

NEWS

# Photographer Rob Beintema often goes unnoticed while capturing unforgettable images

JOHN STEWART

stewartjohn85@gmail.com

MN Feb. 15, 2018

A Mississauga News photographer had covered a community event and someone wanted to know who he was.

"I know Fred, it wasn't him. Who's the other one - the tall guy?"

The other one, the tall guy with the quiet manner, bright smile and amazing ability to blend seamlessly into the background while getting a great shot every time, even if you never quite got his name - that guy was Rob Beintema (pronounced Bine-te-mah.)

Even after he'd taken former mayor Hazel McCallion's photo several hundred times, she still called him "Mr. Photographer."

Some might be insulted that everyone remembered the late chief photographer Fred Loek and few remembered them.

But Beintema shrugs, lets it slide as he usually lets things slide and explains that it's all part of his quest at every job - to be the guy nobody notices as he captures the essence of the event.

"I don't get emotionally involved in photography situations, I'm not a socializer," says the 63-year-old who retires Feb. 9.

He may be anonymous to many, even after nearly 39 years on the job, but Beintema is venerated by peers.

"Just about every picture the guy takes is an award-winner," says Chris Horobin who worked with him more than 30 years. "There's nothing the guy hasn't won."

Even though the day of photo feature spreads is long gone, the Clarkson resident of 35 years still shoots every assignment as though it were one.

"He likes to challenge



Arthur Uyeyama photo

After almost 40 years capturing still frames of the news, events and people that ended up on the pages of The Mississauga News, and later The Brampton Guardian, photojournalist Rob Beintema is ready to focus on retirement. Above, Beintema, photographer for The News, covering the Smile China mission in Lanzhou, Gansu, China in 2004. Right, a picture of Beintema in the days when news photographers wore sleeveless undershirts, smoked and had to clean up their darkrooms. With him is co-op student Karen Mifsud. Right, one of Beintema's many award-winning photos he titled 'Mommy doesn't like the shots either' of a flu clinic in 2010. See more photos, page 71.

himself," says Horobin, page editor at Metroland's central pagination centre.

He'll never forget the day Beintema threw a single roll of film at him from two days of assignments. He'd shot a single frame at each event.

"Fred and I... our mouths are hitting the floor," recalls Horobin.

Beintema got a superior single shot from each job.

"It's still mind-boggling to me that he did that," his colleague says. (Needless to say editors weren't advised of this "experiment.") "Rob's a lucky guy."

So he is. His retirement has been accelerated by a recent \$2.5 million lottery win.

The genesis of his career is also mind-boggling.

After graduating from Brampton Centennial, he worked in factories and drove trucks. When Rob and girlfriend Mary - childhood friends who went to the same church - visited her sister, he tried out her boy-

friend's camera.

"From the very first roll, I thought I had a knack from the pictures I took."

After taking night courses at Humber and Sheridan, he made a proposal: they would marry and Rob would take creative photography at Humber while she worked as a nurse.

When he found he disliked formulaic studio photography, he applied at the Mississauga Times.

In June 1979, despite zero news experience, he was hired.

"I just had a recreational camera, a Pentax with one lens. My first job was a soccer game," laughs the father of two. "Fortunately, one guy jumped over another guy right in front of me."

His knack for the "lucky" shot, his mastery of the dark room, his skill at making setup shots look natural, his nonchalant air and sly sense of humour always set Beintema apart.

His former editor, Judy Imerson, says "Rob's a very talented photographer who captures the world around him in still-life moments. He has an amazing ability to make people comfortable in front of the camera."

In their working days Beintema recalls that Imerson put it somewhat differently: "She'd tell me, 'if you were any more laid back, you'd be in a coma.'"

When prime minister Joe Clark came to town, the national press corps lined the entrance.

"Make way for the Mississauga News!" Beintema shouted as heads swiveled.

Inside, the photographer spotted an elementary class seated at Clark's feet. He knelt with them as the PM finished his speech. When Clark reached down to shake hands and tousle heads, the national press corps was shooting the back of Beintema's head.

As good as he is with a



Metroland file photo



lens, Beintema may be better at the keyboard. He's more proud of his writing awards because he finds writing harder.

A longtime member of the Automobile Journalists Association of Canada, he was third in its 2015 journalist-of-the-year contest. His photos and story about Mississauga Dr. Joseph Wong's 2004 tour of northern China to perform surgery on children's cleft palates won first place for special section at the Canadian Community Newspaper Awards.

When he was convinced

to write regularly three decades ago, he won second place in Ontario as best columnist.

Beintema started in the era of black and white "wizardry and artistry" in the dark room, moved through the exacting process of shooting on colour transparencies and now shares digital files and video on Twitter and Instagram.

"I started out as a recreational photographer and that's what I'm going to be from now on," says Beintema. "I might even have to get myself a camera soon."