

Obituary for Frederick N. Ward

The Indiana Jones of photojournalism, Frederick N. Ward adventured far and wide, writing and photographing in all parts of the world. Notable were his *Life Magazine* covers on the Martin Luther King memorial issue and the Kennedy assassination issue—Andy Warhol turned the latter into an iconic print of Jacqueline Kennedy. Ward contributed to *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, and *National Geographic*, among many other magazines that published his prolific work. When his family moved to Miami in 1948, they transported the Huntsville, Alabama naïve country boy to the open blue sea and skies of the world. He excelled at Coral Gables High School, voted the one “Most Likely to Succeed.” The debate team teacher mentored Ward’s start in photography by lending him a two-shot camera and giving him the key to his home darkroom. After a day of waiting for the perfect shot and waking to find it in the school paper, he was hooked.

At the University of Florida, Ward studied photography first semester and taught it second. Painstakingly building his career, he worked his way through college by photographing for the newspaper, magazine, and yearbook. Basic to his enterprising nature and hunger for success, he earned a B.A. in Political Science and Far East History and an M.A. in Journalism and Communications. In 1984 the University of Florida named him a “Distinguished Alumnus of the College of Journalism and Communications.” And in 1985, he received the additional high honor of “Distinguished Alumnus of the University of Florida.”

Ward freelanced as a photojournalist in Washington, D.C., dedicating himself to telling a dramatic story and revealing the truth. He served as a member of the Washington Press Corps and the White House News Photographers Association. His photographs won first prizes in the annual White House News Photographers Association and University of Missouri contests—including historic images of President Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Gerald Ford—and reside in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Library of Congress, as well as in space, on the photographs aboard the Voyager spacecraft. His presidential photographs were exhibited by the International Center of Photography in New York, and a retrospective show of his work was the premier exhibit in the Washington Press Club. Ward was named by the Florida Scholastic Press Association as the “Outstanding Journalist of the Year, 1980.”

Honing a rare facility to combine words and pictures, Ward wrote and photographed *Golden Islands of the Caribbean* (Crown Publishers, 1972) and *Inside Cuba Today* (Crown Publishers, 1978). He also photographed *The Home Birth Book* (Doubleday, 1977), with text by Charlotte Ward; and *Portrait of a President* (Harper and Row, 1975),

with text by Hugh Sidey, an intimate coverage of President Ford during three months in the White House.

If the adventure makes the man, Ward sought challenges that many merely read about, and he involved his audiences in the action. Extensive travel for *National Geographic* over 28 years led him through more than 130 countries, piloting experimental aircraft and his own helicopter, and diving underwater, all in search of the perfect picture and the most accurate and interesting story. He wrote and photographed “Rubies and Sapphires,” “Emeralds,” “Florida Reefs,” “Computer Graphics,” “Everglades,” “Diamonds,” “Cuba,” “Tibet,” “Cree Indians,” “Dominica,” “Pearls,” and “Jade.” He photographed “Fiber Optics,” “Silver,” “Pesticides,” “Hazardous Wastes,” “Rhode Island,” and “Japan.”

Ward developed his gemstone series for *National Geographic* into nine books under his own imprint, Gem Book Publishers: *Diamonds* (also in Russian), *Emeralds*, *Jade*, *Opals*, *Pearls*, *Phenomenal Gems*, *Rubies and Sapphires*, and *Gem Care*. Morphing into a gem dealer and a gemologist, Ward earned a GIA Graduate Gemologist diploma in 1990 in the shortest time ever recorded, 90 days. Along the way, he produced and directed two National Endowment for the Humanities films on Mexico and various TV commercials and corporate documentaries and served as a special gem consultant for *National Geographic* television.

Fred Ward is survived by his wife of 58 years Charlotte, their beloved children Kimberly Litle (Tom Litle), Christopher Ward, Lolly Ward (Nathan Kornelis), and David Ward, four grandchildren, and his sister Lynn Erckmann (Jim Erckmann). Ward died at his Malibu home on July 19, three days after his 81st birthday.

For forty years, Ward worked alongside his Black Star Picture Agency colleague and friend, photographer Dennis Brack, who commented recently: “So many of his great stories to remember. Fred was the smartest photographer in Washington. There have been other smart photographers since he went west, but they have excelled in only one field—Fred had it all together.”