



NICOLE TUNG INTERVIEW
JIM: THE JAMES FOLEY STORY
LIFE STORIES

Nicole Tung, Photojournalist
February 5, 2015
Interviewed by Brian Oakes
Total Running Time: 2 hours, 2 minutes and 55 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Life Stories Presents

The following video contains graphic descriptions of difficult situations.

Viewer discretion is advised.

00:00:10:00

BRIAN OAKES:

All right. Okay. So you're owning, right? Yep. And just introduce yourself and what your official job title is.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Nicole Tung

Photojournalist

00:00:20:00

NICOLE TUNG:



My name is Nicole Tung. I'm a freelance photojournalist, and I'm based in Istanbul for now. I cover a lot with the Middle East since 2011 and also starting to cover Africa.

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BRIAN OAKES:

Tell me about the moment that you decided you wanted to become a photojournalist.

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NICOLE TUNG:

I think the moment I decided I wanted to be a photojournalist was. I took a trip in my freshman year of college to Bosnia. And this was like 2006. I was 19. I was pretty close by because I was studying my first year in Italy, and, I had been reading up a lot on, you know, the, the peace accords and also the, the war in the 1990s. And it just sort of became this fascination of mine. And so during spring break, I just bought a plane ticket to Sarajevo. And I met up with some local NGOs there, just met, you know, it was just traveling alone, meeting people along the way. And, I had this chance to go to a town in the east of the country called Tuzla, where a lot of the Bosnian widows had fled from the Serbian and some massacre in 1995. So when I went there, I was, you know, just trying to talk to them. And I was I had this kind of little crappy canon camera shooting with slides and, you know, I started taking some photographs of them. And I'd always been interested in photojournalism, but it never I just never realized that it's what I wanted to do. Until I got back to school and I, you know, processed the film and everything, and I saw, you know, it's just sort of brought back those the memory of being with them and



spending that time with them. Just the images were so much more powerful than anything I could have probably written. So I think that was a huge factor in deciding, you know, this is what I want to do.

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BRIAN OAKES:

When you were taking the photos in Bosnia, do you remember seeing some of the suppose you were taken kind of captivated by them and.

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NICOLE TUNG:

Wanting to do that? Yeah. So one of the photos that I took in Bosnia was of the, the women, the widows who were, you know, sitting in a room. They were talking to me and, I just as I was leaving, they all stood up. You know, I took a quick photograph and it was they were all kind of looking in different directions, but also the colors, because I was inside, I had the slide film and, there was a, you know, weird fluorescent light. It just came out blues and greens and, the mood of that image and their disposition on their faces was to me like, wow, there are so many stories here that I just wish I could have had more time to listen to. And I wanted to explore that more, you know, I wanted to know what was behind them and their lives and what they'd seen, what they'd been through. They were still, stationed at this internally displaced persons camp, like 11 years after the war at that time. And it just seemed unfathomable to me. You know, we kind of document war and then forget about its aftermath. And I think that consequence was became really important to me. I wanted to kind of see what is that process of being in war and then having to deal with it afterwards. And who is most affected?



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BRIAN OAKES:

So after Bosnia, you kind of fast forward and you enter this career and in photojournalism. Explain kind of maybe the places that you've been in your career and projects that you've worked on and kind of some maybe some special moments during those.

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NICOLE TUNG:

So yeah, I think I think since Bosnia and throughout college I had, you know, started to work on some projects. I got little grants here and there from NYU where I was studying. And I went back to the Balkans. I went to Kosovo. I was trying to do some stories on human trafficking there that proved. And I was very young, so I didn't really know what I was doing, just didn't quite work out. But still, I got to see Kosovo become a country. And it was in this transition in like 2008, where it had separated from Serbia. And then afterwards I, you know, when I graduated, I started freelancing here in New York City and, just kind of went up from there and started doing local assignments. And then once it hit 2011, when the Egyptian revolution had started, right after Tunisia, I'd always been fascinated by the Middle East. I did Middle Eastern studies, so I was like, I have to go. It's like the the right time. So without an assignment, I jumped on a plane. I was in Paris at the time, and I just landed in Cairo. I knew there were a few photographers around that were friends. And Chris Hondros was one of them, so I didn't really feel like I was going completely into the unknown. But having no kind of Arabic language skills and never having been to the region, it was a little



scary, you know, going there, and it was like I arrived, the night before Mubarak stepped down from power. And it was just this complete scene of, I don't know, I'd never really covered massive protests before. And walking into Tahrir Square was just this phenomenal event. And I think in hindsight, it's easy to look at it like, wow. So such a narrow scope of coverage. But, yeah, shortly after that, I went to Libya. Shortly after that, I went to Syria. And I've been kind of stuck in the Middle East since.

