

# RANGEFINDER

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**Postman Greg Jarrett** bows his head in prayer before eating with Ruth Charlson. She has prepared a sandwich a day for him for ten years, allowing Jarrett to check in on her and her progressing dementia. When he retires at the end of this week he worries about what will happen to Ruth without his daily visits. (Photo by Jon Pearson)

FIND YOUR OWN WAY

# Three photographers' roundabout journey

- by Ellie Cherryhomes, Emily Nevils & Monique Woo

Pam Houser remembers the first photograph she ever took. She was in preschool, younger than the age of five, and her sister had just gotten a Brownie camera. Houser stared at it in marvel. Watching the film go in, she knew it created pictures. She bugged her sister until she was finally given the blessing to take one photograph.

"I was going to take a picture of her sitting in a lawn chair in front of our house. She helped me focus it but then my grungy little thumb pushed the grey shutter button before she could get in a chair. My first picture is of an empty chair. But, I still have the picture, the lawn chair, and the camera," said Houser.

Raised by middle class, hard working Iowan parents, Houser had the expectation to have a career that would give her a paycheck after graduating college. She loved music, was good at counseling friends with problems, and adored photography. But studying photography seemed frivolous to her parents.

Houser decided to teach music. She made a career as a high school band director for 32 years.

"I just kind of decided, 'This is it. I'm going to do what I want for the rest of my life while I am young enough to do it,'" said Houser.

She retired early at 55.

For five years, Houser lived in a log cabin on a bass pond in the area where she grew up. She would fish, substitute teach, and work for a tour company. The tour company helped her return to her initial dream of photography because it allowed her to take photos while travelling.

But the images from the photographers who inspired her, Robert Frank, Walker Evans and the Farm Security Administration wouldn't let her rest.

Houser realized she wanted more formal experience so she studied fine art photography at the Santa Fe University of Art and Design. She is now a graduate student at the Missouri School of Journalism.



**Pam Houser** watches a nightly presentation in Eldon at MPW.69.  
(Photo by Mike Krebs)

After graduating, Houser plans to get an RV, travel the back roads, and photograph small town America. She hopes MPW will be the perfect training ground for her goal.

"I just think that would be like the dream job, if you want to call it a job, to do in retirement. To see the country, to meet the people, and to take their photographs," Houser said.

## From designing roads to crossing them

There's an expectation in our society where we have to figure out what we want to do the rest of our lives by the time we graduate college. We're expected to choose a field of study by the time we're 18 or so, get a degree, find a job and stick with it. Sometimes, however, it takes a little longer to realize our passions and to have the courage to follow them.

For Aaron Phillips, his life didn't pan out that way he imagined it would. Phillips, a member of the MPW mul-

timedia team, couldn't fathom ending up in the visual journalism industry at first. As a child, he wanted to be a farmer, but he realized that it was too much of an impractical lifestyle for him personally. He had always excelled in math and science and felt that his skills were applicable to the engineering field. After receiving his Bachelor degree in civil engineering at Mississippi State, he got a job at WGK, Inc., where he worked for three years designing roads and drainage systems. For the first year, he enjoyed learning how the job worked, but it soon became repetitive and mundane.

"The facade started wearing thin," Phillips said. He reached the peak of the learning curve and felt there would never be anymore creative challenges for him. To fill that void, Phillips began to chase photography as a hobby.

He first fell in love with photography after taking a photo class his last semester of college but didn't pursue it because he felt that it wasn't something he could succeed in. So, he continued to pursue civil engineering and kept photography as a hobby. With an income from an engineering job he was able to buy photography equipment.

"Engineering is so dry, and I needed to feed this other part of myself, the creative side," Phillips said. "I think I



**Aaron Phillips** photographed twins at MPW.65 in Trenton.

invested so much into photography and learning photography because my job was in no way fulfilling that part of myself."

# Journeys into the world of photography

After leaving WGK, Inc., he still felt that a career in photography was too far-fetched. He started working part-time at a graphic design firm and was able to dabble with some basic photography. He mostly did copy work – taking photographs of photographs – but loved it because, well, it wasn't engineering. Through this new job he started learning more about the creative industry. He made connections and eventually took on assignments for Portico Jackson Magazine, a monthly commercial magazine, as a freelancer. It was his first time photographing people he'd never met, he said.

Phillips continued to do commercial freelance work but soon fell tired with that aspect of photography.

"I started becoming frustrated with making things look better than they actually were so that other people could make money," he said. "I was becoming more interested again in telling real stories, but I had no clue on how to do that."

