

Unit 1: A Photographer's Life

Annie Griffiths: I got started in photography kind of by accident. I was in a journalism program and got a camera and decided I'd take a class just to learn how to use the camera.

And, um, two weeks later, I changed my major. My whole life, I thought I'd be a writer. And there was something about being in that class, going into a dark room, watching, you know, being in kind of that dark wonderful place watching images come up. I realized that's what I wanted to do.

Our kids have traveled to every continent except Antarctica. More importantly, when we travel, they've lived in communities. We never stayed in hotels. And, so, they were always in little communities where they were hanging out with kids, and sometimes they had a language in common and, many times, they did not. And they learned how to have fun the way those kids had fun. And they're very confident travelers.

Our daughter, you know, has—she's eighteen now—and she has no problem hopping on a plane, going overseas, and it is not a stressful thing for her. She really, um, is excited about it and remembers all of our trips with, you know, enthusiasm and great memories.

So, I think they also, our kids... I think our kids also understand that people all over the world are different—that you don't assume that they are going to be the same as we are. But then if you go into each culture open, and look people in the eye, and observe and listen, you're going to make connections that are well beyond what most travelers get to see. And I think what I've learned from my kids is how delightful flexibility is, and how naturally flexible most kids are. As long as they've got the basics—you know, food and sleep and a little something to keep them entertained—they pretty much can set up camp anywhere.

Almost everything's been photographed. And, so, the real challenge for a photographer is to bring her or his own unique vision to that subject matter. And in the case of the work that I do on assignment is primarily, um, telling a story that is compelling enough. Or, you know, the photograph is compelling enough to get people interested in reading the captions or what's going on. And hopefully that will lead them into a more in-depth written piece. It's a,

it's a wonderful, terrible job because you get this opportunity to go out and do it, but then you're supposed to do it better than it's ever been done before.

What traveling has taught me is that once, you know, you step into another culture and you allow yourself to really immerse yourself in another culture, um, and be available to them, communication happens very quickly. And it doesn't require perfect language skills, it doesn't require introductions, it really—it's really something that happens when you are your honest self, when you recognize that you're a guest in another culture and that you really need to listen to people on a different level and abide by their way of doing things. That's the best part of travel for me.

I think one of the most inspirational parts about photography is that you're never done. You're always growing and, when you travel, you're always learning. So, to have a career where I'm... I get to be creative, I'm immersed in really interesting situations, and I continue to grow artistically—what's better than that?