In late May of 1979, as the rising temperatures signalled the impending arrival of summer, Steve McCurry was journeying north from Central India to the mountainous province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, situated at the western tip of the Himalayas in Pakistan. He was into the second year of his travels around Southern Asia and over the previous months, he had been selling images to various small magazines, for a few hundred dollars a piece, as a means to sustain himself on his journey. When McCurry arrived in Chitral, a small town at the base of the vast Tirich Mir Mountain, he immediately sought out a cheap hotel. From this base he was able to set out to explore the surrounding area. This was to be another adventure in McCurry’s journey from, in his own words, ‘being a news photographer in Philadelphia to becoming an established magazine photographer.’

Prior to arriving in Chitral, McCurry had been reading about the developing situation in Afghanistan and the border region with Pakistan in the local press. McCurry had been reading about the growing civil war and the influx of refugees entering Pakistan from Afghanistan. McCurry visited a number of small hotels in the Chitral area before stopping in at the ‘New Hotel’ and logging into his guide, Haji Ali, who introduced him to the ‘Mujahideen’ in the area. This was to be the start of McCurry’s travels with the Mujahideen over the course of the next several years.

The Mujahideen were part of the Afghan resistance against the Soviet invasion of their country. McCurry was to travel with them intermittently over the years, photographing the civil war and the mujahideen movement. McCurry’s images would define the conflict and a world-renowned photojournalist was born.

In 1979, under deteriorating security conditions, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan to the aid of the Government, currently struggling to quell the US-backed mujahideen rebels. At the same time, Steve McCurry would enter Afghanistan under a similar veil, cloaked in local garments and smuggled under the border with his revolutionary guides. McCurry travelled with the Mujahideen intermittently over a number of years, exposing the deeply personal side of a civil war backed by the world’s two major superpowers. His images would define the conflict and a world-renowned photojournalist was born.

Steve McCurry in Afghanistan, 1980

Father and son, Kunar, Afghanistan, 1979

Afghanistan, 1980

Steve McCurry in Afghanistan, 1980

Afghanistan, 1979

Shooting Under Fire
Mujahideen fighters, Afghanistan, 1980

Shooting Under Fire
from a talk by Lt General Hussain Muhammed Ershad held at a Monsoon Rainfall Prediction workshop in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Through Veslind's notes, McCurry discovered when the best time for heavy rain in the Nepalese mountains is, and the areas suffering from the worst erosion because of the annual downpour were to be found in the countryside around Kathmandu valley. In the midst of the chaos of the monsoon, such information was vital and it enabled McCurry to be in the right place at the right time as he spent several weeks photographing in this particular region.

McCurry also looked in the newspaper everyday to discover when the rains were predicted to come. 'I'd discover', notes McCurry, 'that the Monsoon had arrived in a particular region. So, I'd end up jumping on a plane and going there. Or maybe I would be in a café having lunch or dinner and it would start to rain and I'd drop everything and rush out and take pictures. You have to respond immediately to the situation because those heavy rains really don't last for long. When it's a really heavy downpour, these things only last for 5-10 minutes, so if it starts to rain you have to race outside and start shooting.'

For McCurry, these downpours offered both a practical challenge and a marvelous opportunity to capture something truly unique. In the first instance, he was faced with keeping his cameras and lenses dry; not an easy proposition when you are wading through flood waters 4 feet deep or fighting a sudden deluge. 'I carried a large gold umbrella when I shot in the rain', McCurry explains, 'I had my back turned to the wind, and fifty per cent of my time was spent keeping the camera lens dry. Sometimes in the downpour, I felt that my front lens was the only dry object in a radius of fifty miles, an unnatural object in a world meant to be wet! I was always soaked, but the lens survived. I learned to hold the umbrella myself, balanced on my shoulder, almost invariably, an assistant would squeeze himself under the umbrella, forcing my camera out.' Yet, in such moments, he was able to capture images of beauty and misfortune, from such scenes as a young girl looking desperately cold and dejected as she tries to shelter herself against the downpour (see p. xx), to a humorous image of a dog waiting for a door to open while the waters continue to rise around him (see p. xx). 'For me,' McCurry continues, 'the weather has mostly been a congenial ally, creating mood and drama for photographs. But in the heart of the monsoon, I was forced to immerse myself in weather so profound that nothing else mattered – not art, not culture, not intellect. It was a lesson in humility.'

