



Mark Tuschman

GLOBETROTTING PHOTOLANTHROPIST

By Dan Havlik

Part photographer and part crusader for global healthcare, Mark Tuschman has made a living out of trying to do something good for the world. But as anyone who's tried to reconcile work that helps make a difference with work that puts food on the table, it can be a challenge.

But Tuschman doesn't necessarily make that distinction. Photographing health issues for a host of global non-profit organizations (and even some corporations) is the way he puts food on the table. In particular, Tuschman's photography focuses on women's reproductive healthcare, including documentary projects in Bangladesh and Tanzania for EngenderHealth; and family-planning projects in Guatemala for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

He's also photographed microfinance and reproductive healthcare projects in Ghana for WomensTrust; and a variety of projects in Ghana, China, Mongolia and Thailand for The Global Fund for Women.

Other noteworthy assignments for Tuschman, who was named The Global Health Council's Photographer of the Year in 2009, include documenting diabetes prevention programs on the Mexican-American border; malaria prevention in Ghana with Pfizer and Family Health International; and River Blindness clinical trials with Wyeth and the World Health Organization (WHO).

But there's a reason Tuschman still identifies himself as a commercial photographer on his Web site (www.tuschmanphoto.com). It's because he has no problem moving easily between corporate and nonprofit work when necessary.

"I get a lot of e-mails from young photographers who say 'Oh, I want to be just like you,' and I explain to them that I do all this commercial work to support the other work," he says. "And while I still do work for corporations it's for their corporate social responsibilities division. So it's the same kind of jobs I do for the NGOs [non-governmental organizations]."



Even though Tuschman needs to do less corporate work than in the past, those jobs still help sustain him. "Hopefully I'm going to be doing more corporate social responsibility and foundation work in the future. While I won't be earning as much as in the past, it's a decision I've made on my own. The whole market has changed. Photography has become a commodity. Everyone's a photographer now."

That sentiment is echoed by a lot of professional photographers these days who find themselves competing against a growing pool of amateurs with newly purchased digital SLRs. Tuschman says the competition actually often comes from the within the organizations he's shooting for.

"They sometimes say, 'We just have our own people go out and take pictures' and I tell them, I bring a lifetime of experience and different level of quality

to the work. I come back with a whole library of compelling images. Not just one or two shots."

With the volume of powerful images Tuschman has captured over the years it's easy for him to make that argument visually. In tough economic times though, money is still an issue. Tuschman comments, "Nonprofits have limited budgets and they have to decide do they give it to me or to poor people in some other country? In the end though, they're still competing for donations and dollars so they need communication materials to let people know what they do. And photography plays an important part in that."

Dignity in Dire Circumstances

No matter whom Tuschman is photographing and what the circumstance is, his approach is always the same: try to capture the humanity and dignity of people even in the face of extreme poverty.

"Ethiopia was a real challenge for me," he says. "It was really the most impoverished country I've ever been to. The lack of infrastructure is almost biblical in nature."

One of Tuschman's assignments in Ethiopia was to photograph

Left: Taken in Pokuase Ghana as part of a book project on microfinance.



Lalibela, Ethiopia. St. George church. This church is carved out of solid rock and one has to walk down a path that descends 100-feet to get to the entrance. The insides of the church are similarly carved out from the same rock.

health workers in small clinics in the northern part of the country. His goal for these sorts of projects is to tell a story as simply and clearly as possible. “I’m always trying to show what it’s really like so I try to keep shots simple and elemental.”

Despite the abject poverty and destitute conditions, Tuschman says the Ethiopian people were surprisingly positive and

optimistic. “They were so appreciative of everything, which is such a contrast to our culture where everybody is so unhappy with everything even though we have so much.”

There is a definite sadness in many of the places he travels to and he’s not there to whitewash that part of the story. “I try to show sadness in a way that still main-

tains their dignity,” Tuschman says. “I’ve photographed my share of happy faces for corporations, which makes me feel I have the liberty to show things as they are.”

