

The
worldly
photography
of Kelowna's



wendell
Phillips



Above: An elderly woman watches human traffic go by from her home in Varanasi, India.

As a young boy I remember my proletarian father wrestling into a suit for the annual family portrait. Resistance was futile as my mother commandeered our lives for that one day, so future generations could appreciate our history. My father's posterior was planted for posterity and he never looked more out of place. Sadly, my dad passed away ten years ago. The antiseptic quality of those engineered studio images never paid homage to a man who lived passionately amid sawdust and fishing boats for so many years. Today, my mother confesses the images she covets the most were in the field of his life with those he loved. That memory, more than anything else, seeded my convictions about reportage versus portrait/commercial photography.

Buoyed by a sense of adventure and a passion for narrative photography, I embarked on a career in photojournalism in 1981 as staff news photographer in Manitoba. It was there I cultivated a sense of compositional rhythm and began to conceptualize space while attempting to blend it with light and shadow. General photography gave me infinite physical and intellectual pleasure but it was the genre of social documentary work that inspired me.

Before this was fully realized, I left the editorial world to spend time with a commercial photographic agency in Lima, Peru. Making pictures for clients such as Pampers or Coca Cola wasn't stimulating, but led to my enduring interest of

Below: An Indian woman is framed by ancient architecture in Varanasi. The city is situated on the banks of the Ganges River.



the global community. After life in Peru, I continued on as photojournalist with Canadian newspapers producing photo essays from China, Venezuela, Egypt, and war in Nicaragua.

The role and responsibility of the photojournalist have been scrutinized and for just cause. There are those who believe reportage of human suffering around insalubrious environments has become for some, a fast grab for dramatic images under the guise of social conscience. For self-preservation, some journalists cover human suffering as dispassionate observers while others make themselves more vulnerable when transcribing the story. I have seen words and pictures influence social change, prod our collective conscience, but also cause demonstrable grief.

Working as a commissioned photographer for United Nations and CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) has offered extraordinary access to global stories. I recently spent a week on a French oil tanker converted into a floating hospital on the Brahmaputra River in Northern Bangladesh and then covered the pandemic of HIV/AIDS in India. Other assignments have included documenting Karen refugee camps that populate the Thai/Burmese border, the slums of Manila, Philippines, Greenland Inuit above the Arctic Circle, and landmine clearing in Cambodia.

Since leaving newspapers, the geometry of my life has changed in numerous ways. There was a time in the early 1980s I chose assignments based on their value to my portfolio. My libertarian values still existed, but my compulsion to find success suppressed the search for significance in my life. Today, I follow my convictions and faith producing stories of the human condition in the global community.

Last year I surreptitiously documented the lives of Buddhist monks living with HIV/AIDS in a sanctuary near Bangkok, Thailand known as Wat Phrabat Nampo. In this temple, three to five men and women died a day and were then cremated on site. Most live in an area known as the "agony ward." There is no morphine, lab, or x-rays at the hospice. There I met a Buddhist monk named Vinuy Pomma. Like most monks, he claimed to have been infected by a needle used to tattoo his body. His ability to speak English (better than my Thai) was a blessing and like many other patients, he and I synchronized as friends in a short time. His days were numbered, though, as his emaciated body was betraying his will to live. The day before Vinuy died he looked at me and said, "Be our voice, tell our story, Wendell." Those words left an indelible impression in my life as a journalist, social advocate and citizen of the world.

Wendell Phillips is a Kelowna based documentary photographer who was once awarded Canada's News Photographer of the Year. His work from India and Bangladesh have just won Picture Stories of the Year awards. He is contracted in 2004 to work in Russia and sub Saharan Africa. More images can be seen at www.wendellphillips.com





