

Publisher's Commentary...

The Power of a Photograph

Text Copyright Jim Erhardt
All rights reserved.



Image copyright Steve McCurry

Steve McCurry's image of the Afghan girl on the June 1985 cover of National Geographic Magazine is one that most of us will never forget. Beautiful green eyes shrouded in the misery of that time and place, her haunted gaze burned an unforgettable impression of beauty, dignity and determination in our collective consciousness. A single frame of 35mm film, it is without a doubt one of the most powerful and compelling images of modern times.

With all of the images we capture of the natural world around us, it's easy to forget that they can potentially serve a far greater cause. We fret over composition, direction of light, exposure and whether we should use fill flash or not, often losing sight of the fact that a single image can shape the view of life on this planet. While we endeavor to please ourselves with superficial aesthetics, are we missing out on an opportunity to do something far more worthy with our nature photography?

Steve McCurry set out to refind the "Afghan Girl" he photographed as a nameless refugee over 17 years ago. Through the concerted

efforts of National Geographic, federal law enforcement, a forensic sculptor, iris recognition technology and local contacts in Afghanistan, the "Afghan Girl" was found and positively identified. Sharbat Gula is now a grown woman with a family of her own, continuing the struggle for survival in a land torn by war and political strife. Aged beyond her years, the gaze of her sea-green eyes still penetrates the soul. Her only request of us is a simple one - provide a means for the young girls of Afghanistan to receive the education they have been denied of in the past. National Geographic has now set up the [Afghan Girls Fund](#) for this purpose.

A single image changed our perception of a far way place and the plight its people face. Seventeen years later, that same timeless image has now paved the path to hope. Perhaps we can make a difference with our photography too.

For more information about Sharbat Gula and her present day life in Afghanistan, visit [National Geographic.com](#). For more information on award winning photo-journalist Steve McCurry, visit his web site at [www.stevemccurry.com](#).

Note - Our sincere thanks to Steve McCurry for granting us permission to use this image.

JE - NPN 001

Comments on this article? Send them to the [editor](#).

[\[Front Page\]](#) [\[Reader's Forum\]](#) [\[Letters\]](#) [\[Links\]](#) [\[Features\]](#) [\[Reviews\]](#) [\[Photo Tips\]](#) [\[Photo Itineraries\]](#) [\[Personal Galleries\]](#) [\[Gift Shoppe\]](#)

All content copyright 2000 - 2002, *Nature Photographers Online Magazine, Inc.* All rights reserved.