

Our nation's collective memory

AMY REISWIG

Thelma Fayle has written an ode to Canada's father of photojournalism, Ted Grant.



PHOTO: DARYL JONES

Thelma Fayle

We always think people see what we see," Victoria writer Thelma Fayle tells me. "They don't." This seemingly simple statement reflects an underlying message in Fayle's new book *Ted Grant: Sixty Years of Legendary Photojournalism* (Heritage House, October 2013). Grant—known as the father of Canadian photojournalism—saw things like no one else, from the world's elite power figures to the most common street scene here in Victoria, which he has called home for 32 years. And through her professional collaboration, friendship and over 50 interviews with Grant, in addition to archival research, Fayle has seen both his work and the inspiring man behind it like no one else. Now she shares that insight, as the foreword by the Right Honourable Joe Clark and Maureen McTeer explains, on how "a kind, determined, generous, and brilliant man has made one of the greatest contributions to our country's history through the lens of his camera."

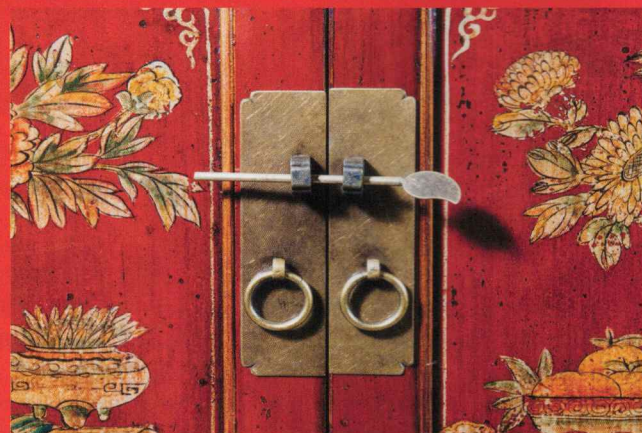
Most Canadians of a certain age recognize the book cover's iconic photo of Pierre Trudeau exuberantly sliding down a banister. It's probably Grant's best-known image and captures not just a historical moment but a human moment, telling us a story about Trudeau the man. Grant once explained photojournalism as writing with his camera, and it's what he did throughout his 60-year career: tell stories about people through his lens. His choice of stories to tell, however, is actually a surprising story in itself.

Now in his mid-80s, Grant has eight books and countless photo publications, has won major awards for his work, lectures internationally and received an honorary degree from UVic in 2008. And while he has photographed all the predictable figures from the last 60 years—Diefenbaker, Douglas, Ben-Gurion, Thatcher, Reagan, the Kennedys, our once-illustrious national hero Ben Johnson, and many more—the bulk of Grant's work is about average people both at home and abroad.

Left: Former Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in Ottawa, 1961

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PHOTO: TED GRANT

Grant captured Ben Johnson crossing the finish line at the 1988 Seoul Olympics

From the children of Chernobyl to local cardiologists or the last inhabitants of Halifax's Africville in the 1960s, Grant was most fascinated by basic human stories that we perhaps never really see: doctors, fishermen, meter maids, metal workers, loggers, farmers, cowboys, seal hunters, new mothers, a hitchhiker, actress—people living their lives, people who form our nation's and world's history, right down to two musicians relaxing on the very recognizable shallow brick steps of Victoria's Centennial Square.

Of the approximately 300,000 images in the Ted Grant special collections at Library and Archives Canada and the National Gallery, about 80 percent focuses on anonymous Canadians. "Other than Ted and the archivists, I may be the only other person to have looked at the entire body of his work," Fayle writes. "If Canadians could see the richness of their own reflected images in the Ted Grant Special Collections...they would know a little more about the importance of their individual roles in our nation."

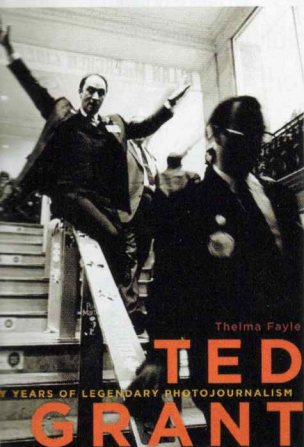
Fayle makes clear Grant's role in chronicling Canadian history, geography, politics, culture, our nation's collective memory. While we might not have occasion to visit those archives, this book and its selection of stunning photos fulfills Fayle's hope that "As you read through these pages...you will get a sense of exactly what he has given to Canadians"—something Fayle suggests the humble Grant himself isn't necessarily aware of despite his accolades. "Ted is the kind of person who would say 'I just knew it was a good picture' and not be aware of its significance," she tells me, laughing.

Of his medical photography, Grant says: "It forms a record of the men and women devoted to caring for humankind." From this book, though, it is evident that all of Grant's work stands as a record of his own caring for humankind. And so we also see, as in Grant's Trudeau photo, a story of the man himself in a book that is not simply a catalogue of great pictures or an analysis of their importance. Rather, it's a respectful, even loving biography based on interviews with Grant's friends, work colleagues and with Grant himself.

