

an artist of



ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT: Stephanie has a knack for capturing the spirit of the moment. "Ring Out," 2004, Coronado, California; "Wet, Sandy Rope Climb," 2005, Coronado, California; "K Bar Tattoo," 2005, Coronado, California.



Stephanie Freid-Perenchio, Photographer

BY RYAN WATERFIELD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHANIE FREID-PERENCHIO



Beginning in 2001, with unprecedented access to the notoriously secretive Navy SEAL community, Stephanie Freid-Perenchio spent seven years documenting the lives of Navy SEALs and their families for her book, *SEAL: The Unspoken Sacrifice*. Since then, Stephanie has photographed in war zones and in areas of geo-political turmoil; she has documented the ever-threatened animals of Africa and captured the fading way of life of the American cowboy. And that's just to name a few of the topics that Stephanie has photographed. A humanitarian documentary photographer, Stephanie is a prolific artist who is never satisfied to sit on the sideline and just take the shot—rather, she is an artist of action using her photography to create change. Not only does she donate a portion of every photograph sold to various non-profit organizations connected to the subjects of the photograph, but she has also given her time, energy, and talent to a number of causes close to her heart. Stephanie understands that photography can be used as a tool for social change. In fact, this idea is the fuel powering her passion.

action



TOP: "Two Worlds Both Protecting," 2010, Kabul, Afghanistan. INSET: Stephanie in Khost, Afghanistan, 2011.

"Here's the thing." This is the way nearly every conversation I have with Stephanie Freid-Perenchio starts. Or if it doesn't start that way, I can count on that catch phrase recurring like a chorus. When I hear it, I know that Stephanie is ready to cut through all the conversational clutter and offer up an insight or a direction to move. To put it in photographic terms, she's bringing the conversation into focus. And click. She's captured it—the thought, the next move, the point.

This ability to see through the periphery and hone in on "the thing" serves her art well. Stephanie's photographs offer a glimpse into many worlds that very few of us encounter firsthand. When Stephanie talks about her work, two things are evident: she has unfaltering respect for the subjects of her photographs, and she hopes her photographs tell a story about the reality of the lives of the people and animals she documents. "I have a quote on my website from Robert

Frank (an early and influential documentary photographer) that reads, "There is one thing a photograph must contain, the humanity of the moment." she says. "That thought has guided me no matter the subject. If you can capture the humanity and the dignity, then your audience will care." This principle is not lost on Stephanie's audience. When asked what he liked about her photographs, one of her clients says, "What I like most about her work is that it truly captures the heart of whatever subject she is shooting, from a child's smile and innocence even in the harshest of times to being cold, wet, and oh so tired in BUDS (Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training)."

One of my personal favorites is from her Afghanistan series, and it captures a woman in a blue burqa passing an American soldier standing guard. The soldier is clad in a military uniform, and she is covered from head to toe in a brilliant blue burqa. It seems

to me, at first glance, that their narratives rest in the fabric. His story is about service and sacrifice. Her story is hidden under that cloak. To the western gaze, it might be a story of oppression and inequality. She is but a blur in the photograph after all. And just as I'm about to fall too easily into that read of the photograph, I realize that we only get a glimpse of the soldier as well—his shoulder and nothing else. I recognize that the photograph is framed to de-emphasize each individual and asks us to focus on the moment. It's a moment of transition, a moment of passing frozen in time. The photograph opens up different narrative possibilities. Maybe to the woman in the burqa, the soldier isn't just one of the infidels occupying her country, and maybe he sees her as more than a victim. Maybe, in that moment of passing, if they can see beyond the fabric to the humanity in the other, the narratives clash just a little less and our disparate worlds get just a bit closer.



ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT: "Nurturing Lioness," 2008, Maasai Mara, Kenya; A child in Kenya, a photograph taken by Stephanie in 2008.



