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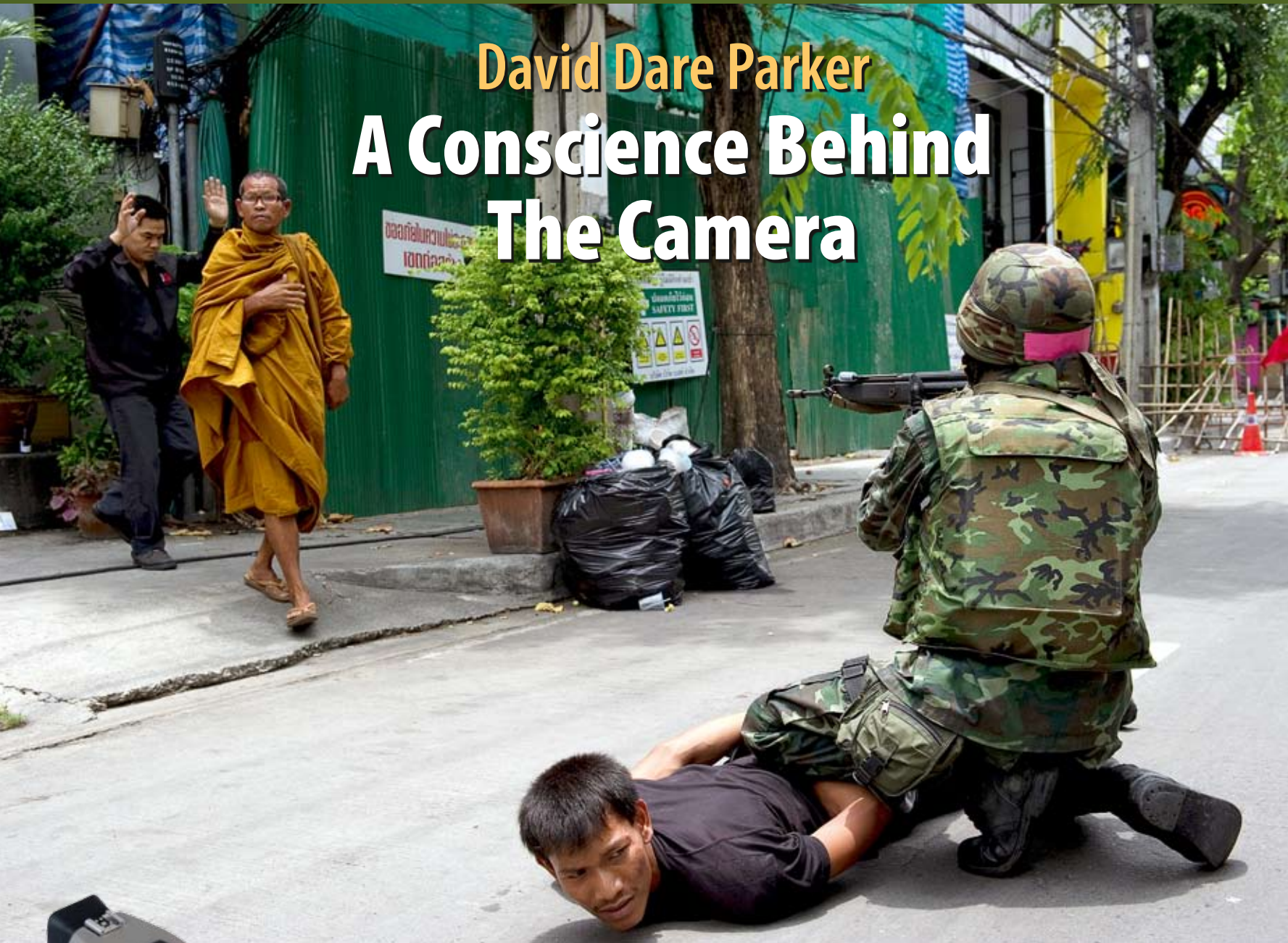
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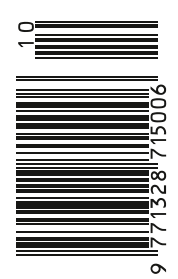
## David Dare Parker A Conscience Behind The Camera



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# Daring To Be Diff



## David Dare Parker

Continuing Australia's great tradition of dedicated photojournalists, David Dare Parker believes photographs can be a powerful medium for creating both awareness and for motivating change. Interview by Alison Stieven-Taylor.

**T**here are photographers who choose the profession in order to seek fame and fortune and then there are those who, like David Dare Parker, with a deep sense of social justice, can't see beyond photography's role as giving those without means a voice.

"When I took up photography it was all about photojournalism, in fact that was all I thought photography was, other genres didn't enter my psyche. I've sort of had tunnel vision ever since.

To me, photojournalism is the most important thing photography can do."

I sit with David over a coffee in one of the rare moments he is actually still... and for one of the few interviews he's granted. He prefaces our discussion by telling me that interviews for him are a double edged sword – the positive being that it gives him time to reflect on his work, the downside that sometimes his words come back to bite him. I tap my trusty tape-recorder to reassure him, but remind him that if he

doesn't want to see it in print, he shouldn't tell me. We both laugh and the ice is broken.

