

PROFILE TED GRANT  
EMBRACING  
LIFE AND ART  
BY JENNY MONTGOMERY

It's possible that the course of one's life can be changed in a moment.

### A LIFE-CHANGING GIFT

Just before breakfast on May 25, 1950, newlywed Irene Grant gave her husband, Ted, his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday gift: a \$30 Argus A2 35-mm camera. That moment, Ted Grant explained, was the most pivotal in his career: "That gift started my journey as a photojournalist."

At the time, he was working in a service position at Hobart Manufacturing Company. After receiving his new camera, Grant started taking pictures at stock car races—that is, when he wasn't busy racing in them. On September 17, 1951, one of those images was published in the *Ottawa Citizen*. Grant said the memory of that first published photograph stands out to him even now: "Photo by Ted Grant! And I hoped it never ended!" Soon he was taking pictures everywhere he went. By age 23,



This shot, taken in High River, Alberta, shows a pack of workhorses turned loose. These horses were used by cowboys to carry backpacks containing lick salt and other supplies for grazing cattle. Once the job was complete, the horses were allowed to run free until winter, when they were rounded up and housed for the season at the home ranch.

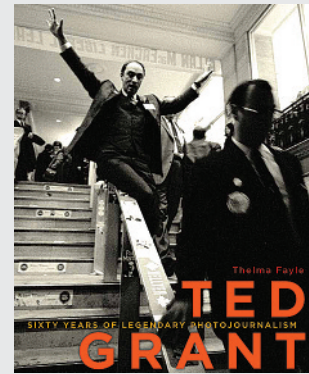
© TED GRANT

Grant had joined an established photography agency in Ottawa and was working full-time as a photographer.

Today the Ted Grant Special Collections at Library and Archives Canada and the National Gallery contain more than 300,000 archived images taken by Grant over the years. He's known in the industry as the father of Canadian photojournalism. You've probably seen many of his images; his photo of Pierre Trudeau sliding down the banister and the one of Ben Johnson in the 1988 Olympics are two of his most recognized. He's had eight books of his work published, and Bravo made a documentary about him called *Ted Grant: The Art of Observation*.

Grant recently took the time to answer some questions about his career, his approach to photography and Thelma Fayle's new book, *Ted Grant: Sixty Years of Legendary Photojournalism*.

**Thelma Fayle's *Ted Grant: Sixty Years of Legendary Photojournalism* is an excellent chronicle of Grant's life and career. Grant said, "It was an adventure into my past each week when she asked questions that took me back 30 or 40 years or more. Some weeks the interviews were very emotional as I lived through some of the darker moments of what I had photographed...wars, Chernobyl and other types along those lines." For the review of *Ted Grant: Sixty Years of Legendary Photojournalism*, see page 15.**



## AN INQUISITIVE APPROACH

From our interview exchanges and from reading Fayle's engaging book, one thing was abundantly clear. Whether Ted Grant is photographing world political leaders, Olympic athletes, medical professionals, fishermen or cowboys, he takes the same



**Derrick Man, Oil and Gas Exploration, 1967** To get this shot, Ted stands behind a derrick man working on an oil-and-gas exploration platform in the prairies. "I have photographed the downtrodden and the princes and the shahs and everyone in between."



**Nun in Training, 1965** Ted had the opportunity to visit a convent in Hull in 1965 with NFB filmmakers who were producing a film there. Ted, assigned to take the accompanying photographs, was mesmerized by the beauty and tranquility of this young nun in training.

“BUILDING RAPPORT IS ALWAYS IMPORTANT. YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE IN LIFE.”  
—TED GRANT IN *TED GRANT: SIXTY YEARS OF LEGENDARY PHOTOJOURNALISM*

approach: he looks for the story. He watches attentively and waits for it to appear. Grant knows that the most honest moment often comes after the “official” photo opportunity.

He explained that this intuitive approach “comes from knowing your subject, instinct and your immediate reaction to what you observe! Stay fully involved with what you’re shooting and be prepared. You can’t be distracted by others trying to talk to you, or thinking about what lens you should use, or what was the ISO, or any simple-minded techie things! You see! You shoot! That’s all there is to it!”