The way this image brings me into a world I know nothing about—or two worlds, that of the soldier in a foreign country and that of the woman in the burqa—and asks that I think about the complexity of the moment is indicative of Stephanie's body of work. Her photographs take Dorothea Lange's idea that "Photography takes a moment out of time, altering by holding it still" one step further by not only altering the moment, but more importantly altering our perspective by expanding the way we see the world. Maybe it's the vast array of places Stephanie has traveled that makes her work so distinctive or maybe it's the way she travels, intent on learning as much as she can about the

place and the people, ready to dissolve the boundaries when she can. She says, "As a photographer, I understand that there are boundaries between me and the people I am shooting. But I'm always willing to close the distance whenever possible." Either way, Stephanie turns the unfamiliar into something familiar—something that we can relate to even if it bears no resemblance to our own existence. And, in my experience, her photographs make my world just a little bigger.

On her website, Stephanie has collected quotes by photographers who inspire her including Sebastiao Salgado, one of Stephanie's favorites. Salgado said, "I try with my pictures to raise a question, to provoke a

debate, so that we can discuss problems together and come up with solutions." To facilitate discussions that might lead to solutions, Stephanie hosts events like the Pacific Council Sun Valley Global Affairs Forum (PCSV) a local offshoot of a Los Angeles-based foreign policy organization at her Ketchum studio. These events are intimate dinners where foreign policy experts come to discuss issues like nuclear proliferation, the European Union economy, or the Mexican-American border.

Pacific Council represents one of Stephanie's interests that she characterizes as a "big picture organization" because the PCSV forum deals with global issues on the policy level. She also sits on the board of national organizations that promote women's health and equality and the well-being of animals. Always searching for ways to make a real and lasting impact, Stephanie is involved in grass-roots events like the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Family of Woman film festival for which she serves as co-chair. The UNFPA is an international development agency that promotes the right



PACIFIC COUNCIL SUN VALLEY FORUM

Six times a year the Pacific Council Sun Valley Forum brings foreign policy experts to Sun Valley to speak in an intimate setting about international issues. This past year the topics ranged from the Mexican/American border, cyber terrorism and cyber security, and the European Union and its economy. If you are interested in becoming a member of the PCSV, contact Nikki at Nikki@sfpstudio.com or call the studio at 208.727.6803.



LEFT TO RIGHT: "Broncing Cowboy #2," 2006, Hailey, Idaho; "Cowboy Wrap-Up," 2008, Hailey, Idaho.

of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity, and the film festival the Stephanie co-chairs has increased awareness of issues facing women and children around the world, turning awareness into action.

Ever committed to improving the lives of women and children around the globe, Stephanie recently started Women Under the Radar. "Women Under The Radar is a call to action. It is my attempt to get the passionate and committed women I know in a room together to talk about the realities facing women and children on the global scene." She says, "In too many places around the world, children suffer at the hand of strangers, or worse, people they know and trust to keep them safe. In too many places in the world, women and children live under the radar." For this forum, Stephanie has invited filmmakers who make films about child soldiers in the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo and doctors who deal with women's

health issues in developing nations.

An entertainment agent in her pre-Sun Valley life (she moved here full-time 8 years ago), Stephanie is a marvel at connecting people. These forums are not fundraising events; rather her intent with these events is to put like-minded people in a room and connect them. She says, "Most everyone I know wants to make a difference. I've always found that sometimes the global problems are just too big, and it's hard to know where to start. I remember feeling that if I wasn't donating money or sitting on a board of a non-profit, that I wasn't making a difference. I realized that for many of the problems we face globally, it takes like-minded people taking baby steps to make real and lasting

change. I've been fortunate in my life and I owe it to others to give back." When asked what drives her to keep giving back she says, "I'm a mother and my girls keep me grounded. They remind me what is important. Being a mother and taking care of dogs and horses, it's all such a big part of who I am—it keeps my passion and compassion alive every minute of the day. And I'm fortunate to have a husband who understands and supports my need to be who I am and to do what I do."

Here's "the thing" about Stephanie—she's got heart, talent, and an infinite amount of determination. Her photographs tell a story but so does the way she lives her life. She is a woman of action, and she is making a difference.

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