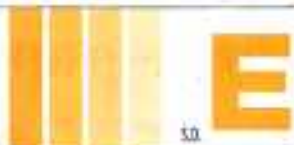


## TROPICAL LIFE



The Miami Herald



MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2008 | EDITOR: MARIE LAMBERT mlambert@miamiherald.com 305-376-4939 or 954-764-7095 ext. 4939



A Miami photographer-adventurer remembers an Afghanistan from a peaceful time

PHOTOS BY AL DIAZ/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**THE SHOOTER:** Joseph Hoyt with one of his images from Afghanistan. Below left is Hoyt's photo *Chillum Seller* taken in Kandahar in 1973.

## CAPTURING BEAUTY



BY JAWEED KALEEM  
jkaleem@miamiherald.com

Joseph Hoyt was a 22-year-old backpacker on the Grecian islands when he first heard of the mountainous peaks and sweltering deserts of Afghanistan. Fresh out of college and armed with savings from a year as a medical orderly, he was in Europe to do what many 20-somethings do: lose, or possibly find, himself in travel.

He didn't think it would become an on-and-off five years of traipsing the Middle East and South Asia. He

baby-sat kids in Turkey. He hitchhiked across Iran. He roamed the ancient ruins of Mohenjo-daro in Pakistan. A few months in one country and weeks in the next, Hoyt — an amateur photographer toting a Nikon — snaked east as far as Singapore. But nothing caught him like Afghanistan.

"It was beautiful. It was untouched. It was safe," says Hoyt, 60, of South Miami. "It was really fun to walk around and engage people. It opens up a whole world to you." •

Camera in hand, he met Uzbek shepherds by mud-and-rock homes, turbaned Kabul bird-sellers, bearded streetside blacksmiths, tired camel drivers and nomad traders of the Khyber Pass.

Kept away in a storage chest for decades, Hoyt recently brought 50 of these black-and-white photos to light for display at the San Francisco Public Library. *Afghanistan: 1970-1975: Images from an Era of Peace* shows that nation prior to

• TURN TO AFGHANISTAN, 2E

## CAPTURING BEAUTY

# Photographer recalls time of peace in Afghanistan

## AFGHANISTAN, FROM 1E

the scars that stamp it today; before the Soviet invasion, before the Taliban regime and long before U.S. missiles struck the caves of Tora Bora.

Hoyt, who supplemented his savings while living abroad with sales from Oriental rugs he brought back to the United States, later sold antique ceiling fans from a storefront on Miami's Coral Way. After coming home in 1975 and later marrying, the news of turmoil in his home away from home cemented the fact that he couldn't return. In fact, history is what inspired Hoyt to dig out his film for the public.

"With the invasion of the Russians in '79, I was totally blown away. And with the uprising of the Taliban, we realized it could get worse," he says. "For many years I was despondent to watch what happened in this country because they were such wonderful people I had become friends with."

He met young boys dressed in western garb, crowded together and giggling while learning to read verses of the Koran. He rode bejeweled, standing-room-only buses from the city to the countryside, crisscrossing the same paths as Alexander the Great, Kushan Buddhists, Muslim Arabs and British colonialists. He stood in awe at the 1,500-year-old Bamiyan Buddha statues, which the Taliban destroyed in 2001. He spoke survival Dari and got by with body language, laughs and smiles — and many cups of warm chai.

"Kabul was full of little hotels that were full of American and European tourists. We were all explorers or vagabonds or seekers — I guess many people were seeking another meaning of life," he says. "It was a time of upheaval in the United States. If I wasn't in Afghanistan, I might have been off getting drafted."

It took some high-tech equipment and a push from his wife and friends to get out the prints. With



PHOTO BY AL BAZZIMINI/HEROLD STAMP



**PEACEFUL IMAGES:** Joseph Hoyt thumbs through his book, *Afghanistan 1970-1975: Images From an Era of Peace*, top. Above are three Hoyt photos taken in 1971: *Nomad Traders in the Khyber Pass*, left; two policemen encountered on the street in Jalalabad, center; and *Entrance to a Chai Khana* — a tea house

film too ruined for traditional developing, Hoyt used a professional negative scanner and digital image printers, plus a crash course in Adobe Photoshop. It was 2004, Iraq and Afghanistan dominated the news, and he wanted to show the forgotten place he knew. But Hoyt was unsure. Were the photos any good? Would there be an audience?

"Sometimes you just got to give people a kick," says noted environmental photographer Clyde Butcher, best known for his Everglades photos. "It's important to people to see what Afghanistan was like before all this mess happened." Hoyt met Butcher during a photography workshop and Butcher later helped him work the project's technical aspects. He also gave Hoyt that much-needed kick.

"The photos revealed a sort of everyday Afghanistan through the lives of people of all ages set against, in some cases, really amazing landscapes," says Lisa Vestal, curator of the San Francisco exhibit, on display since October and running through Jan. 18. "It

## AFGHANISTAN 1970-1975: IMAGES FROM AN ERA OF PEACE

**What:** Joseph Hoyt shares and discusses his photographs of pre-war Afghanistan

**Where:** Books & Books, 285 Aragon Ave., Coral Gables

**When:** 4 p.m. Dec. 14

**Cost:** Free

**Info:** 305-442-6608 or [www.booksandbooks.com](http://www.booksandbooks.com)

really gives a face to a nation."

The exhibit is Hoyt's third show. In February 2005 a handful of photos were shown at Books & Books in Coral Gables and in March 2007 he displayed another batch at the West Dade Regional library in Westchester.

Nazefa Given, who was born in Kabul and now lives in Coconut Grove, saw the library exhibit with her mother. She later helped Hoyt write captions for the exhibit's catalog, filling the blanks about common scenes he couldn't recall after many decades.

"The Afghanistan that Joe did a pictorial of is the Afghanistan I remember. It brought nostalgia," says Given, who left in 1968 and is now an architect. "The Afghanistan that exists today is as foreign to me as it would be to anybody who hasn't ever been to the place."

Hoyt believes the old Afghanistan still exists in the lives and hopes and everyday Afghans. With time, he says, people may begin to recognize it. Profits from the photo catalog, on sale at Books and Books, will go toward Ormeid International, a nonprofit working to bring housing, education and medical attention to Afghan orphans.

"Pictures really do have an impact on people," Hoyt says. "I hope that by viewing this people will think 'Wow, these people are just like us.'"