After commercial photography Phillips was introduced to the Look3 Festival in Charlottesville, VA. There he met MPW.63 alumnus Kevin Downs. Downs was persistent in getting Phillips to apply for MPW. This was an outlandish idea to Phillips at the time. But after a couple years of Downs' persuasion, Phillips eventually applied and was accepted into MPW.65 in 2013. Phillips, known as a "Friend of Kevin" (FOK) to MPW co-directors David Rees and Jim Curley, learned more about the photojournalism industry and the photojournalism program at the University of Missouri. Phillips made a school visit to see MU, walked the hallways and ate lunch with Rees who is also the chair of the photojournalism sequence. Phillips was accepted in Fall 2014. After three semesters in the photojournalism program, Phillips transitioned into documentary filmmaking.

Currently, Phillips is on one-year leave working on a project in honor of Mississippi's bi-centennial. One aspect of the project includes facilitating one-

week workshops in small towns across Mississippi, where they work with community members nominated by the community to tell their stories.

Phillips believes that the work he is doing now fulfills the part of himself that engineering simply could not.

"More than anything, it has to do with the pursuit of me and the pursuit of understanding humans and just constant learning," Phillips said. "Constant learning about things that I don't know anything about, constant learning about people's lives, and to me, that is the greatest privilege of working within a visual storytelling medium."

## A revolutionary beginning in photojournalism

For Amr Alfiky, it took the Egyptian Revolution for him to discover his passion for photojournalism. When the revolution broke out in 2011, Alfiky was in his third year of medical school



**Amr Alfiky** witnessed photojournalists in action during the Egyptian Revolution.  
(Photo by Mike Krebs)

in Alexandria.

"The revolution was the changing point in my life," he said.

While working as a field medic on the front lines of the clashes between police and protesters Alfiky would

watch photojournalists as they were documenting the same events.

"I remember I was on the front lines rescuing a protester who got serious injuries and a photographer was right next to me taking photos and I figured that he's so lucky to witness this moment and be able to preserve it for a lifetime, forever," Alfiky said.

After that moment, Alfiky began to



photograph the revolution on his Nokia 6600 phone. The majority of his time was still dedicated to medicine but he continued to document what was around him without any prior training or experience in photography.

Three days before his final medical exam, Alexandria University banned him from taking his exams and prevented him from receiving his degree citing activism during the revolution. He left the country and came to the U.S. to visit friends. However, after two weeks in the U.S., Alfiky's family warned him that the Egyptian police were looking for him and that it wasn't safe to return.

So Alfiky stayed in the U.S., living in Virginia and using photography to document his story as a post-Arab Spring revolutionary who couldn't return home. His story was published on the New York Times Lens blog in Oct. 2016. His career in photojournalism grew to interning with the Magnum Foundation and having his work published by Reuters, New York Magazine, TIME, The New York Times and others. He currently is a teacher's assistant to Fred Ritchin at the International Center of Photography School while working on his graduate degree in journalism from the City University of New York.

"I quit my medical career for the sake of telling other people's stories," Alfiky said. "Because I once had a story and I needed somebody to tell it, and there was nobody, so I told my own story and then I found myself telling other people's stories."

## HILLBILLY HAIKU

*Did you realize  
It's time for Haiku and you  
Pick up your pen, try*

*Missouri workshop  
in seventeen syllables  
does sound so easy*

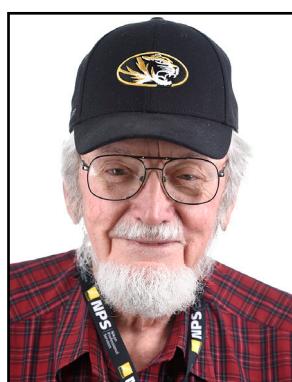
*Give it a quick try  
Count five, seven, five in rows  
Of three lumpy lines.*

*Randy Olson says  
Put camera where should be  
Main workshop lesson*

*First find a subject,  
Enticing, situation,  
turn into a story*

*Photo journalists  
can become eloquently  
skilled in words, photos*

*by Duane Dailey  
a deadline Haiku artist  
in downtown Eldon*



## Weather report

- via Accuweather

Thurs., Sept. 28  
Mostly sunny  
74/51  
0% chance  
of rain



Friday, Sept. 29  
Partly Cloudy  
77/50  
9% chance  
of rain



Sat., Sept. 30  
Mostly Sunny  
75/51  
12% chance  
of rain



#MPW69

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