Though he makes it sound simple, Grant’s skill is masterful. His exceptional ability to see and use light sets him apart. He’s

particularly known for shooting from “the shadow side.” Grant told us, “In the portrait studio, the type of lighting is referred to as ‘Rembrandt Lighting,’ as in the famous painter whose art pieces illustrate shooting from the shadow side. It isn’t a case of taking five steps to the right or left, it is recognizing the effect of the lighting and how it is shining on the subject...My suggestion for those wishing to learn about shooting from the shadow side [is that] they should go to the library and find a book about Rembrandt and his paintings. Once this style of lighting is recognized, it can become extremely effective in many, many situations!”

When considering Grant’s sixty-year career, the role of his curiosity about life and other people cannot be minimized. His genuine interest in others and his respect for them guide him as he tells his



Madame Vanier and the Dropped Purse, 1961 Governor General Georges Vanier, Prime Minister Diefenbaker and Prime Minister Ben-Gurion bend down to retrieve Madame Vanier’s dropped purse. “You often get about three minutes to take pictures at these official events and then everyone is instructed to leave. I always stay for a moment without turning my back on the scene.”

“I WANT TO MAKE GOOD USE OF EVERY MOMENT THAT I HAVE LEFT.”  
—TED GRANT IN *TED GRANT: SIXTY YEARS OF LEGENDARY PHOTOJOURNALISM*

subjects' stories with his lens. One project has had a way of leading to the next. Grant said, “One example, certainly the most important during the past 40 years, [was] when my curiosity was aroused while laying on a hospital gurney awaiting a serious operation for trigeminal neuralgia. While experiencing excruciating pain, [I was] thinking, ‘Wow! What a great place to shoot.’ Upon recovery four months later after the brain surgery? The result was three medical books and a whole new look at life around me.”

His interest in photographing the medical field has only deepened over the years. Grant revealed, “At the moment I have a standing book project on medical students [in] training. In Hong Kong, Canada, several universities in Europe and Africa. Then Cuba and the USA at Johns Hopkins. I trust shooting will

begin early 2014... With any kind of luck this medical project should be ready for publication by spring 2015. I am eagerly awaiting [getting] started.”

## A TIME TO HEAL

At the moment, though, Grant is recovering from major surgery and forced to wait until his doctor gives him the okay to get back out there with his “two Leica M8s, a couple of extra lenses, spare batteries and an extra card.” He explained, “Earlier this year, I had my right shoulder replaced due to a major fall while on assignment in the [former] USSR in 1992. I just sloughed off the physical annoyance and kept shooting. In 1994 I did my first solo parachute jump at the age of 65, unfortunately once again damaging the right shoulder on top of the previous



**Leopard-hatted Surgeon, 1985** This surgeon's exotic animal-print surgical cap is an interesting visual contrast to his intense concentration while performing heart surgery. “All of my medical work was shot in existing light. No flash. Imagine being in an operating room and trying to use flash. You wouldn't be in that room very long!”

“MY WAY HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO CAPTURE LIFE—REGARDLESS OF SUBJECT OR LOCATION—IN AS STRAIGHTFORWARD AND TRUTHFUL A MANNER AS POSSIBLE.”  
—TED GRANT IN *TED GRANT: SIXTY YEARS OF LEGENDARY PHOTOJOURNALISM*

'92 incident. Both of these began such a battle with pain I had to finally have the replacement [in] May 2013.”

It's been a long season of healing for Grant. In addition to his recovery from surgery, Grant has also been coping with the grief of losing his beloved wife, Irene, who passed away during the time the interviews were being done for the book. The courage he has shown while navigating the grieving process is inspiring. His determination to look for the beauty in each day and his decision that grief was going to have to live with him set a powerful example of how to deal with heartbreaking loss and yet choose to continue to embrace life and art.

Jean Cocteau wrote in his book *A Letter to Americans*, “I would rather that things happened otherwise, and there are times I weep on the ruins. Afterward it comes to me that ruins have their own astonishing beauty that can inspire an entirely unexpected direction in art.” When I asked Grant what he thought about this quote, he said, “I can say quite openly and unashamedly I know exactly what he means and felt! And have shed a great number of tears also! But life must go on!”

I must admit that I've been taking notes of Dr. Ted's wise advice, and I am greatly looking forward to seeing more astonishing beauty in his upcoming work. ■



Ted Grant, *Self-Portrait at Seventy-Six Years Old*, 2003 “When somebody asks me to talk about my career and the places I have been and the wonderful people I have met, I can be the gabbiest person in the world. I have enjoyed my work, and if I am lucky I will still do more. I want to make good use of every moment that I have left.”