Fayle met Grant when she took a photojournalism course at Camosun, one of about 1000 courses she's taken since moving to Victoria from Montreal in 1977. Twenty-five years later, with a question about photographing the subject of an article, Fayle e-mailed Grant "with the subject line 'Downright Bold Request.'" Being an award-winning photojournalism pioneer didn't stop him from making himself available, and so they met again and a friendship was born. Given what Fayle tells us of Grant's community involvement, his accessibility isn't surprising. For example, in addition to his Camosun teaching, Grant has spoken to grade 10 photography students at Reynolds High School in Victoria every year for the past 30 years. When writing the Postmedia "House Beautiful" column in 2011, Fayle chose Grant as her photographer, and that time together was the impetus for this book. With great affection and admiration in her voice, she tells me: "I want Canadians to really know him. Everyone I interviewed said basically the same thing: 'You have no idea how special this man is.'"

With that affection, Fayle does in words what Grant does in image: notices, captures and shares individual, resonant moments—from Grant writing "Happy 60th" to his wife Irene in toothpaste on a hotel bathroom mirror to his getting up at 4 am every Christmas to personally call 200 friends, or admitting "that

he once failed to carry out an assignment to photograph a police officer pulling a toboggan carrying a drowned young boy. He was crying too hard." By incorporating parts of her inter-



views, we also hear Grant's voice, his tone and sensibility. For example, he recounts being thrown from a horse into a manure pile during an assignment on cowboys: "As I looked up at her, I swear she stood there killing herself laughing at me." And in the book's final "Ted Commandments"

tips for aspiring photojournalists, we hear his mentorly advice on things like breathing, composition, letting go of irritations, responding to your gut, carrying raisins and, simply, wondering.

Payle, who has published in the *Globe and Mail*, *Reader's Digest*, *The Tyee* and right here in *Focus*, could never have known how that one-night course with Grant would change her life, but her gutsiness to write him must have come from a wondering moment of possibility. And while the book is about Grant, her careful, sensitive selection and style shows it is actually about two artists. Excitingly, and probably also something Payle couldn't have predicted, the prestigious Leica Gallery in New York is holding a six-week show based on the book starting April 25, an incredible coup arranged by Heritage publisher Rodger Touchie.

No one does, in fact, quite see what we each see. We are lucky to have, in this book, a unique look through Payle's eyes at a great figure in photojournalism history, an important Canadian who is also, by all accounts, a great man. Every reader will no doubt see different qualities in Ted Grant's work, and it's intriguing to think about the equally different ways people might go forward with his final advice: "I encourage you to have as many 'I wonder what if' moments as you can."



Writer and editor Amy Reiswig wonders "what if" we were all bolder and took the time to learn about more of the surprising, inspiring people living in our local community.

A Royal Affair at Victoria Hospice



PAINTING BY ROBERT AMOS

Rosemary Donison was admitted to Victoria Hospice in late winter two years ago, comatose and apparently near the end of her life. At the time, there was little indication that she would live another three months.

Rosemary experienced her first rally soon after her admission, surprising everyone to the point that she was prompted to ask, "I don't have to die yet do I?" The surprises continued.

All her life Rosemary had carefully watched her diet, but now she stated, "I can eat whatever I want now." For the next few weeks, she hosted afternoon cocktail parties with her friends, enjoying her Crown Royal as well as such treats as tempura prawns which her son Christopher would routinely pick up and deliver. Keep in mind that this was all happening in a Victoria Hospice room.

Rosemary entered another non-responsive phase, but once again she rallied. This time she described a dream about the wedding dress to be worn by Catherine Middleton in the upcoming royal wedding to Prince William. She told Christopher, "I plan to be here for the wedding."

Inspired by his mother's will to live, Christopher decided to make a party of it, issuing invitations—not unlike the Buckingham Palace invitations—to her friends to come to Victoria Hospice to view the "Wedding of the Century" at 3 am on April 29th, 2011. Appropriately, Christopher planned a menu of cucumber sandwiches and champagne. The ladies arrived in gloves and hats, and the room was filled

with laughter for the next few hours. Christopher later commented that he had no idea his mother was so funny, or that there could be such hilarity and joy at the end of one's life.

Hospice staff were on board right from the start. Pam Prewett, Senior Development Officer for Annual Programs, says, "Staff want people to live their life to the fullest, right to the end. We moved Rosemary into a single room so she could have this party, as she had been in a double room. All of Rosemary's guests were welcomed, and in keeping with the celebration, even though Rosemary was unable to drink from a glass at that point, staff helped her imbibe by putting champagne in a water spritzer." Rosemary loved the party, and incredibly, she managed to hang on until her 84th birthday on May 28th.

Rosemary's story is the inspiration for the Victoria Hospice Fall Campaign now underway. The invitation to the "wedding of the century," as well as colour illustrations of the royal couple and of Christopher and his mother Rosemary, created and donated by Victoria artist Robert Amos, are part of the campaign.

It is through the generosity of community donors that Victoria Hospice is able to ensure that quality end-of-life care is available. Your donation will help patients celebrate the lives they have lived, just as Rosemary Donison did.

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