



Exploring the Relationship Between Photographer and Subject

“Documentary photography is purity and freedom....”

Denise Keim

Documentary photography is a medium of aesthetic expression in which form and content need to collaborate with the subject matter to capture an unchangeable image. This collaboration provides an active examination of contemporary society and a presentation of experiences to enhance historical and cultural awareness. For me, documentary photography is purity and freedom: the purity of the relationship between the photographer and the subject and the freedom to create images of life as it happens. With documentary work, I stretch the boundaries, nurture the subject matter, and communicate critical thinking on many layers.

To compare documentary photography to newspaper photography is to view them as a mirrored set. They appear to be the same, yet they live in two different worlds. Both mediums show aspects of a situation and each add creative tension as they convey images. As a news photographer, I felt honored to provide a community service, but constrained by the selection of subject matter, editing, deadlines and the standards of the publication and community. However, when I devote my energies to documentary photography, creative possibilities are limitless. I have the freedom to allow my uniqueness to permeate all parts of the process.

Frequently, when photographing, I am asked if I work for a newspaper. People react differently when confronted with the expectation of being “in the news.” But when I tell them I am photographing them for myself, something natural and pure opens up. It becomes a more intimate experience, about me and them and the camera.

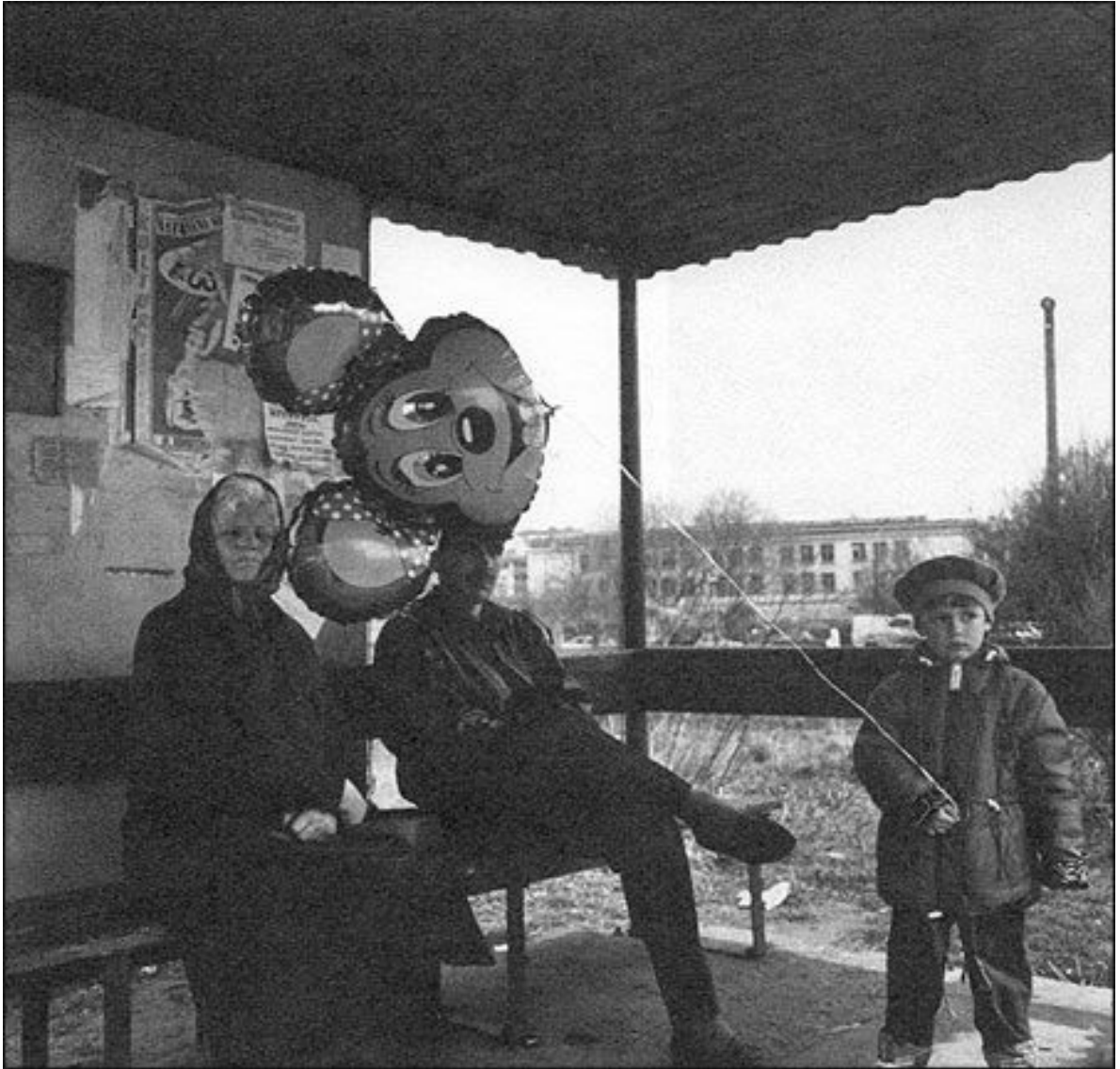
This reaction is not universal. When I spent a year in Poland as a documentary photographer, an intimate relationship was more difficult to establish because of cultural differences. I was met with more suspicious than I find in the United States. This experience in Poland taught

me that a close relationship between subject and photographer is much easier established in an open society but, once established, the results are the same.

Ultimately, all photographers photograph for themselves. How they choose to use the medium and their vision dictates how pictures are made and seen. Both news and documentary photography have their own form of art and are interesting and rewarding career paths. News and documentary photographers are complementary in that together they provide a rich visual history of our time.



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