

meet international photographer Claudia Schechter of The Listening Lens

"Hsinbyume Paya." Schechter says she "felt like the seven wavy terraces around the stupa (religious monument), which represent the seven mountains around Mount Meru, were symbols of this young monk's spiritual journey."

editor *Deb Owens* *chatted* with Fairfield's Claudia Schechter, an international photographer with an altruistic bent. Her photographs speak for themselves, but here's a little background on the talented artist.

FM: Where do you make your home?

CS: Although Fairfield is my official residence, I feel most at home behind the camera—and that could be anywhere from the fjords of Patagonia to a Buddhist temple in Myanmar, among a troupe of university students in Europe or a team of doctors in a third world operating room.

FM: What exactly is your company, The Listening Lens?

CS: The Listening Lens is a reflection of my passion for photography and desire to capture the extraordinary in the every day lives of people all over the world. I chose the name, The Listening Lens, because it really describes my approach to my work and my sensitivity to my subjects and my natural curiosity about life. I don't use words to connect with my subjects—I listen. I embrace their cultures and capture the spontaneity of

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their lives on film because I’ve come to understand how precious and potentially fleeting these ancient traditions are. Over the course of nearly two decades, I’ve traveled far and wide—from India and Ireland to Paris and Peru, Kenya and Cuba to India, Vietnam and Israel, and just about everywhere in between. My images not only help charitable organizations raise substantial funds, [but also] they help raise awareness of our interconnectedness and responsibility as members of the global community.

FM: What is your photography background?

CS: International photography wasn’t my first love. I’ve always been curious about the human body and the natural world. I studied biology and biomedical photography at the Rochester Institute of Technology, but it wasn’t long before I switched majors to focus on biomedical photography and communications, developing an eye for detail and skills in still photography, television and filmmaking in the medical field. Even early in my career, my photographic adventures took me to places most photographers have never been—to morgues, operating rooms, emergency rooms, surgery suites, laboratories and teaching universities. As a Medical Photographer at the University of

“On the road to Golden Rock.” After ten hours on the road Schechter got out to stretch her legs just as this Danu Minority woman took a break from her tending this lush, green field.

Pennsylvania, I photographed a variety of procedures and patients—from dental and plastic surgery to OR, ER and veterinary medical procedures—for teaching and research by doctors and medical staff.

FM: How did you become an international photographer?

CS: Having developed expertise in photographic technology, I turned my attention to selling photographic equipment and teaching special effects to professionals. But it was at FUJI Photo Film USA that I cultivated knowledge of film and love of color, selling film and cameras to color-critical professionals in the fashion, beauty, manufacturing, newspaper, food, and medical industries. After a brief foray into pharmaceutical sales, I was really missing photography—not just talking about film and techniques, but also being behind the camera myself. So I decided to start my own company, combining my two greatest passions: photography and adventure travel.

FM: How are you enjoying this career?

CS: Today, I am pursuing my dream—seeing the world through The Listening Lens. It may seem a total departure from my days as a sales executive, but I see it as a new sales adventure—this time I’m selling the world and all it has to offer to those who may never have the chance to see or visit some of the exotic places I’ve been.

FM: How would you describe your portfolio?

CS: If I were to describe up my portfolio, I would say that it is filled with life stories captured in a single moment. I try to reveal the inner light of my subjects as they perform the simple rituals and routines of daily life. Second only to my favorite subjects—people and the natural world—is color. It’s a common theme in my work. I remember people and places in terms of color—the sea of saffron robes worn by monks in Myanmar, the vivid plaids wrapped around Vietnamese schoolgirls to the deep, ebony complexions of Kenyan children. I find that the rich intensity of color often contradicts the financial realities of the people and environments I photograph.



PHOTOS BY CLAUDIA SCHECHTER

FM: Where can our readers view (and purchase) your work?

CS: I have an online photo gallery at my website, thelisteninglens.com. I wanted visitors to feel like they were there when I took the shots, so I went back to my travel notes and used them to tell the stories. Sometimes I say where I was and what was happening; other images just left me with a feeling or thought, so I share that, too. Here’s one of my favorites—it’s not a dream sequence, it really happened on my trip to Galway, Ireland: “While hiking in Galway’s countryside, the sound of angels emerged from the greenly hills. Drawing closer, a lone

musician, plucking his harp, came into view. Unaware of my presence, I paused to appreciate the soundtrack he was creating for this perfect moment.” Each photo has a unique story, but I tell people to go ahead and imagine their own.

FM: How do you spend your non-working time?



above: “A sea of saffron robes.” Monks at a festival at the Shwedagon Pagoda line up to receive gifts of rice, candy and money from locals; left: “School girls in Jerusalem.” Among the hushed chatter of young Muslim school children, this girl’s calm glance suggested a certain seriousness... wisdom beyond her years.


CS: When I'm not traveling or doing photography, I'm usually learning more about it. I'll be attending travel photography workshops in Santa Fe, New Mexico to learn more about lighting and composition, which is critical for shooting large-scale subjects, like festivals and ceremonies, schools and marketplaces. I also enjoy traveling and sharing learning experiences with other adventure photographers, many of whom will be joining me at the Sundance Film Festival Photo Seminar in March 2007.

FM: Do you do any work here in Fairfield?

CS: Recently, Fairfield University commissioned me to photograph a group of nursing students in Italy for their new study abroad program brochure. As I accompanied the students on their visits to hospitals and nursing home facilities, I was fascinated by their enthusiasm and genuine interest in exchanging experiences with their Italian peers. Of course, this became the essence of my work there. This year, I'm looking forward to creating visual documentaries for more educational and cultural exchange programs, as well as family and naturalist adventures.

FM: What else is on the horizon?

CS: For one, I'll be returning to my roots in medical photography. Since I have a unique background as a medical photographer with international photography experience, I'll be accompanying not-for-profit organizations to third-world countries to document the important work they do, particularly the life-saving medical procedures they perform. I'm passionate about letting my work give voice to people and social issues, build global understanding and raise awareness of the need for volunteers and financial support that allow not-for-profit organizations to continue doing their good and necessary work.

And, as much as I love to document cultural rites of passage or ancient customs, I am a nature lover. Whether I'm soaking in the sun as it sets on the Gobi Desert or enjoying a walk at Lake Mohegan with my golden retriever, Dakota, I'm always thinking about what's next and thankful for the journey so far. 

Claudia Schechter is available to speak to groups and show her work. For more information about speaking engagements, services for international travel, educational programs and medical/humanitarian efforts, visit thelisteninglens.com or call 374-8821.