern Ethiopia. I sat in mud huts and under trees with a local guide and local people. They told me about their lives. And I took photographs. Striking photos, but the life stories were even more captivating.

The development of my practice has been individual, even isolated, in the sense that I have not been part of the wider photographic community. I have a vision as to where I want to take my practice, photographing Londoners in context, going about their lives. I want to share and collaborate. I want to be challenged. I want to question and be questioned. I want to explore new media. I want to experiment and to expand my thinking. So, I have now enrolled on an M.A. in Photojournalism and Documentary Photography at the University of the Arts London (London College of Communication), collaborating with a wonderfully talented group of fellow photographers with very diverse backgrounds and experience.