



112-year-old and friend

Feature Photography and Photojournalism

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There seems to be a lot of confusion about the content that fits the category of *feature photo*, in both amateur and professional Photojournalism

competitions. Although most working photojournalists say they know a good feature photo when they see one, even they have a hard time defining it.

One national press competition specifies, “Unposed shots with eye-catching subject matter and storytelling qualities that can elicit an emotional response from the viewer.” When the topic arose again recently on the National Press Photographers Internet discussion, one award-winning staff photographer defined it as “photos that celebrate life,” and another said it was “a ‘slice of life’ that could catch the reader’s attention.”

A group of staffers who had recently judged a newspaper contest commented that there seemed to be a lot of incorrectly categorized entries with subject matter that missed “the true spirit of what defines a feature photo, which is the capture of an exceptional moment within a common, everyday occurrence.”

A professor emeritus of photojournalism at a major university proclaimed that “news is the information needed to be an informed citizen; a feature photo has no compelling ‘news’ reason to run, but can illustrate a positive life moment, completely un-staged.”



Can't retire

So, if a feature photo is one with no actual “news” reason to run, and “news” means information needed to be an informed citizen, then a feature photo simply captures a nice moment within the culture, or a happening that illustrates quality of life in some sense. While these events may not be important individually, cumulatively they portray the quality of life within the culture. And “culture” covers everything in our individual and collective lives. Feature can introduce something positive to balance news that deals with the negative and, for the media to present a complete report on the culture, it is important along with straight news.

Feature is one of the three major categories of photos captured by working news photographers, the other two being news and sports. This was the reason for including these three sections in the Photojournalism Division (PJD) annual *Published Picture of the Year* contest for its Ollie Fife award, even though news represents a relatively small percentage of amateur photojournalism due to more limited opportunities.

When PJ exhibitions began attracting mostly sports action shots, the PJD attempted to encourage feature entries by introducing a human-interest medal and eventually establishing human-interest sections in PJ exhibitions. Eventually, because this category was frequently misunderstood, it was defined as, “an image depicting a person or persons in an interactive,



A dousing

emotional or unusual situation, excluding sports action.” It should be noted that a shot fitting this definition, even if taken in a sports environment, is eligible as human interest, whereas a traditional sports winner usually shows the peak of action or captures an exciting moment, hopefully with a storytelling facial expression.



See my funny face



Washer woman

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Of course any photojournalism image, regardless of category, should be easy to “read” and cropped for impact, while keeping enough content to tell the story. **According to PSA’s exhibition standards,** *Photojournalism entries shall consist of pictures or sequences with informative content and emotional impact, including human interest, documentary and spot news. The journalistic value of the photograph shall be considered over pictorial quality.* This does not mean that composition and technical quality are unimportant, but the best picture is simply the one that best tells the story.

The definition continues, *In the interest of credibility, photographs, which misrepresent the truth, such as manipulation to alter the subject matter, or situations which are set up for the purpose of photography, are unacceptable in*

Photojournalism competition. In an effort to show a complete and accurate representation of the moment, entrants are advised that *No elements may be moved, cloned, added, deleted, rearranged or combined. No manipulation or modification is permitted except resizing, cropping, selective lightening or darkening, and restoration of original color of the scene. No special effect filters can be applied. Any sharpening must appear natural.*

As for posed photos, an environmental portrait is a perfectly legitimate method of documentation if it doesn’t mislead viewers to believe it was captured spontaneously. Ethical photojournalists do not create scenes or direct events with the purpose of making them appear as “found” moments. Such photos are unsuitable for publication, according to professional codes of ethics, and they are inappropriate for PJ competition.

But opportunities for great feature shots surround us: just carry a camera and stay aware, for award-winning human interest images can be captured almost anywhere.

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So many birds