

History through his lens

Former N.Y. Daily News photographer to talk about career
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POWNA — It's possible to accumulate quite a few photographs in 21 years working as a daily photographer for a metropolitan newspaper.

Frank Giorandino's staircase is lined with photos he took while working as a staff photographer for the New York Daily News during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. Some of them could be printed today, especially one of a man holding a sign bemoaning the hard economic times.

Recently, he found some old photos lying in the closet of his Pownal home on Barber Pond Road and decided to do something with them. He said what has been fascinating him lately is digital photography and high-definition video, so at the urging of neighbor and friend, John Leavy, he created a DVD, complete with narration and music, showcasing some of the photos he's taken over the years.

He plans to show the DVD to a group of people at Williams College Faculty Club in Williamstown, Mass., on Nov. 25 at 7:30 p.m. After that, copies are being sent to his family and friends. Giorandino said he had no plans for it beyond that.

"It's just a memento of a time that's gone," he said. "I'm happy with it."

He began his time at the Daily News in 1960, working as a copy boy. His father worked for the paper, and although he didn't push his son in any one direction, he let him know when a position opened up. He learned his business while sharpening pencils, taking lunch orders, delivering messages and answering to the name "Boy."

When he got to do the type of work he was looking for, it was in 1968, when the transition to using 35 mm film was happening. He said the technology changes in print media are amazing. He said reporters and photographers can send their material and an editor can put it straight onto a page digitally, a big change from the linotype era.

Graveyard shift

Giorandino said that early on in his career he worked the midnight to 8 a.m. shift, driving around the east side of Manhattan, listening to police and fire radio communications over a scanner.

"I could cover stories, breaking stories, in a timely fashion, better than I could during the day," Giorandino said, adding the low nighttime traffic made getting from one end of Manhattan to the other easy.

In those days, he said, the amount and quality of work a photographer did earned extra money. He said the benefits at the Daily News were good as well, and most people were promoted from within.

"It was what you might call a real cradle to the grave corporation," he said.

While working the night shift, he said he learned not only how to "capture the defining moment" in a shot, but respect for people in emergency services. He said he had been to many scenes where fireman were still evacuating burning buildings, or police officers had dived into a river to pull a person out who had jumped off a bridge.

"These people, they go in to harm's way to help other people," he said. "Sometimes it just gets glossed over."

The variety of things he covered helped keep him going, he said. Apart from fires and suicide attempts, he was able to photograph The Beatles eating dinner at 3 a.m. when they first came to America, and Mother Teresa holding a baby as she entered the United Nations building to accept an award for her humanitarian efforts.

"It pumps you up and makes you go a little faster, a little keener, a little sharper," Giorandino said.

The Mother Teresa photo hangs on the wall of his stairs, not far from a picture of a man falling from a building. He said the Mother Teresa photo had brought him some acclaim. "I just happened to bang off a shot that said it all."

He has taken photographs of other famous people as well, including Muhammed Ali, Elizabeth Taylor and Woody Allen.

He said Allen often enjoyed eating breakfast between 3 a.m. and 4 a.m., because like other celebrities, it was the only time of day he could move around in peace.

"In Manhattan, after midnight, a different society takes over," he said.

Giorandino has lived in Pownal for the past six years with his wife, Kathy Gaffney. After leaving the Daily News in 1981, he worked as the director of photo and video operations for the town of Hempstead, N.Y.

His next project, he said, is inspired by composer Antonio Vivaldi. He plans to use pictures to create an essay on Pownal's four seasons set to Vivaldi's "Four Seasons."

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