The monsoon would not sweep across the Indian subcontinent in a methodical and predictable wave. Rather, one area would suffer monumental levels of rainfall, while others would be left untouched. During one period of calm before the waters broke, McCurry documented the life of the fishermen of Goa, who base their working life around the cycle of the dry and wet monsoons (the cold dry monsoon coming in the winter months, and the warm rainy season in the summer). As McCurry recalled, 'I spent a few weeks in the little fishing village of Sirgado, near the capital city of Panaji. The seas were already getting rough with the storms raging in the Indian Ocean, but the real monsoon was nowhere in sight. For several nights I slept in a fisherman's house, awakening at 4am to sail with them into the dark waters in their small, carved dugout canoes. I would sit on the bottom of the boat with my camera bag clutched between my knees, with two oarsmen kneeling fore and aft. We would move quickly through the bay for hour after hour, the oarsmen's blades knifing tirelessly through the water. The seas were muddy from earlier rains that had washed silt into the sea from the mountains to the north, and sometimes waves broke over the gunwales. I was afraid we would be swamped, but the fishermen would simply laugh. They had been fishing this way for generations in the fragile craft even into the early days of the monsoons. It would get much worse, they would say, and grin at me. They would fish until...
Chandni Chowk, Old Delhi, India, 1983

Monsoon
placed in the middle of a rice field. They are both crying. Luan is holding on to her daughter as she puts some more incense sticks into the grave. The grey sky, the dilapidated building (once a church) in the distance, and the wet muddy field, all contribute to a scene of profound grief and sorrow. McCurry followed the mother and daughter back to their home and photographed them walking together through the field full of fresh green shoots. Although we know Luan is also HIV positive, it’s a final picture that embodies some hope for the future, and reflects positively on The Global Fund’s work.

The second person McCurry photographed was Duong Van Tuyen. Also living in the Thai Nguyen province, he was married to Luong, a young girl from the local village. The couple had a two-year-old son, Toan, and lived in a small two-roomed house. Like Luoc, they ran a small farmstead, given to them by Tuyen’s father as a wedding present. The labour was hard and Tuyen had to supplement his income with other work. Yet, beyond such difficulties, they considered themselves lucky to have the life they had. However, all this changed when in June 2007, Tuyen found himself in hospital after being diagnosed as HIV positive. ‘Luong was a young woman who had just married at 19,’ McCurry notes, ‘she had a small child and expected to live a typical farmer’s life in the countryside. Out of the blue, she learned that her husband was dying from AIDS — and that she too had been infected with the virus. Even though her husband had infected her, she stood by him; ‘I don’t know when he got his disease,’ Luoc said. ‘Before getting married, he seemed a good man and good tempered. I don’t know anything about when he got infected. If you talk about me placing blame, then I don’t; I don’t place blame on anybody, because it’s this disease; it’s heartless and it’s easy to infected. If you talk about me placing blame, then I don’t know. I don’t know when he got infected.’

McCurry’s journey from discovering Tuyen was HIV positive, to him dying, reveal images of fear, pain and acceptance. Each of his images chart a stage in this journey, utilising the qualities of light, tone, and colour to reveal something of what McCurry himself was feeling when in the presence of people faced with the possible end of their life. In one of the earliest photographs, McCurry pictures Tuyen praying in the bedroom. We can see he has already begun to lose weight; his coat seems far too big for his small frame. Later on, maybe on the same day, Tuyen is seen looking through the mosquito net that surrounds the bed. He appears pensive, unsure of what is going to happen next. Clearly, he is struggling with the thought that he has infected his wife with HIV. At first, Tuyen noted during this time, ‘I thought, “That’s it — I will die from this.”’

After that, many people encouraged Tuyen to go get medications to take. With health, I can still help my wife and son. I can still live with my wife and son and my parents. But if I die, I don’t know what my wife and child will do. How will they live? If they are infected, they won’t know how to get the medications and take them. They’ll die just like me. So I try to live.’ The subsequent pictures by McCurry reveal Tuyen’s expectations of prolonging his life to have been unrealistic. In each frame his spirit seems to ebb away, until in one image he just looks up towards McCurry’s camera barely conscious of his presence.