This tall, willowy, quietly spoken man whose gaze doesn't miss anything, has been in constant motion since he traded a lucrative career as a session musician for the uncertain life of a freelance photojournalist.

"By the time I was 25 I'd been working as a session musician for ten years. I was tired of the music scene... basically I was burned out. I wanted to travel the world, to see it all carrying a camera, but I wanted to make a point and photojournalism seemed to be the right path for me."

### Public Opinion

Influenced by Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Don McCullin and the Life magazine greats, David took off, backpacking for a while before finding his way to Gaza.

"I made a lot of mistakes, but I also met a lot of people who introduced me to other people and eventually my work became good enough for magazines to publish."

# erent



LEFT AND ABOVE: Red Shirt anti-government protesters are detained by Thai soldiers inside their camp in Bangkok during military crackdown to end the protests.



TOP RIGHT: East Timorese return to the burnt-out remains of their homes only to find rogue elements with the departing Indonesian military burning nearby buildings. September 1999.



RIGHT: Independence supporters prepare for an expected pro-Jakarta Milita Attack near Hera. Dili, East Timor, September 1999.

And he learned to think on his feet, such as the time when he was in Israel, his cameras had been stolen and he was flat broke, wondering where he'd spend the night. "I was at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem watching these Rabbis coming up to young Americans asking if they were Jewish. If you were Jewish they fed you and gave you shelter. I told them my great-grandmother was Jewish – she was a Palestinian-born Jew. They looked after me. I remember this Rabbi said 'Try...to treat people the way you want to be treated and respect the people you photograph and then try to get published because you have the responsibility to do that for them'.

These very simple rules resonated deeply with the photojournalist.

"If you are going to influence public opinion you have to get your images before the public and not shoot for other photographers; that's an ego trip."

Ego isn't a word that springs to mind when talking to David Dare Parker. Instead, self-deprecating seems more appropriate. He's not keen to talk about acco-

lades, omitting facts like he's a Walkley Award winner or that his photographs have often been used in cover stories for international magazines such as *Time*.

"I've been able to sustain a living of sorts by accident more than anything. I tend to work on stories that I'm interested in and the people I do work with, there is a trust between us that I'll get the job done. I was never comfortable with the idea of having to nurture relationships with picture editors in order to get ahead.

"Agencies want stars to put on display, but for me the first responsibility is taking pictures that tell stories and give people a voice. I believe there is this ethical code of honour attached to what I do where my work has to stay true to the story... I don't think about what others are doing or their motivation, I just try to do what I want to do and I don't sit comfortably anywhere else but as a photojournalist."

## Close Calls

David prefers self-funded jobs rather than being "stuck on an assignment, not doing the sort of pictures I

want to do". In the days when there was a proliferation of pictorial news magazines photo editors would call David to find out where he was heading. "I'd pick up a guarantee of sorts from a magazine that might cover my airfare. That would mean the magazine would look at my photographs and pay that fee whether they used the images or not. But that type of work is very rare now."

His face breaks into a grin when I ask if it is expensive to fund projects which, as he says, can go on for weeks.

"Not the way I live," he says. "I usually stay at some little shithole in the middle of nowhere."

His self-funded work consists of long-term projects that are documented over years. It is obvious he finds it awkward talking about the photographs he takes as 'projects', very aware of the fine line that photojournalists walk between getting the story and remembering they are documenting someone's trauma.

And as with all the photojournalists I've interviewed David has had his share of close calls which he



ABOVE: Students risk arrest as they demonstrate for Government Reform (Reformasi) outside the grounds of Gadjah Mahda University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 1998.

TOP RIGHT: Students celebrate from the top of the People's Consultative Assembly as Suharto's 32-year rule comes to an end, 21 May 1998.

RIGHT: Senen is one of Jakarta's poorest areas. Here people live in illegally erected shacks precariously near fast-moving trains.



sees as a by-product of the job; danger comes with the territory.

I encourage him to recount some of his experiences. He rolls his eyes good-humouredly and tells me of the time he was in East Timor when the back of the car he was travelling in was shot out. "That morning we'd been hunted by guys with machetes and they'd trashed our car." He pauses, the memory flickering across his face. "It was a bad day."

Continuing, he explains, "We'd heard a village leader had been killed and seen the trail of blood. Bougainvillea had been laid on the bloodied patch that the corpse had left [a tradition in East Timor] along with a picture of Jesus, a sign of respect. What we didn't realise was the militia who had killed the guy were still there and they were looking for journalists, especially Australian journalists, to kill.

"When you are travelling with other journalists and they aren't from Australia and they know you are, they look at you very warily and you wonder if they are

really your friends," he adds laughing. "So I pretended to be British."

Within days of this incident David was again in the thick of the action this time in Jakarta while covering the anti-Australian demonstrations.