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BRIAN OAKES:

It'll move out a little bit. Your first the first experience of going into a conflict zone for the first time.

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NICOLE TUNG:

When I went into Libya in February 2011, it was still this kind of nascent revolution. People protesting in the streets, Benghazi had been freed. It was just the eastern city, and it hadn't become a full blown war until three weeks later. So I was there. And it just sort of happened very quickly. One day it was, you know, kind of quiet, and the next it became a war. I, I didn't have any kind of prior preparation for it. You know, I was just relying on my instincts and the veteran journalist who were around me. And, you know, I was very lucky to have people like, you know, seasoned war correspondents to share cars with us because it saved my life. And I learned just by watching them, how to move, where to go, you know, people to talk to, how to stay safe. And they often kind of, in turn helped me and helped look out for me. So that was a



really kind of steep learning curve that I probably wouldn't do again now in my life.

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BRIAN OAKES:

When you say seasoned correspondents like who? Who are you referring to? Or some of those when?

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NICOLE TUNG:

Well, there was a Peter Bouckaert from Human Rights Watch who's, he is the emergencies team, head. And they were going into Libya at the very beginning as well. And basically I came to the border of Egypt and Libya alone, and I was going to go into Libya, into Benghazi by myself. And he saw me at the border crossing, and he was like, what are you doing here? And I was like, you know, going to Libya. And he was like, yeah, I think, I think you should probably, you know, come ride in our car. It's a little safer that way. So through him, you know, he sort of ensured that I would be safe. And from there, you know, a lot of the journalists stayed in one hotel in Benghazi. And that's how I started meeting people like John Lee Anderson. You know, other photographers like Ben Lowy and, my friend Michael Christopher Brown as well. So. And Frank Pejeta, another photographer from, from the Seven Agency. So, yeah, a lot of us were kind of holed up in this one hotel, but it was actually the Al Jazeera. He was like a safety coordinator. And he, he's also a cameraman who, basically one day said to me, you don't have any body armor. You're going to the front line every day. So we have a lot of extra gear here. Just take one of the flak jackets and here's a, you know, first aid kit. I'll



give you a quick rundown of how to treat a wound just so that you can stay safe. And that was really, you know, gracious of him to do. I'm, like, really indebted to him for, you know, lending me that gear when I was clearly just out there as a freelancer without the kind of resources available to me.

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BRIAN OAKES:

Peter Bouckaert, I know he's Human Rights Watch, but what does he actually do? What is his when did he start as a journalist? And those rights watch him.

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NICOLE TUNG:

As far as I know, Peter has been working with Human Rights Watch since the Balkan Wars. So the 1990s, I don't know what his career was before that, but, yeah, he's been working in pretty much every major conflict since the 1990s. And he's the director of the emergencies team. So basically, when the, you know, when their crisis breaks out, there's an emergency and they have to send in researchers. It's very different from what all the other rights groups do, because they are kind of there very quickly and able to document, firsthand account and witnesses, what they've seen and try to very quickly draft, papers and try to change some, some sort of policy or. Yeah.

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BRIAN OAKES:

So can you just define the difference between know the title of a journalist and a freelance journalist?



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NICOLE TUNG:

So, the title of a journalist in this day and age, I guess, is referring to a staff journalist. So someone who is with a media organization, for example, on staff of the New York Times or Al Jazeera or CNN, and they're identified as staff with the backing of their organization, with of their publication. They have editors they work closely with, and, you know, they're employed by that company. They have a steady paycheck. If they go into conflict zones, it's understood that they're, you know, guaranteed, safety protocols and also insurance, etc., etc., with the title of a freelance journalist. It's exactly what a freelancer does in any other industry, which is, basically being self-employed and working with various different publications, building up relationships with those publications, but also not having benefits, and, you know, pretty much paying your way through your career, whilst trying to get, you know, assignments or. Work published with various media outlets.

