

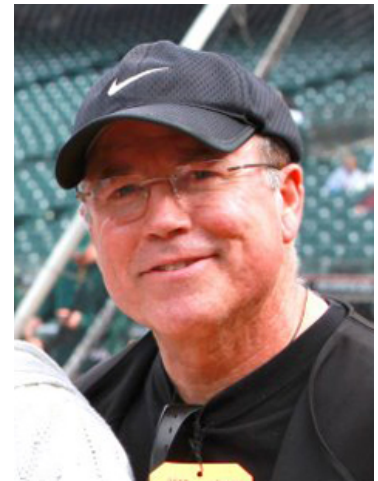
Michael Collopy: A Portrait of Compassion

by Maren Symonds

If you look behind the camera at a UTAC photo shoot, you'll see one of the world's preeminent portrait photographers, UTAC Board member Michael Collopy. With a stunning body of work that includes hundreds of world leaders, entertainers, professional athletes, and cultural icons, Michael is renowned for his capacity to capture the essence of his subjects on film. Alongside these high profile commissions, Michael plies his craft to tell deeply personal stories from around the globe. Since the early 1980s, many such stories involve HIV/AIDS.

A San Francisco native, Michael lived and worked in a city thrown in turmoil by the AIDS pandemic. "[HIV/AIDS] really affected a large percentage of our community. At the time, we didn't know that much about the disease, but it carried quite a stigma. Sufferers were rejected. Some within government wanted to impose quarantines. The religious right said [persons living with HIV/AIDS] deserved it for the lives they led," he recalls. "I got really incensed. And I decided to get involved."

Michael documented some of the first cases of HIV/AIDS. His subjects were doctors, lawyers, teachers, artists, homeless people, and more. They let him inside their struggles with disease and the pain of rejection. Many were uncomfortable about coming out or afraid to expose their history with substance abuse. Others simply did not wish to burden their families and friends with their illness. They suffered in isolation. All of their stories were heartbreaking. Yet through the power of the photograph, Michael's audience learned to care about his newfound friends.



"I think about David, a person with AIDS who lived on the streets. He told me that he'd never had a lot of friends. Yet his story touched a lot of people. They rallied to care for him," Michael said. "I was at his bedside when he died. He was surrounded by a roomful of people who truly loved him. In those last days of his life, he was deeply grateful to have friends."

A chance encounter with Mother Teresa in 1982 provided Michael with another lens through which the AIDS pandemic could be explored. She and the sisters at the Missionaries of Charity provided homes for persons who suffered physical and emotional anguish due to this insidious disease. At a time when fear of transmission reached a fevered pitch, Mother Teresa faced her critics with her usual aplomb. When asked how she protected herself, she said, "I wash my hands." She did not see danger but rather the face of God in the people she served. In her mind, they deserved to feel the warmth of a human hand.

Michael collaborated with Mother Teresa on the 1996 photo essay entitled *Works of Love are Works of Peace*. This critically acclaimed documentary provides a comprehensive portrait of the Missionaries of Charity and the spirit that surrounds their mission. Michael reflected on the spirit he witnessed at a house of dying in Calcutta.

"They were carrying out two bodies as we arrived. The people here were very poor. Most were dying from TB, typhoid, and other infectious diseases. Yet what I witnessed of the vows in this religious order was a vow of joyfulness. The nuns radiated a deep sense of satisfaction for having lifted these people out of poverty. The circumstances were grave, yet these were very peaceful places."

Since 2005, Michael has worked with a broad spectrum of celebrities who lend their names and images to Until There's A Cure's public service advertising campaign. Like Michael, they are selfless individuals who are 100% committed to putting an end to the pandemic and providing compassionate care to persons affected by HIV/AIDS.

"We are all a part of one family. We complete each other. Our brothers and sisters are affected," he said. "It is easy to get involved when you simply love them."

Stand with Michael in solidarity with persons affected by HIV/AIDS... Until There's A Cure.

To view Michael's work, go to www.until.org/ads.shtml or scu.edu/ethics/architects-of-peace/gallery.html.

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Headquartered in Redwood City, CA, Until There's A Cure® Foundation is a national organization dedicated to AIDS awareness and prevention education, care and services for those living with AIDS and vaccine development.