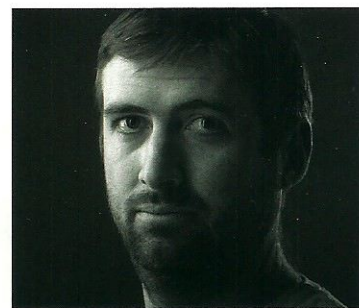


10 Questions for R.J. Sangosti

by: Jefferson Geiger



TIME's Top 10 Photos of 2012 included R.J. Sangosti's photo of Chantel Blunk, the wife of Jonathan Blunk who was a Navy veteran killed in the Aurora movie theater shootings in July. *The Denver Post* photographer who graduated from Colorado State University in 2001 shares his experiences with photography and journalism. In April, Sangosti was named 2013 Photojournalist of the Year by the National Press Photographers Association.

What drew you to photography? My father gave me a camera, a Canon AE-1, at a young age, and I couldn't put it down. I loved looking at pictures in *National Geographic*. I'm dyslexic, so I have a hard time reading. The arts, painting, photography — visually learning and telling stories visually really appealed to me.

How did you get into photojournalism? I saw an ad in the *Collegian* for a photographer and that they would provide equipment. I wanted better equipment for free, so I applied and got it. Within a year, I was the photo editor. I loved the assignments and meeting people. Unfortunately, since I was an art major, I couldn't take the JTC photography class. Aside from the *Collegian*, the only JTC class I took was an ethics one taught by Greg Luft.

Run through what you did to shoot the photo. The *Post* decided to cover the victims only when welcomed. Blunk's were one of the families that let them. She really wanted the media coverage. She was angry and wanted to let the world what she and her kids had lost. I met her in Lakewood for the ceremony and was part of the caravan procession to DIA. Walking from the limo to the plane is when I got the shot. There was no planning. That's what journalism is. She was walking toward me and crossed my path as I was taking shots of the hearse. It ended up being a surreal image where everything, her youthful appearance, the hearse, the rainbow, and the soldiers, lined up.

Funeral photography is a very sensitive is-

sue. **How do you handle it?** It depends on the situation. Chantel was very upfront with me. She wanted the world to know. I didn't shy away from anything. I photographed it like it was my own family, because she wanted me there.

What was your reaction when you heard you made TIME's list? I was overwhelmed and humbled. This is a pretty amazing thing in my career, because I'm a fairly young photographer. It's neat to not only be in *TIME*, but to be picked as one of the best was very

such as Todd Heisler who works for *The New York Times*.

What have been your most difficult assignments? I spent a month covering Katrina in a car. It was exhausting. The day of the theater shooting was also hard. I spent 19 hours in a high school parking lot photographing the families as they walked out. It was a horrifically long day.

What is the worst photograph you've taken? I'm so out of touch with the feature stuff. I cover a lot of news. One day I was shooting architecture. I was horrific at it. I didn't know what I was doing. I wasn't prepared for it. I had to reshoot a lot. But, the great thing about *The Denver Post* is that we cover everything. There is no beat. We cover a lot of random things.

What moments make you love being a photographer? I love how amazing humanity is. I love comebacks, like with Katrina. I like witnessing how strong people are. It's amazing to simply have the opportunity to be involved in current events. There's always something big that I'm a part of. During the campaign, the president came to Colorado a lot, and I covered it about nine times.

I get to do what people are talking about.

Do you have any tips for aspiring photographers? Journalism is about people. You have to always keep that in the forefront. Spend as much time with the subject as possible. The more you spend with them, the better. Photography is about the human relationship. The best journalism comes from people who relate the best.



This R.J. Sangosti photo of Chantel Blunk, waiting as her husband's body was prepared for transport to a military funeral, was named one of the Top 10 photos of the year by *Time*. Jonathan Blunk was killed in the Aurora theater shooting.

humbling. I'm glad for Chantel that the photo is preserved in history that way.

Who are some of your favorite photographers? William Allard from *National Geographic*. He did these series on cowboys, Mennonites, and Western American themes. His work is what inspired me, and I still love his stuff. I also follow modern photographers and trends to keep up with what's happening,