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BRIAN OAKES:

As a freelance journalist, will you get an assignment before you head off to there, or would you go to an area and then do your journalism and then hope to sell it or cover it for media?

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NICOLE TUNG:

As a freelancer, you can do two different things. One, which is being sent to a place by a publication, which means you're on assignment for them exclusively. Or you can do on spec work, which is you go to a particular



location, let's say, you know, I don't know where it is, Ukraine or even Syria, which is what I did. And you, come up with a body of work or a story, and then you sell it after after the fact. So that's what we call on spec work.

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BRIAN OAKES:

Do you, as a freelance journalists, receive from government, private institutions, the freelance community itself? Like what kind of practical support is there a thing.

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NICOLE TUNG:

As a freelance journalist? The practical support we've been getting as of late has mostly been training, and, you know, workshops and things of the like, traditionally freelancers really just didn't get any kind of support. You know, we just out there on our own, you pay for your own insurance sometimes or don't have insurance at all. And psychological support, you know, you don't have anyway, but, lately, because there have been so many more freelancers working in the media industry, there's a realization that there needs to be kind of more support and more training for the freelancers to work and operate responsibly. So there have been things like reporters instructed in saving colleagues, which is a, medical trauma training course that's set up for freelancers specifically to train us and, how to treat battlefield wounds. If, if, you know, myself or my colleague is injured, for example. That course is free. And also, organizations like the Roy Peck Trust have been trying to, help give, I guess, scholarships or funding to freelancers to enable them to do other hostile environment training courses. But other than that, the practical



support from the media organizations themselves when we're being put on assignment or when they take on spec work from us, especially if we've worked with them before, has a lot of a lot of room for improvement still.

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BRIAN OAKES:

So if there was one area where you could if you could say, this is where I would really like to have more support in, do you have is there like a specific area that you would that you would like to see kind of looked at as far as support goes.

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NICOLE TUNG:

If there was one area in which I would want more support, that's probably well, it's hard to say. It comes in different levels of priority, I think. Yeah. Safety training, first aid training. You know, I've, I did the risk course, but, you know, you sort of need to refresh your memory every year, on that. But also, personally, I just think the publications need to be fair with their payment. You know, it's a very ad hoc situation. And, there's free wheeling market where, freelancers don't have a union to represent themselves. So it's, it's really up to the publication and the freelancer and often the publication is it's in their best interest to pay as little as possible. And the freelancer will often have to accept that rate because, they don't want to lose the relationship with a publication. You know, they want to establish a long relationship with them. So they'll say, okay, I'll take that day rate that you're you're going to give me, even though it should be more, you know, is your life worth \$300 a day or even less when you're in a war zone? I don't think so. So, and the reason why



I say payment is because we equate payment with safety. If, you know, I have to pay my way out of somewhere. I, you know, want to be able to hire a trusted driver. And I, you know, this this is one thing that relates to Jim that I always wonder about, which is, you know, had he had a trusted driver that day, he came to the border meet. Would that have changed the equation or the outcome? Instead, you know, he hired a taxi. You know, just kind of taxi that was sitting on the side of the road. And, I would have done the same thing because it would have cut costs for me. I wouldn't have to hire a driver. I would just take a cab. So it calculates a lot into how we, determines safety and all of that.

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BRIAN OAKES:

What is the responsibility of a photojournalist in your mind?

