

Travels With Aunt Jean **By Stephanie Celano, Staff Writer**

Upon meeting Jean Pritchard, one is impressed by her clear blue eyes and gentle smile that set you at ease. Her demeanor is quite genuine and forthright, like that of a child. It's not difficult to understand why she's become such a successful children's photographer.

As a global photographer with more than thirty years of experience, Jean's honesty and purity of spirit are certainly reflected in her work; she simply captures the essence of whomever or whatever it is that she is shooting. Jean travels the world making friends while photographing children and landscape scenery using mainly black and white film—now specifically infra-red for scenery because, as she says, "Infra-red lends itself so well to scenery and people out there doing their life. Everything that has energy in the photographs will go light," creating a stronger contrast of light and dark. In combination with this technique, Jean sometimes hand-paints her photographs to accentuate aspects of her photos with color. She began hand-painting her photos over fifteen years ago, a technique that has recently become popular.

Originally a native of Decatur, Illinois, Jean moved to Los Angeles in the summer of 1966 upon the suggestion of a friend. It was at this time that she would discover her true passion in life, as well as the practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. She had been working various jobs in bookkeeping and cashiering during this period of her life, and describes herself as being very lonely and needy, really negative about her life in relationship to other people. She had no appreciation at all for her life.

On September 25, 1967, Jean's friend Marcia Salisbury introduced her to the practice. For the first three years, Jean chanted to develop friendships. As a result, she learned through her Buddhist practice that she first had to learn to love herself and then her relationship with others would improve. Following an excerpt from the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, Jean encouraged herself to "employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 245).

Jean chanted to know if her mission was to be in photography. As long as she could remember, she was interested in photography. She gave herself one year to reach her goal. Two weeks later Jean was offered a job at her friend John Wolf's photo lab. It was here that she learned the fundamentals of printing and photography. After twelve years of developing her skills, she finally decided to start her own business.

At the beginning of her twentieth year of practice, with no money or prospects, Jean chanted to realize her dream. Her prayer was answered when she secured an interest-free loan for \$8,500 to start her business, and My Favorite Black and White Lab was born. Jean recounts: "The first week I was open I made fifty dollars. I made a determination to be debt-free within two years, and I was."

Jean's photo and processing business has been solvent for eleven years now, and

is steadily increasing in revenue. Her clientele includes well-known professionals as well as amateurs who are great sources of encouragement for her. Jean has had the opportunity to photograph some familiar faces such as Dennis Hopper, Christopher Reeves, George Forman, Cynthia Gibb and Russ Tamblyn. She does her best to take a personal interest in all her customers no matter their status. Additionally, she travels the world photographing exotic places including China, Hong Kong, Japan, Europe and the United States.

Although she enjoys all the places that she's visited, Jean is particularly interested in photographing the scenery of the United States. "I have a really big desire to leave something behind about the United States because we have such incredibly beautiful cities, every bit as beautiful as Europe—especially in the Midwest. I love the silos of the Midwest. To me they're just as beautiful as the castles of Europe." She likes to shoot "buildings and places that look like they've been around long enough to have been touched by a lot of people; that have great stories to tell." These photos are part of her exhibit titled "Travels With Aunt Jean."

As for her style as a professional photographer, Jean says she's "a point and shoot type of person"; she shoots the environment as it's happening, regardless of what the lighting conditions are. "I really go by my life rather than by my brain; I frame as I shoot." Finding infra-red changed her work tremendously. She feels she has a special relationship with this type of film: "The first time I ever shot it and looked at what I got, it was like my life remembered it. I love it and I know how to shoot it and I know how to get good images on infra-red."

Children's photography is of particular interest to Jean because she feels so much like a kid herself. She says she's able to act really ridiculous, which puts children at ease. Jean loves to make kids laugh by making silly faces and being really animated. "Instead of trying to get them to fit into my rhythm, I fit into theirs. I love being around children."

As for the influences in her career, she credits her friends in faith—those who have been able to encourage her to pursue her dream. "Wayne and Lisa Green have encouraged me to go for it. They also give me a lot of love. If a person knows that they're loved, they're going to be more influenced and they're going to listen." Although Jean appreciates and admires the work of other photographers, she believes that her trust and strong connection to the people that she meets through her business are also some of the greatest influences in her life.

Jean is not overly concerned with fame and fortune, although she enjoys when her photographs are published. Her photos have graced the covers of *Photographer's Forum*, *Minolta*, *Essence*, *Modern Maturity*, *Women's View*, and the former *Seikyo Times*.

In 1997, Jean received a Mayoral commendation from Councilwoman Ruth Gallanter for her work with Lincoln Corridor Community Watch, a group of Venice business people and residents trying to clean up, make safer and more attractive Lincoln Boulevard. Also, the SGI honored Jean with the highest award for a photo taken in Idyllwild, California, which she entered in an international contest at the last minute. "If no one recognizes my photography until after I die,

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that's O.K., as long as someone sees through my photography how beautiful the United States is." She loves her photography, she loves her customers, she loves her business and she feels very fortunate.

With all her success, Jean's heart always seems to be in an extraordinary place. When asked about her future, she comments: "I want to be able to make enough money to be able to travel where ever I want to and shoot. I want to have created enough fortune so that I don't have to sell my business. I want to be able to give my business to someone so they can do the same thing that I'm doing and create a business for themselves. Right now, I'm not rich but if I want to do something, I'm able to do it. If I want to go to France in May and take someone along, I can. And I have friends all over the world. To me, that's wealth." □

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