

LARRY SNIDER

Larry Snider has never gotten into serious trouble in his quest for photographs in the far corners of the world. But this retired Chicago lawyer has been in any number of interesting situations. Like the time he was poking around the back alleyways in troubled Xingjiang Province, in north-



western China. He stuck his head inside an open doorway and found himself emphatically invited for tea by a friendly family.

"We couldn't talk with each other," Snider recalls. "But they saw the camera, made motions for me to come in, and insisted I have tea with them. Afterwards I took everyone's picture and gave them all Polaroids. They seemed to like this, and I figured it was a good way to repay them for their hospitality. It's not often a lawyer gets to do something nice for someone."

Snider acquired an interest in the Far East from a favorite professor at the University of Michigan. To satisfy his curiosity about these exotic lands, his first trip was to Japan. At first he went without a camera, but when he discovered, at the age of 40, that he had become a workaholic, he reasoned that photography would make a good hobby. He walked across the street from his home to the Cranbrook Academy of Art, and asked Carl Toth, head of the photography department, to teach him the ropes. Toth politely passed him on to a graduate student who tutored him on the finer points of darkroom technique.

Since then Snider has traveled extensively throughout Asia looking for photographs. In the 1980s he visited China and saw the incredible changes that were occurring there. He wanted to record the old customs and rituals that were rapidly disappearing under the relentless forces of modernization. For the next five or six years he took off time from his law practice and traveled for two or three weeks to different regions of the country.

Although he has never been arrested or harassed taking photographs in remote corners of the world, this doesn't mean there haven't been dicey moments. In 1990, shortly after the uprising in Tiananmen Square, he tried to enter the country at a remote border crossing. "They wouldn't let me in," Snider says. "I had about 120 rolls of film with me and they assumed I was a journalist. They said I could enter only if I gave them all of the

film. And I thought, 'Oh my God, I've come all this way to take pictures, and they want my film.' I argued. I yelled. I cried. I showed them my cards and my papers and finally convinced them I was a lawyer. And they must have figured I was harmless. It was the one and only time I found someone lower than a lawyer...a journalist!"

Of all the places and people Snider has seen, his favorite place to photograph is India. While so many other cultures in Asia live their lives behind walled compounds, in India life is lived in the streets. The country is teeming with exotic sounds and smells, crowded bazaars, chaotic traffic, and lively festivals.

"I've discovered a lot of things from my travels," Snider says. "I've learned how similar we are as human beings, and how dissimilar we are as cultures. I usually hire a guide when I'm photographing, and I've spent long days talking with them about their lives. Wherever I travel I find we all have the same worries and concerns: the need to make a living, the trials of raising our children, the desire to live in peace. I see the world changing at an alarming rate, with China especially becoming as materialist as we are here in the West."

Although there are any number of subjects for Snider's lens, he is primarily interested in the vanishing cultures in the countries he visits. He hopes to document the people before the relentless forces of Westernization turn the whole world into a homogenized version of America. Perhaps this is why many of his pictures look like they might have been taken twenty years ago, or two hundred.

"I took one picture in Burma that just fascinates me," Snider says. "I was visiting a remote village on the Ayeyarwady River, and those people are living exactly as their ancestors did hundreds of years ago. It is a village scene of reed boats and thatched houses. It amazes me that in today's world you can still find places like that. It's a totally different way of life. That's what I'm trying to capture in my photographs."

—David Best

■ PRINT INFORMATION

13.3x20-inch digital prints, in limited editions of 15—\$2000 each.

■ CONTACT INFORMATION

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