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NICOLE TUNG:

I could get real philosophical on you. I think the responsibility of a photojournalist is to simply just document what's in front of you. But it goes so much more beyond that. You know, I think, first of all, my job when I'm out there is to bring context to a situation. But also record what's happening right in front of me. And to try to be balanced about it, you know, because I think as a photographer, it's easy to excuse things. You know, you're capturing a slice of a moment, and, and you kind of everything else is on the periphery. And people who see those images don't see what else is around it. So again, that's like the context issue that one needs to bring. When you know, and keep in mind when you're photographing, am I showing, the breadth of the



situation? Is it, you know, am I simplifying it for people too much? I think also it's about making connections with people. I don't want to just show people the gore of a war. And I think that's almost too easy to show. You know, I want to show the complexity behind it and also the compassion and how people's lives in Syria still have a connection or a relation to people here in America. You know, creating those emotional connections and images and getting intimate with your subjects and spending time with them, and that's how you kind of get to know them. But also in, I guess, from a bird's eye view, we have this responsibility to, be witnesses and to document history as it is and, and atrocities, etc. for people to not be able to say in the future that we didn't know what was going on. I think that's really important.

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BRIAN OAKES:

What is your relationship with the subjects that you photograph?

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NICOLE TUNG:

My relationship with the people that I photograph is really just a human one. I don't really know how to approach it any other way. You know, I kind of just want to learn about their lives and to, you know, understand the situation or the predicament or, you know, the life they live. And I think just trying to get to that basic root of things is how I can make images impactful on, you know, people who see them, being sensitive to their culture, their religion, etc. that comes along with it. And, I'd like to always be a fly on the wall. But obviously my presence affects, how people act in front of a camera. So I'm never going to just be kind of unnoticeable. But yeah. So a lot of the images have to do



with my relationship with them. And, sometimes I know that it's more distance than I'd like, but other times, when you kind of spend more time with people that comes through in the pictures.

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BRIAN OAKES:

Do you have any artistic choices that you make with your photography that help kind of show who you are or will tell your story if you think about that kind of thing?

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NICOLE TUNG:

A lot of the, I guess, artistic choices that I make are based on emotion and the mood of what it was like in that moment. So with, you know, with quieter or smaller stories that I have time to actually navigate. Yeah, I will think about how I want to represent. For example, I did a story recently on child soldiers in the Congo. It was difficult to show their faces for some of the kids because I wanted to protect their their privacy. You know, then you sort of have to think about how can I photograph this in an intimate way without, being to kind of explicit about it or, you know, showing the kid's actual face. And also, yeah, I choose kind of between color and black and white, depending on really what the story is and what I want to convey. And it's usually a choice I make afterwards. I just tend to shoot in color first. It's a lot easier with digital, but with things that happened really fast, like they were happening in Syria and it was news still at that time in 2012. I didn't really have much choice. I just had to very quickly compose images. And there were just so many things happening around you. You know, there were bombs falling. There was debris



falling. There were people, you know, who were really emotional. And obviously a lot of death happening. So at that time, you just have to just record immediately what's in front of you. And the camera can act as, like an emotional filter in a way, because you're you just solely trying to do your job and. And, it's not that you become a robot and, you know, you obviously you're cognizant of the things happening in front of you, but it can be this shield for a time until you really go back to the images and you start realizing that happened. I saw, you know, five dead children being carried out of a building. They were just alive a few moments before that. It yeah, it can. You know, I think the, artistry just sort of has to go out the window at that time, and I don't really I don't want to make, terrible scenes of tragedy, a masterpiece in a way, because it's it's bad enough that I'm there photographing people's misery. And it's difficult to reconcile that. So I have to just show the truth. And. Yes, of course, I'm going to compose it still, to, you know, at least be technically right about things, but it's it's hard to see beauty in that. I don't think I could do long term stories on things that I'm not interested in. So obviously a lot of the stories that I choose are human interest and, issues to do with conflict, and I think I'm fascinated by that because of. The struggles that people have within their communities, within their countries, within politics at large. And I, I don't know, I think I'm still seeking out what that meaning is and what those connections are. But my I think after having done this for a few years, I realize that I gravitate towards the people who are most affected or the most vulnerable. And it's important to talk about that honestly, you know, I mean, it's there's straight news and then there's the news that comes after that. So in Syria, yeah, I spent a lot of time with the civilians. And, you know, it was just sort of the obvious thing because they, a lot of them didn't have allegiances to either the opposition or



the government, and they were just sort of caught in between literally and figuratively. And they just wanted the bombing to stop. They just wanted the fighting to stop, but they couldn't go anywhere. And so it's like this cycle of being in limbo for them. And that was what was most interesting to me at the time.