When McCurry visited Vietnam, he thought that the work The Global Fund were carrying out would translate to stories that were positive and life affirming. When it became clear that even with all the help of medication and health advice, many of the sufferers were going to die, travelling from his hotel to be with the families everyday became emotionally draining. The remaining photographs from McCurry’s time with Tuyen and Luong are testament to the pure grief and deep sorrow McCurry was faced with picturing. In one picture Luong is seen in the back of a car, tears rolling down her cheeks. The picture was taken on Luong’s journey back home after she had just received news that she was HIV positive. ‘Now I too am infected by the disease’, she said at the time. ‘I’m just 21 years old. It is possible that my son is also infected [but he subsequently tested negative].’ I thought a lot about that. I was very depressed. I wanted to die. For three days after getting my results, I thought a lot about everything. But I would still get up when I had to prepare lunch or dinner for my son.’ In another moment, taken after the death of his father, we see the two-year-old Toan being consoled by Luong. McCurry has captured them seemingly isolated, cut adrift from the world around them. After losing her husband, Luong told McCurry that she feared she would lose everything. Such thoughts haunted her on a daily basis. Now she was alone, and one of her greatest worries was that Tuyen’s father would take away the farm and possibly even her son. Many of McCurry’s pictures reveal Luong walking alone on an empty track cradling her son, praying at her late husband’s grave, or hugging Toan in the early evening. In the final picture from this series, Luong is seen sitting alone outside her house. The fading light is only punctuated by the golden glow from inside the house. Toan is asleep and Luong is seizing the last few rays of light to do so much needed work. In the face of everything, the only answer is to carry on. In these images McCurry had to draw on all his thirty years of experience to translate the experience of sorrow and anguish into images that would serve The Global Fund’s aims of both informing the viewer of their work, as well encouraging governments and private benefactors to give money to the organization. The results are works of deep sensitivity, that reveal how the efforts of local treatment centers offer a rare lifeline for sufferers in a country that often ignores the problem.

The final series of images McCurry produced for the Access to Life project were of Nguyên Đức Khánh. Khánh lived in a Hanoi apartment, and had contracted HIV when working in one of the illegal goldmines that pepper the central provinces of Vietnam. He began working at the mine one year after he was married. Maybe it was being away from home, the isolation and boredom, but like many other miners he began to use opium. Once he was hooked on opium, the locals began selling heroin instead and Khánh, inevitably, became a user and, shortly after, an addict. After leaving the mine, Khánh could not shake the habit and eventually went into a government-sponsored rehabilitation unit in Phú Tho Province. Unfortunately, just when he needed to be getting help, some of the inmates had smuggled heroin into the centre and they would often end up sharing a needle. Khánh believed it was possible at that moment that he contracted HIV.

Khánh’s stay at the rehab clinic took place in 2001/2002 and, aside from a bad case of diarrhoea, he displayed no obvious symptoms that he was HIV positive. It was not until 2007 that he became aware of having the virus. Throughout that year he had been getting gradually weaker and was spending more time in bed. The family was suffering financially because of Khánh’s absence from work, and his wife Trần had to support the family, which also included two children, his 16-year-old son Thanh and 13-year-old daughter Bình. The family business was a breakfast stall in the market that was her family’s main source of income; recalls McCurry: ‘But once people learned that her husband, Khánh, had AIDS, many of them stopped buying food from her. Such myths and misunderstandings that
Interior, Phu Tho province, Vietnam, 2007

Fighting HIV/AIDS
It was an army that he discovered his first evidence of the those struggling clean up the destroyed oil fields. Hitchhiking with two army couriers, he undertook over the top. 'corpses of people working to save endangered wildlife or also train his camera on their surrounding envi-

numbing artillery rounds and rockets. With a roar our big guns launched a rain of fire could. Once in a while we stopped, and soldiers of his jeep decided to switch columns and head with a bumper crop of unexploded "bomblets" from the sky was full of fire and smoke. As the troops withdrew they also mined the area surrounding

Hitchhiking with two army couriers, he undertook over the top.' took a good strong shove from a truck to put us stubborn mule of a jeep wouldn't budge. It finally lined up behind us. We tried manhandling it over. I also sat on my flak diffi culty for the incoming allied troops, the envi-

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