

# THE SHOT: The Faces of the World's Poor



Renee C. Byer

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Living On A Dollar A Day: The Lives And Faces Of The World's Poor

On assignment in Mali, West Africa for The Sacramento Bee I photographed Mohamed Ag Ahmedou, 2, suffering from malnutrition, while working to make coal alongside his mother in March 26, 2004. "Those that don't work, don't eat," proclaimed the village chief as Ahmedou's big wide eyes looked up holding a few grains of rice in his hand. That image haunted me for years and was the catalyst for a long-term book project titled *Living On A Dollar A Day: The Lives And Faces Of The World's Poor* that I worked on with The Forgotten International, a San Francisco based non-profit that works to alleviate global poverty worldwide.

The Living on a Dollar a Day project focuses on the 1.2 billion people who live on less than one dollar a day. Approximately one out of six people live on a dollar a day. It's a statistic that remains abstract for many who do not feel its implications on a day-to-day basis. That's why I traveled to four continents and ten countries to capture the circumstances of people living in extreme poverty—to give us the names and show us the faces of those it haunts. Throughout I've documented the poor whose lives are dominated by health problems that are treatable with modern medicine, who work hard in hazardous conditions for little pay, and who build homes on borrowed land because, like all human beings, they have to live somewhere. In *Living on a Dollar a Day*, it was important to translate a stark statistic into stories so that we can more easily access our compassion and, hopefully, exercise our humanity.

As the United Nations Millennium Development Goals to eradicate extreme poverty are up for review in 2015 this project is a poignant call to action for governments, civic society organizations and the private sector to set a better course of action. There has been improvement but not enough to eradicate extreme poverty as it relates to hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, water, education, environmental sustainability, healthcare, and gender equality. While

the reasons for their poverty may be different across geographic regions and political circumstance, the results are much the same. Extreme poverty robs people of options in life, and the cycle is nearly impossible to break without help. While the poor often work very hard at jobs many of us would not even consider doing, not having access to basic health care and education keeps them at the bottom of the economic ladder, usually for generations.

The Dalai Lama explained it best in his forward, “Unfairness in the human condition can only be remedied when people everywhere care.”

My hope for this project is to fund a traveling worldwide photography exhibition to bring this needed awareness to everyone, because positive change can happen. Looking into these faces may seem overwhelming at first, but in fact, changing the life of one person, or one family, or one village, is possible. I’m partnering with Laura Lo Forti and Andrew DeVigal of A Fourth Act to develop an age sensitive audience engagement component to the exhibition to connect, educate and empower viewers to act. The book also serves as a call to action. Each chapter’s insightful text by Tom Nazario ends with information about how readers can get involved in the fight on poverty.

Several children have been helped as a result of the images and stories I reported including Sangeeta, a 2-year old toddler, in India that only weighed 9 pounds and was being starved to death on purpose so her mother could beg with her on the streets to solicit money to feed her other children. After identifying the child in a slum the Ton Len Charitable Trust stepped in with help from a mobile medical clinic to aid the child who is now doing well. But according to the World Bank 19,000 children under the age of five are dying a day of preventable disease.

Another 8-year old child, Fati, pictured in Ghana with tears streaming down her face from the effects of malaria as she worked in an electronic waste dump searching for metal to recycle in exchange for pennies to survive has been helped by The Forgotten International along with several other girls I photographed. They are now attending boarding school, getting medical attention and wearing shoes for the first time. In addition after I made the photo of 4-year old Ana-Maria Tudor standing in the light of her doorway in Bucharest, Romania, hoping for a miracle as her family faced eviction from the only home they have ever had that consisted of one room with no bathroom or running water she also is now attending school with the help of SamuSocial a non-profit based in Bucharest that I worked with there.

Throughout my travels I discovered one extraordinary truth: The human spirit transcends even the worst deprivation. And if we hope to change it, we must connect at that most human level.

Most recently, I’m honored to be a finalist for the World Understanding Award at Pictures of the Year International for this work. Earlier this year, I was awarded 1st Place Documentary book by the IPA 2014 (International Photography Awards.) In addition, my work from Living on a Dollar a Day was featured at the premier photojournalism festival, Visa Pour l’image, held in Perpignan, France, and received Honorable Mention from the Moscow International Foto Awards. The image of Fati working in an electronic waste dumpsite was selected by David Clarke, Director of Photography at Tate, for a “Best of Show” exhibition to tour seven countries starting in New York. My photographs in the book have received extensive press coverage

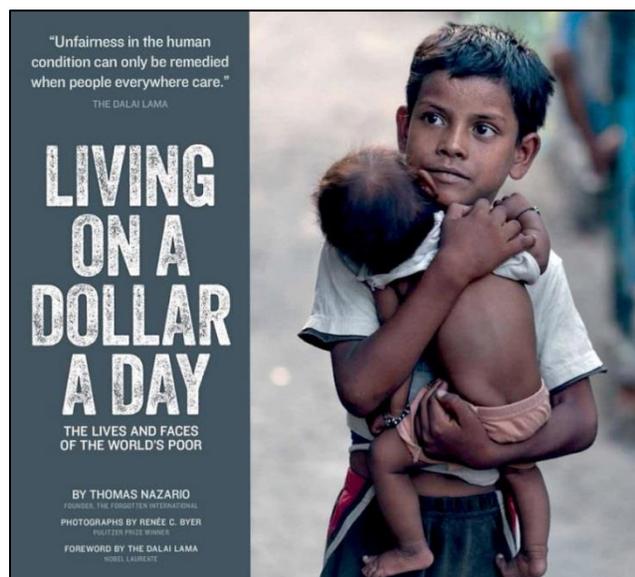
including interviews with Ann Curry of NBC, and Bob Woodruff of ABC, Time, Newsweek, Slate.com, Truth Dig, Mother Jones, and National Geographic, among other publications.

I'm grateful to David Griffin, former director of photography at National Geographic Magazine, for his beautiful design and help editing the images that span over 348 pages with 215 photographs in the coffee table book.

I think of myself as a journalist who chooses the art of photography to bring awareness to the world. Art is a powerful means of expression, but in combination with the ethics and unvarnished storytelling of journalism it has the ability to bring awareness to issues that can elevate understanding and compassion. It's the basic reality of why I do what I do.

Mostly, I was humbled by the grace, generosity, fortitude and bravery of the hardworking men, women and children who allowed me into their lives, lives they did not choose and often cannot control. Through them, my life was enriched. I hope you'll look deeply into these photographs. They might change your life, too.

Photo: In an e-waste dump that kills nearly everything that it touches, Fati, 8, works with other children searching through hazardous waste in hopes of finding whatever she can to exchange for pennies in order to survive, in Ghana, West Africa. While balancing a bucket on her head with the little metal she has found, tears stream down her face as the result of the pain that comes with the malaria she contracted some years ago. This is work she must do to survive. Since this photograph was taken, Fati and several other children that were photographed have been placed in boarding school and are now getting medical attention with the help of a donation to The Forgotten International.



Vishal Singh, 6, cares for a baby girl while her mother is away, in the Kusum Pahari slum in Delhi, India. When Vishal is not working, he attends a school in the Kusum Pahari slum. Renee C. Byer

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