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BRIAN OAKES:

Can you paint me the picture of the day when you met Jim, first met Jim?

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NICOLE TUNG:

The day I first met Jim, I was sitting in the the media conference room of, the hotel in Benghazi where all the journalists were staying. And it was just this, you know, huge room where there was a ground table and a bunch of journalists were in there, all frustrated at the pace of the internet. It's like there's one thing you can't live without now. And. I'd seen Jim talking to, you know, a few other journalists, and, and I just met Claire before, so they seemed like they'd been getting along. And, you know, he was just really friendly with everybody. And he came up to me and he introduced himself, and he said, you know, like, how are you doing? And you going to the front line tomorrow, and if you want to catch a ride, you know, you can ride in my car, and and shoot stuff for the GlobalPost. So if you need a place to publish images and, you know, send them over to me and I want to send it over to the other editors. So right off the bat, he was already just giving and, really generous and just such a sweetheart that, you know, and it was unusual in a place like that because even though there were a lot of journalists looking out



for the younger, photographers and writers, they weren't completely like, open to, you know, taking work from other journalists. They, you know, there's still an edge of competitiveness in that environment. Whereas Jim was just like, yeah, whatever. You know, let's publish together. Let's work together. Very keen. And that was unusual.

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BRIAN OAKES:

So we gave off a good first impression.

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NICOLE TUNG:

You gave off a really good first impression. And, you know, it helps that he's like a super good looking guy. And that's just like, who is this guy? Who are you? But very. Yeah. You know, he has this American brawn and charm to him that just felt really nice and familiar and warm.

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BRIAN OAKES:

Did you guys work together in Libya?

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NICOLE TUNG:

Jim had introduced himself to me a couple of days before he was taken by the government forces, on the frontlines in Libya. So we really didn't get a chance to work together. I think some of my photos ran with one of his articles. But we had kind of bumped into each other again after he was released from



prison and returned to Libya. I know that I saw him on the front lines and Sirte when the the battle for gadhafi's hometown was happening. And he, you know, we both kind of went back to Libya, a few times after the end of the war. And we were always in communication, but we weren't really working together, per se.

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BRIAN OAKES:

When did you guys decide that you were going to kind of team up and work together for the first time?

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NICOLE TUNG:

The first time Jim and I thought about teaming up and working together was when we took the risk course in New York, and this was like, must have been April of 2012. So we had done a trip or two into Syria already in early 2012. And he'd gone in with another journalist. And so he knew a little bit lay of the land, and I was talking to him about it during the course. We were sitting in the lobby of the hotel, and, you know, I was like, you know, what is it like? And how do you get in? How can you operate and stuff? He's like, you know, it's easy. He just makes everything sound so easy. So he was like, you know, if you're interested in going, I got contacts, whatever. And let's, like, try to meet up in Turkey and, like, go together. So, we talked about it back and forth, and then when I finally. Gone into Syria on my own. And, you know, those must have been June. She was also back in Syria. We were trying to figure out a way to get further into Syria, past, you know, this town called Idlib. And, so we just



basically cobbled it all together, you know, went through our contacts and, and, you know, started doing trips in together.

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BRIAN OAKES:

Working alongside Jim and and what was your kind of team dynamic like as you guys were going through?

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NICOLE TUNG:

Working with Jim was just easy. You know, we never really had. I mean, we had differences, but, you know, it was there were good complementary differences in the way that you sort of need when operating in a very dangerous environment. So we were very good sounding boards for each other in terms of, okay, what do we want to do today? Is it safe to go there? You know, do we need to meet with this commander of blah, blah, blah and like, you know, so I think that, you know, and also Jim being very laid back and me being less so it, you know, really helped kind of, yeah, it became like this really good complementary team. And because he's, you know, out of the two of us and in a very male dominated society, he was the man. It was always more appropriate for him to break the ice first. So whenever we went into meetings or just talking to people, he was always the one that just sort of led the whole conversation. And that was fine by me because it worked out for me. And also, she was just really good at it. It was very warm with people and made friends very quickly. And I think that, you know, I think one of the best memories I have was I'm not even sure if this is funny, but it is now. We went into Aleppo, in the very beginning of July of 2012. And this was just