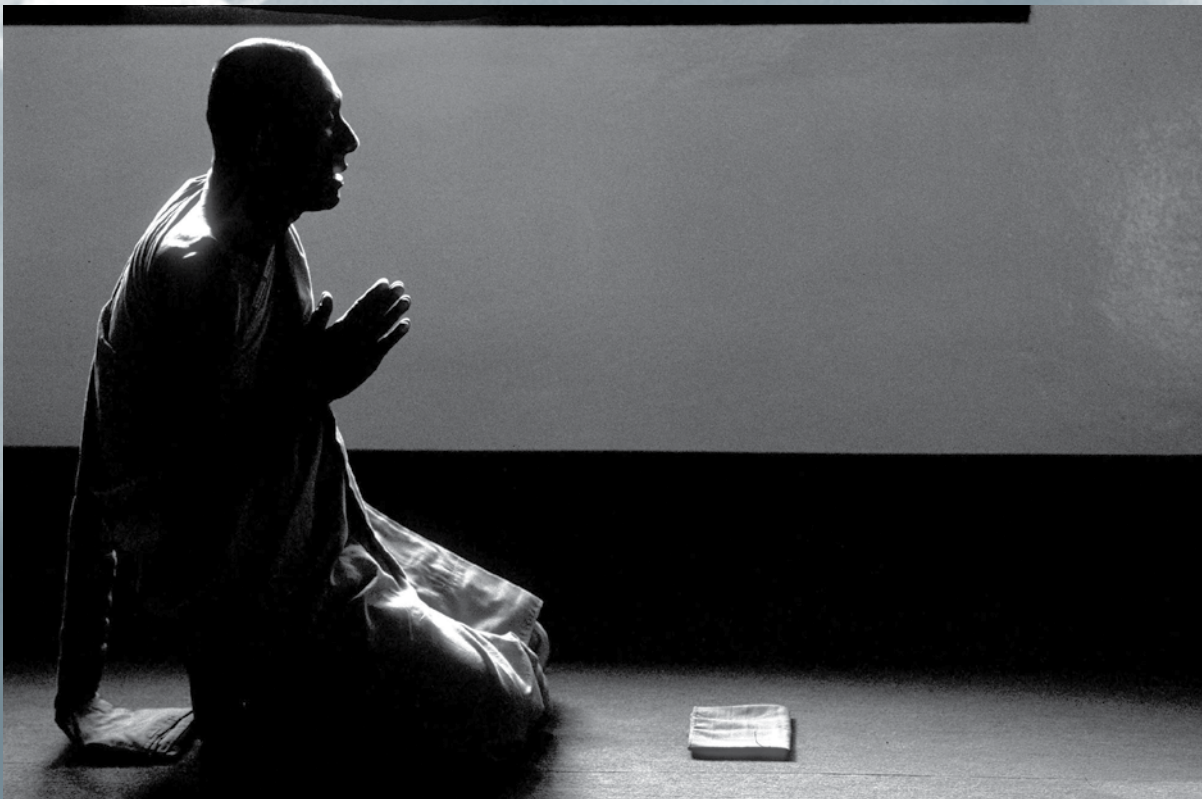
Above: A young boy holds the skull of a person killed by the Khmer Rouge near Phnom Penh, Cambodia. For much of the last three decades, Cambodia has suffered through war, political upheaval and massive genocide. **Below:** Ex-Khmer Rouge soldier Yat Khim lost his leg after stepping on a landmine in Cambodia. War and isolation have been contributing factors in Cambodia becoming one of the world's poorest nations.



“be our voice,



Above: A homeless Bangladeshi woman waits for charity near a burned out truck in the capital, Dhaka. More than half the population lives in poverty and gender inequalities limit progress for women. **Below:** Buddhist monk Tongiua Chotpanyo prays at a temple known as Wat Phrabat Nampo near Bangkok, Thailand. The sanctuary has become a hospice for Thai's living with HIV/AIDS. Chotpanyo is one of many monks infected with the disease that live on site.



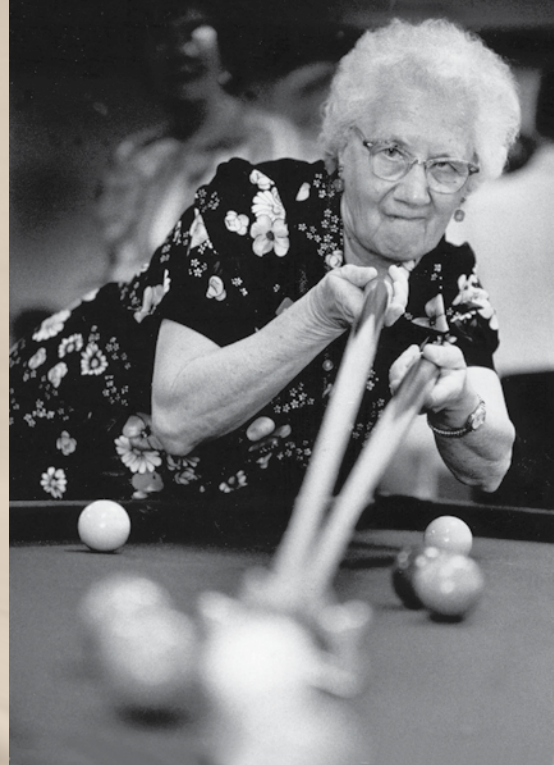
light and shadow



Above: Buddhist monk Vinuy Pomma waits out the remainder of his life at a Buddhist temple near Bangkok, Thailand. Pomma is HIV positive and is one of many monks who live at the hospice designed as a refuge for Thai's living with HIV/AIDS. **Below:** A Karen women enjoys an evening smoke at Um Phum refugee camp near the Burmese/ Thai border. Thousands of Karen refugee's have fled Burmese military persecution and populate seven refugee camps in the area.



tell our story..."



Above left: Maria Formosa passes the day by watching street traffic in Havana, Cuba. **Above right:** A senior citizen sets her sights on a shot during Senior's Olympic Billiard Championship in Brandon, Manitoba. **Below:** An enigmatic character known to motorists as Two Hats John, loses one while waving to a long haul truck near Kamloops.



...the geometry of my life has changed in numerous ways



Above: A couple walks along Cuba's famous seaside avenue known as the Malecon in Havana.



Above: U.S. President Bill Clinton speaks to farmers about flood damage on the Mississippi River in Iowa. A farmer's son, Joe Schneckloth, 9, appears to lose interest as the discussion turn to economics.

the lighter side of life...

Below: Kampe Absalonssen of Ilulissat, West Greenland pauses to offer affection to one of his favourite sled dogs.



narrative



Above: Aspiring kayaker Erik Amondson 12, practices one of 74 manoeuvres with rope gymnastics in Nuuk, Greenland. Rope skills have been around for centuries helping kayakers develop strength, agility, and balance for kayak rolling. **Below:** Four men make their way to the beach during a nudist camp open house for media and locals near Winnipeg, Manitoba.

