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How Does Photography Change Our Lives? How Has Photography Changed Your Life?

A New Outreach Program and Interactive Feature at <http://click.si.edu>

The Smithsonian Photography Initiative invites the public to participate in an unprecedented online dialogue about the impact of photography on history, culture and everyday lives. Visitors to “click! photography changes everything” at <http://click.si.edu> are encouraged to submit their photos and stories about the many ways photos shape experience, knowledge and memory.

The Smithsonian Photography Initiative recently started selecting stories and images submitted by site visitors on an ongoing basis to be regularly uploaded to the “click!” Web site. In addition, on a bi-monthly schedule, it is issuing more specific and theme-based calls for visitor-contributed content. New images and stories will join an archive of written and filmed commentaries that the Initiative began collecting last year from invited experts investigating how photography has changed the progress and practice of their diverse fields—from anthropology to astrophysics, from media to medicine, from philosophy to sports.

The Initiative is collecting and sharing images and narratives that shed light on how photography influences who people are, what people do and what people remember. Has a photograph been used to document property loss, inspire a hairstylist, sell a house, beat a traffic ticket or helped with the decision about where to go on vacation? Has a single photograph ever influenced what someone believes in or who someone loves? Visitors can go to <http://click.si.edu> and follow the easy steps to share their stories about the power of photography and to see images and read stories submitted by others.

Selected entries from the general public will be featured alongside those by invited experts such as Stewart Brand, founder and editor of the legendary Whole Earth Catalog, who understood how photography could change the way people viewed Earth and their life on it; Diane Granito, an adoption specialist and founder of the Heart Gallery, who explains how commissioning and exhibiting compelling photographic portraits of foster-care children helped the children find new families and homes; and Lauren Shakely, publisher at Clarkson Potter of a string of best-selling cookbooks, who describes how and why photography can change the kinds of food people crave.

“click!” also presents seven videos—available online, as downloadable podcasts and on YouTube—that feature Smithsonian curators, historians and scientists speaking about photography at the Institution. Visitors to the site can see and hear Lonnie Bunch, the director of the new National Museum of African American History and Culture, explain the role photography plays in building a new museum about cultural identity. In another video, Lisa Stevens, curator of primates and pandas at the National Zoo’s Department of Animal Programs, describes how photography, in addition to turning pandas into celebrities, spreads knowledge about little-known species, generates funds and raises public awareness of conservation issues.

At this transitional moment—as digital technology alters the form, content and transmission of photos—the goal of “click!” is to provide a unique opportunity and gathering place for experts and the public alike to reflect on the history, spread, practice and power of photography.

About “click! photography changes everything”

In March 2008, the Initiative launched “click! photography changes everything” as an interdisciplinary Web site. The goal of “click!” is to stimulate an unprecedented dialogue about the ways photography enables people to document and actively interact with the world. Later that year, the second phase of “click!” launched, inviting the public to actively participate in a dialogue about the role photos have played in history and their everyday lives, a dramatic alteration of the traditional one-way, curator-to-visitor dynamic.

Marvin Heiferman serves as creative consultant and curator of “click! photography changes everything.” His vast experience organizing major exhibitions about photography and visual culture includes exhibits at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the International Center of Photography and the New Museum. “click!” is his first online exhibition project.

Support for “click! photography changes everything” has been provided by several private individuals and foundations, including the Comer Foundation, PhotoWings, The Henry Luce Foundation and the Trellis Fund. Night Kitchen Interactive of Philadelphia is the Smithsonian Photography Initiative’s Web-design firm for <http://click.si.edu>. VideoArt Productions of Washington, D.C., produced the videos for the Web site.

About the Smithsonian Photography Initiative

The Smithsonian Photography Initiative was established in 2001 to encourage greater awareness of the Smithsonian’s vast and unique image collections. It is dedicated to creating interactive programming, including online exhibitions, publications and educational activities via its Web site, <http://photography.si.edu>.

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