before, parts of, you know, parts of the city had broken out into open conflict with the government forces. We snuck in with university students. There were university activists who were holding protests nightly in certain working class neighborhoods of the city. And they took us in, you know, they showed us around. They snuck us, you know, past government checkpoints and into, opposition neighborhoods. And we were able to witness, you know, people rising up against their government. I mean, that was a pretty euphoric time still. And I could just see the excitement in Jim's face and, and I obviously I felt the same way. And we, you know, stayed in the house of these activists. And, and I think that dynamic was really helpful because, you know, we both were just so determined. And I knew that he was really determined to get these pictures out, the video out, to tell the story. But he wasn't, you know, he was never, I guess, careless about things. So, you know, we still had we had a lot of sticky situations, but he was never careless about it, which was. Yeah.

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BRIAN OAKES:

Okay. Can you tell me about Jim's sense of humor?

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NICOLE TUNG:

Jim always chided me for not being light hearted enough or relaxed. And, you know, he was always the one kind of. I'm just super laid back, so I got an earful from him sometimes for being like. Why are you so serious? You know? But he was just so quick to smile. And he made so many friends in this area. But this one time, we were in a neighborhood of Aleppo called Salahuddin. And this was already when the fighting and started. And we were rushing to



get images filed. And there were activists that were trying to get us to a government controlled neighborhood where the internet was actually running. It was actually in an office of a travel agent. And, but we had to go separately because it would have been too obvious for us to walk through the Government Square into the government neighborhood and in a building. So one activist took Jim, and they went first and another activist took me. But somehow we didn't end up on the same route. So I had to get let off somewhere a lot further away and ended up walking through a government neighborhood, with one of my cameras and my backpack, my laptop, all the images that I'd had from opposition neighborhood. Obviously, I was in the country illegally, according to the Syrian government. So I was terrified. I was walking through this old, this, I guess, neighborhood that used to be a Jewish neighborhood in Aleppo is beautiful. And I remember seeing, like, you know, these desserts and pastries everywhere. I was basically getting a full tour of the city, and I, we had to walk through the square and it was called Central Square. I was like the main government square, and I would I just walked in there and the activist was walking in front of me and I'm like, I don't think we should be here. There were posters of Bashar al Assad everywhere. His father, Hafez, and I was like, we're in the we need to get out of here. You know? He was like, just keep walking, just keep walking. And we ended up on this, street corner and we had to go, you know, along that street. And there were government soldiers stationed underneath a hotel and at this checkpoint at the cross section of the street. So I was freaking out. I was like, we can't be here. You know, they're going to catch me. I'm going to be arrested, and this is going to be the end and the end for you and the activists was just like, no, let's just keep going, keep going. So I managed to just walk past a soldier who I knew was looking at me funny. But we made it into this building. And clearly,



I think when I got into this travel agency, Jim was already there, kind of, you know, working on his laptop. And he looked at me. He's like, are you okay? He was I was absolutely beside myself. And I'm like, no, I, I just had to walk through a government checkpoint and there is no consolation for me. He just he just laughed. He was just like, well, you know, you made it. Here's, here's some coffee and you know, you'll be all right. And, and I was just like, Jim, it's not funny. It's like, it's totally funny. You know, I was like, mad at him for laughing. But when I look back on it, I was just like, no, I think he was just glad that I was okay, but I don't know. We had moments where there was just so much bad stuff going on that it was hard to find humor. You know, we witnessed a lot of things together that just. Yeah, it was hard to laugh. But, you know, we spent a lot of time with people there that just shared their food and their lives with us and took us in. And, you know, he was always the one to, yeah, to lead the conversation with people. And they really warmed up to him very quickly.

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BRIAN OAKES:

Do you remember any stories of Jim losing his equipment?

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NICOLE TUNG:

I remember when Jim and I were initially talking about going into Syria. He had gone to a place called Roston, and he had left his laptop and a bunch of other stuff at a media center there, and I guess it got stolen. So, you know, he was just sort of like I had stolen whatever. I got a new laptop. And, but when we were working together in Syria, I think he was a lot more mindful where



he was putting stuff. And, no, I don't he never really, like, lost stuff around.
Yeah.