"But I wanted to get back into Timor. I remember Stephen Dupont and Phillip Blenkinsop [two fellow Australian photojournalists] were waiting in Darwin to

come to Dili as part of the official group. They had their names on a list and I knew that if I got evacuated to Darwin I wouldn't get back in and that would be the end of the story for me. So my only option was to go back into Dili independently".

In Dili – and separated from the official press corps – David slept on the floor in a nunnery while his counterparts were in a guarded compound that was more



## PROFILE

**RIGHT:** This young boy helps his family recover what remains of their possessions after the Boxing Day tsunami hit Banda Aceh in 2004. On 26 December 2004 a tsunami devastated the city of Banda Aceh leaving many thousands of people dead and millions homeless.

like "a cattle yard". At night his only protection was a pocketknife under his bed. By day he rode on the back of a motorbike with a hired rider in pursuit of his story.

"At the first sign of gunshots the rider would take off and I'd be left to walk back two hours in the shadows. That happened all the time and, if the militia saw you, they would attack. There were nuts and bolts exploding from handmade grenades, it was nerve-wracking."

### Degree South

David Dare Parker is a member of Degree South a collective of Australian photojournalists which includes Tim Page, Stephen Dupont, Ben Bohane, Jack Picone and Michael Coyne. With fine art photography book publisher T&G Publishing, Degree South released the book WAR #1 earlier this year.

David's work from East Timor and Indonesia features in this thoughtful compilation that uses minimal text allowing the photographs to speak for themselves. As we flick through the book David points to a provoca-

*"In fact, if you used a film camera these days you'd probably get shot because there is no image on the back."*

tive shot of the anti-Soharto student demonstrations in Yogyakarta in 1998, where a heavily tattooed youth is gesticulating, his sentiment obvious – "Soharto is a wanker". This photo ran on the cover of an Australian magazine.

"It was when students were being shot at and we [the media] were being photographed by intelligence agents. A friend of mine who was also covering the demonstration was followed back to his hotel and his film confiscated. He was shown photographs of other journalists and photographers – myself included – and asked who we were. Later he was deported."

David says he hasn't had his prized digital Nikon D3S camera taken yet ("the best camera I have ever owned"), but in the past he has had to surrender film at gunpoint. That was in Indonesia's Aceh province.

"We came across a road block, guys wearing balaclavas and robbing people at gunpoint. I took some shots and this guy saw me, shoved his gun in my chest and screamed at me to give him the film.

"I thought his colleagues looked nastier than he did and they were coming my way so I made the play of pulling this film out and handing it over. They let us go. It was unused film. There are two slots in my Nikon and I keep one for a dummy card just in case. Unless they have a way of playing it straight away that gives me some time."

He thinks for a moment before adding these guys are pretty savvy. "In fact, if you used a film camera these days you'd probably get shot because there is no image on the back."



All photographs by David Dare Parker, copyright 2010.

### Telling Stories

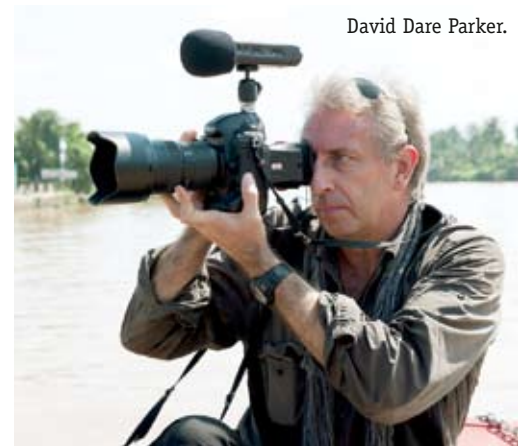
In May this year David was in Bangkok to document the Red Shirts' protests. Coming up is a trip to Afghanistan. To my question about why Afghanistan, he states simply, "Because there are still stories to be told".

"I don't care about exclusives. I remember a young photographer coming back from Perpignan [where the Visa Pour l'Image photojournalism festival is held] and saying, 'Don't go to Africa anymore, photo editors are sick of seeing pictures of starving Africans'. Well, that is a reason why you *should* be going back to Africa.

"If you are going to record humanity, then record it. Don't stop because you've already covered something that represents a situation. I'm not there to provide symbols, something that people can dredge up every now and again. I'm there to put recent news coverage in front of people to say this is still going on.

"War is war. It is horrible. It affects people everyday, different people and they all have a story to tell. I'm trying to put these peoples' lives in front of others. I work with my lens so you fall into the picture when you're looking at it.

"I want that closeness, I want you there in the thick of it, getting a sense of what these people are going



David Dare Parker.

through. It doesn't matter if it's been done before, that's an excuse for what? Ego? You might not like my work and that's fine, but you haven't seen this before. It just happened so how could you?" **GP**

*Alison Steven-Taylor is an author and photographer based in Melbourne. For more information visit [www.realityillusion.com](http://www.realityillusion.com) and [www.astloveslife.blogspot.com](http://www.astloveslife.blogspot.com). Her latest book, *Rock Chicks*, profiles the leading female rock stars from the 1960s to today.*