

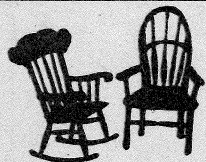
Photog Tells All!!

Michael "Mickey" Kienitz, 32, was born and raised in Madison. A graduate of West High, he earned a degree in philosophy at the UW-Madison. He is a photojournalist who got his start with the *Daily Cardinal*, photographing and "taking part in" antiwar demonstrations during the Vietnam War. Since then, he has covered stories in Africa, Ireland, El Salvador, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Cuba and Nicaragua. His work has appeared in local press as well as the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *London Times*, *Time* and *Newsweek*. He is presently in Nicaragua covering the local elections.

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"I did take one journalism course at the university, and I did try to take a photography course—it was in the art department—but the very first day the professor turned me off.

"He was demonstrating how durable the camera was by banging it on the table,



Listening In with George Vukelich.

dropping it on the floor, and I thought, 'Gee, why is he doing this? I think I'll just go out and learn it by myself.' And that's what I did.

"The *Daily Cardinal* was a great place to do that, because the only way you can learn photography—or just about anything else—is to go out and actually do it and then, after you've done it, be analytical and self-critical enough to recognize what's bad or good.

"Also, all four years I was going to the university I was a copy boy at the *Wisconsin State Journal*, and their photographers, who are excellent, gave me tips: Ed Stein, J.D. Patrick, A. Craig Benson—'Ace,' we call

him—and later on Joe Jackson and Roger Turner.

I was stringing for the Associated Press as a photographer, and I came back once with photos of a tornado I had just shot for them. Joe Caposella, the news editor, looked at them, and there was a lot of destruction in the photos, and he finally said, 'You really need the human element in here. You've got to try to always put a person in these pictures because that's what people are going to focus on. That's what people can relate most strongly to—other people.'

"That's something that has always stuck with me, and I try to do it in every shot if at all possible.

"Another old pro who helped me was Eddie Adams in New York. I had just been showing my stuff to an AP editor in the Rockefeller Building, and I came out of our meeting kind of depressed and ran into Eddie. He saw right away how it was and asked if I'd like to go for coffee.

"Eddie said, 'Show me your photographs,' so I did. He looked and said there were a few he really appreciated, and he told me to stick with it. He also asked me if there was anything else other than photography that I really liked, and I said, 'No, it's my life.' I also said I was willing to sacrifice a great deal to do it.

"Well,' he said, 'your photography indicates that you should keep going and that things are going to work out for you eventually, so just keep it up.' Then he told me a very important thing about my portfolio, and since then I've passed this on to other photographers.

"Never show your mistakes,' Eddie Adams said. 'If there's a photograph that you have any question, any doubt about—maybe the light wasn't just right, maybe it's not perfectly in focus or something—*don't print it. Don't put it in your portfolio*, because other people are going to see the same thing and they're going to wonder: Why does this photographer do this?'

"I guess, basically, what I'm trying to do with my photographs and stories, whether they're from Ireland or El Salvador or Lebanon or wherever, is tell people: Look,



Mickey Kienitz. Photo by Brent Nicastro

this is what's happening. Here's a little cold water in your face. Look at what some people are enduring in this world right now.

"The thing I would really like to do is get a grant or something like the old photographers had from the WPA and just travel here, in America, and document it with photographs. That's partly because combat photography can really string you out.

"A friend of mine who has done a lot of it has reached the point where if there isn't a corpse and gun, he just doesn't want to take the picture.

"I'm reminded of another friend of mine, David Bernette, who works out of New York. He's really a fantastic photographer,

and during the fall of the Shah, David was in Iran for five straight months, and after that experience he said that he'd never do any kind of photography like that again.

"So the very next assignment he took was a story for Geo, and his assignment was photographing night baseball games across the United States. That was it: night baseball on the amateur level across the U.S.

"He said that it was a picture story that was really hard for him to do, and yet it was so pleasurable because there were no bullets, no political factions coming up to him with Kalashnikovs asking: 'Whose side are you on?'

"I can see it."