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BRIAN OAKES:

Do you have insight on, like, how Jim chose his stories?

00:36:02:00

NICOLE TUNG:

Jim chose the stories that weren't being really shown in the mainstream media. He went a lot deeper than just showing bang, bang. You know, what we call, like, front line, images of people firing off guns. I mean, sure, he was drawn to that. And all of us are, in a way, selfishly, because it it's something it's action. It's very visual. And selfishly, it's it's an adrenaline rush to be on the frontlines. But he went deeper than that. He chose one story in particular about a Libyan fighter, actually, who went to Syria, not as a jihadist and not on some quest for holy war or, you know, some theological, you know, agenda. But he was a young man who'd come from Tripoli or near Tripoli, who had fought in the Libyan revolution and saw what was happening in Syria and decided just to go help the rebels in Syria. And Jim spent quite a lot of time with, with him. His name was for us and, and came out with this remarkable story that ran on CNN about how, you know, not all of the foreign fighters. Sure. There were a lot of foreign fighters flying into Syria at that time who had a religious kind of extremist fundamental agenda, but some of them just didn't. They were there because they saw what was happening to their fellow Arab Muslim brothers, in Syria and fought the same, almost similar kind of war in Libya. And, he got very deep and very intimate into the story. And I



think that's what I respect most about Jim, was that he wanted to show a different side of, the stereotype every all the media was slapping on the, you know, rebels already, which was, oh, they're all becoming jihadists and foreign fighters, etc. but he took a different strand from that. And then there was this story about this hospital, the Dar Al-Shifa hospital in Aleppo. And, you know, it was actually Jim's idea to spend a week in that hospital documenting what the doctors and the staff there were doing on a daily basis. So, you know, we managed to get access, and the doctors were very kind to let us stay and hang around and often get in the way when there were emergencies happening. But what we witnessed there was this stream, endless stream of civilians coming in every single day, of women, children and men and also fighters with the Free Syrian Army, being treated by these remarkable doctors who never left and pretty much never slept or had time to eat. And again, you know, Jim came out with a remarkable story on that. I think it ran on the goal post. But that was just something, you know, it's like this innate, nature about him that was drawn to things like that. And he eventually was the one who came up with the idea of raising money for the hospital or to get an ambulance for the hospital. And I remember the day he sent that email out because, you know, we'd all been feeling really helpless about the whole situation. We'd all, all of the freelancers who'd been through Aleppo had been to that hospital, but none of us did anything more than just photograph it, you know, or write about it. And just at the end of the day, file the photos and kind of we couldn't do anything about it. You just we felt so kind of useless and helpless. And Jim was like, well, you know, he sent out an email to me and Manu and Claire and a couple of other, journalists, freelancers and said, guys like, let's get off our asses. I know you're all battling gastrointestinal issues, but like, we need to, you know, do something.



They don't have an ambulance. So he started. That whole campaign to raise ten grand for the first ambulance. And I don't know, he pretty much single handedly did it. And he was in touch with everybody. And there was an ambulance that was like a second hand ambulance that was coming from Austria, and it made it to the Turkish border and made it into the city. And we saw it. And I actually made one trip in and we saw the ambulance sitting outside the hospital. And that moment of joy on his face was priceless. He was just like, it made it awesome. Like he started shooting video of the ambulance. He's like, can I want to show all the people who helped to get this together? And, so he always went beyond, you know, what most journalists do. And that was just because he was just such an amazing person.

00:40:48:00

BRIAN OAKES:

With Jim, you know, his career as a journalist in those areas. You kind of he was just kind of did a little bit more, you know, you put his camera down, you would now, you know, raise money for this. An ambulance kind of became a humanitarian effort for him. Did you see that happening a lot with, you know, the people? It was very kind of specific to Jim.

