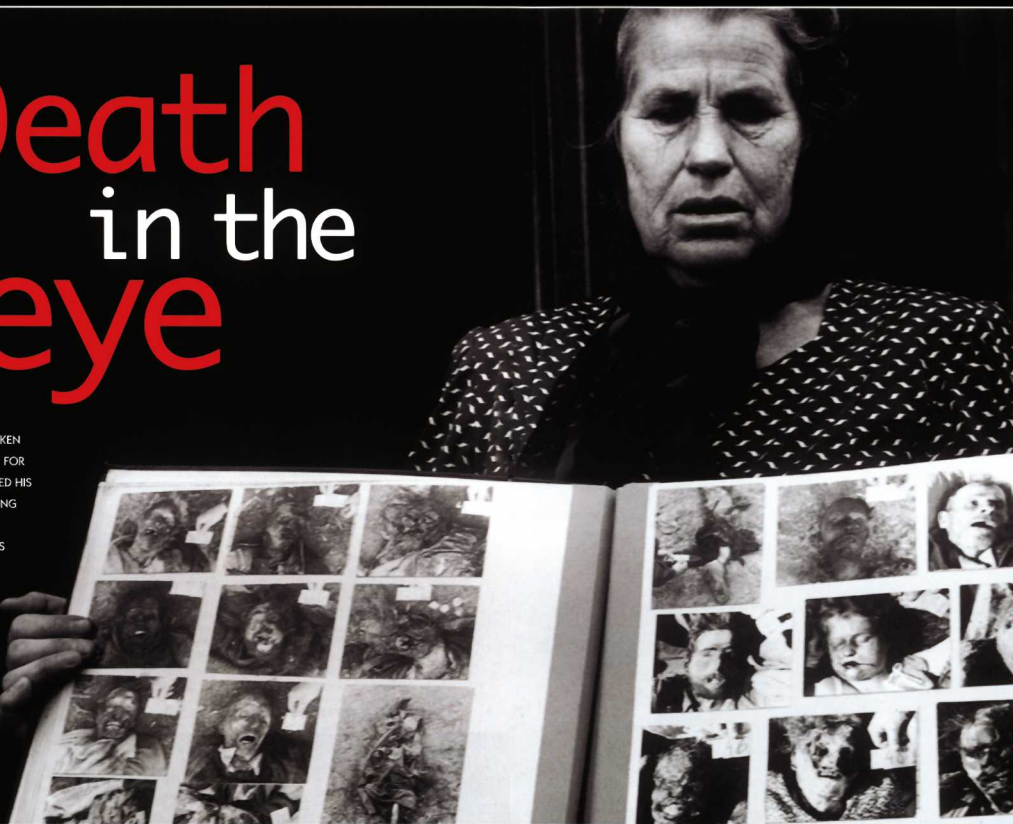


Death in the eye

DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY HAS TAKEN CHARLES PAGE TO OVER 50 COUNTRIES. FOR THE LAST FIVE YEARS HE HAS VOLUNTEERED HIS SERVICES TO THE RED CROSS, UNDERTAKING MISSIONS IN THAILAND, SOMALIA, AFGHANISTAN AND CHECHNYA. HE LIVES IN BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA, WHERE HE LECTURES IN PHOTOGRAPHY AT GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY.



These pictures deal with death. As La Rochefoucauld said, "Neither the sun nor death may be looked at for long." Like the sun, these images are painful to look at.

Photographs testify to a relationship between the photographer and his subject, and then inevitably with the viewer. As a concerned photographer this is what I saw, felt, photographed. Share my experience. No one can totally share it, of course, since distance and context anaesthetise response. Unlike the photographer, who was an active participant, others can escape the horror with the turning of a page or by simply looking away. Yet, removed from our conscious gaze, the images cannot be forgotten.

There is more which joins these photographs. The people portrayed are victims of situations beyond their control. In a sane world they could have evaded the events which now confront them.

A small boy in Afghanistan survived a mine explosion, but has been maimed by a weapon which should not have existed. In Somalia a child dies because he had no food to sustain him. I watched him die for the lack of something I take for granted. A Thai baby, infected by a virus passed on by a parent, was doomed to die from the moment of conception. A Chechen mother holds a Book of Death, an album of photographs which confirms a missing son's fate.

The old lady seemed almost relieved that at last she knew for certain. This image deals with death and the living. Inevitably there are survivors. I, too, was part of the living. Having taken my photograph I put down the camera and put my arms around her. When she walked away she didn't look back. She had seen too much, and could look no longer.

Charles J. Page

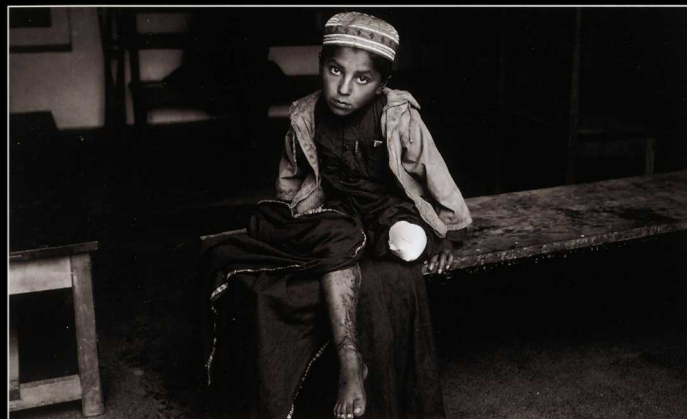
▲ Woman and Book of Death, Grozny. In Chechnya, as in all war zones, many of the dead were unidentified. Photo albums of corpses give relatives a chance to learn what happened to their loved ones. Many searched through the books at a centre in Grozny. This woman had just found her son and insisted on showing the page that displayed his photograph.



▲ Baby infected with HIV, Bangkok. In the Red Cross hospital, several wards are devoted to HIV/AIDS babies. Segregated they await their fate. Many are orphans. Their parents have already succumbed.

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► Starving child, Baldoe. Shortly after this photograph was taken the child died, too emaciated to retain fluids, too weak to fight for life. In Somalia there was money for weapons and the fighters didn't seem to be starving. They alone had the strength to fight.



▲ Mine victim, Peshawar, Pakistan. Sitting alone, he embodied the tragedy of all mine victims. His physical injuries had been treated at the ICRC hospital and soon he would be fitted with an artificial limb. One day he'll return to Afghanistan and along with thousands of other mine victims try to survive in a hostile environment.