Tuschman travels lightly during these assignments, bringing just his Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III and EOS 5D Mark II and minimal to no artificial lighting. For him, natural lighting is key and while he does

A mosque near Rissani, Morocco. Non-muslims aren’t allowed to enter a mosque, but I was fortunate enough to get this view from the outside entrance.





bring some Speedlites and reflectors, he uses them sparingly. "I'll probably bring some additional lighting for a project coming up but it's hard to schlep all that stuff around. It forces you to work a lot slower. In lots of places in the Third World, the way the structures of the building are, there are big doors and big windows so you get lots of natural light."

If he needs an assistant during an overseas assignment he'll take his wife. This pared down approach allows Tuschman to quickly adapt to the job at hand. It also allows him to take on multiple assignments during one trip.

During three-and-half weeks in Ethiopia, he spent one week working for one NGO, three days working for another doing an assignment for Pfizer on Trachoma prevention, and then the rest of the time doing some pro bono work. And yes, he was even able to even squeeze in some time as a tourist and shoot personal work.

Top left: Taken near Bahir Dar Ethiopia. This very young girl is waiting for fistula surgery. Many young girls in Ethiopia (and many other countries as well) are forced to marry at a very young age and have no access to any reproductive healthcare. This very young girl was fortunate to be able to receive corrective surgery. Nevertheless she was very concerned as the outcome is not always successful.

Top right: Taken in Ethiopia. I was photographing healthcare workers and this beautiful, very young mother was one of the patients. This was actually the youngest of her two children.

Middle Left: Taken near Kumasi Ghana. A brother and a sister, who were orphaned by AIDS and even more tragically, have contracted AIDS, as well. They got dressed to meet me. The young man was wearing his father's suit, which was way too large and I thought that he would probably never have the opportunity grow into it.



Top left and above: Taken in Pokuase Ghana as part of a book project on microfinance. The book is *Capital of Hope* and can be found on the blurb Web site, www.blurb.com/.

Bottom: Simien Mountains National Park, Ethiopia. I loved walking among these baboons. They were busy either grazing, mating or playing. I stayed away from the big males, who are always threatening other males for dominance.

A Degree of Trust

The access Tuschman can get while documenting photos for nonprofits is unlike the images any layman or tourist could capture. He adds that a lone photojournalist would probably not be able to get the portraits he captures because it can take a

photographer a while to earn trust. "Since I'm shooting with an agency, I'm coming in with a certain degree of trust. They know I'm striving to do something with the images to help people. You can't take these pictures as a tourist. I much prefer to be

with a group because you get into situations you just can't get into otherwise."

His advice to photographers who may not be able to travel with an NGO or an aid agency is to try to befriend as many people as you can. "People want to feel






comfortable with you. Don't rush them. Take your time and be patient, because if a person sees you're interested in them, they'll understand. Sometimes you see wonderful candid moments and you have to just grab them," he says.

Tuschman has always been interested in health issues going back to an earlier career path in the Neurophysiology of Vision in Berkeley, CA. But his passion for global healthcare and women's reproductive rights stems from reading *The New York Times'* global issues columnist Nicholas Kristof.

"When Bush got into office, he made it very difficult for women to get abortions and cut back a lot of USAID money for clinics doing reproductive health-care. It had devastating consequences. And that's when I approached the Global Fund for Women to do work for them."

Though his convictions are strong, Tuschman's goal in photography is simple. "If you want to look at the face of poverty with one image, it would really be a mother with a child. If women had control over their bodies, we would have a better world." 

Dan Havlik is a freelance writer, editor and photographer based in New York City. He currently serves as Technology Specialist at Photo District News (PDN) magazine; and Editor of DemystifyingDigital.com, a technology education Web site. He also writes for a variety of consumer electronics and photography magazines and Web sites including Popular Science, Popular Mechanics, Consumer Reports, and LAPTOP. For more info on Dan, visit his Web site: www.HavlikIndustries.com.

Bottom: In the desert near Merzouga, Morocco. It was much easier to walk and take photos than riding on the camel.