00:41:15:00

NICOLE TUNG:

I think for a lot of journalists covering Syria, there is this great sense that you can't do anything and no matter how much you report it, nothing ever changes. And as Americans, Jim and I got confronted a lot by people who were just angry that the US wasn't doing anything policy wise or, you know, actively pursuing the Assad government. And, you know, we'd always say,



well, you know, we just had a decade long war in Iraq and Afghanistan. There's just no way our country can get involved again. They're like, but don't they see, this is, you know, civilians and, and and I think there was just this enormous guilt that rode on Jim's back that made him, you know, feel so compelled to do much more than just, you know, record video and file it. And he wasn't getting paid very much for it anyway. You know, none of us were. But there were times where he was offering up video for free. And I would chastise him for I'm like, what are you doing? You know, this is yes, we're here and it's important to be here and we feel the need to be here. But at the same time, you still need to like, you know, make it work for you. Because you want to come back, right? And he's like, nah, you know, whatever. It's fine. It's all good. And, I'll make it work. And I just want to make sure the video gets out there and stuff. I think, you know, a lot of journalists have tried to help with the effort in Syria, whether it's getting, you know, closed drive or like, trying to help in some other capacity, the humanitarian effort by delivering clothes for blankets, etc.. But to do something as big as an operation and getting an ambulance in there from Europe, I don't think I've heard of, and especially as, as a freelancer, you know, we don't have those kinds of resources. So I think he really is an exception because he went above and beyond everybody else to just and, and he identified that very specific need of an ambulance, to, you know, to bring to that hospital. They were, you know, I think, you know, from what he and I witnessed, people were being, you know, shoved into cars and, there were no other means to get to other, to go back home after someone was treated for an injury or to get to the Turkish border, where there would be further taken into, you know, a hospital in Turkey for treatment. So they were literally shuttling people with drips and, you know, bandages and everything in these tiny little taxis and cars. And it was just unacceptable to



me. It was really appalling to see that. And he was just so brilliant in that way of identifying that specific need and said, well, this is what they need. So yeah, he was very different in that way.

00:44:08:00

BRIAN OAKES:

Did you ever see Jim Cameron, like, help someone or, you know, like pull someone's side or, you know, was there any cases like that that you ever saw.

00:44:19:00

NICOLE TUNG:

Early on in the fighting in Aleppo? We were. It's kind of hanging out at this former school, actually. It became like a command center for the rebels. It was a hospital as well, or a field hospital. And there were activists, like a media center. It was just all in one building, which was a terrible idea. One night we were there and it got bombed. The shell had landed just next to the building, so it had basically blasted out all the windows and a number of people had been injured, the number of Syrians who were there. And, I remember it was really dark. There was no electricity. So, you know, just like flashlights, these little pockets of light here and there. We were people screaming and and groaning. And there was no way for us to photograph it anyway. But also, there was such a need that, you know, Jim, I remember, I was trying to help somebody. And Jim started dragging someone else towards the field hospital that was in another room. And, yeah, that was a time we were just like, there's nothing for us to do other than help people, you know? And just like, I think you have to be a human first. And that's, you know, he often saw that, but and



a lot of times there were other people to help with, you know, digging people out from the rubble. We would have just contributed to the madness. So, you know, yeah, I think that, there was always he was always mindful of that, of not just, you know, being a journalist.

00:45:49:00

BRIAN OAKES:

So can you kind of shed some light on how, like, how you and Jim dealt with this, those horrible things that you, that you saw?

00:46:03:00

NICOLE TUNG:

A lot of cigarettes. There is one day in August in 2012, when we had woken up pretty late that day and, one of the activists, Assyrian activists, was taking around this neighborhood called Bustan al-Kasser. We'd spent a lot of time in that neighborhood, and we'd seen it transition from merely the protest to an all out war. And this one morning in particular, we were walking towards, I think we were going to go see another activist somewhere and just hang out in the, in the, in the neighborhood. And this fighter jet just started circling above and just swooped right down and hit a building that was a couple hundred feet from us. You started seeing the civilians coming out and just clutching nothing, really. Just, you know, ashen faces. There was rubble everywhere, and the women were screaming and men were screaming. Everybody was just like it was chaos. And the plane came around again and dropped another bomb really close by. And actually we were right across the building and we looked up and we could see the rubble start coming down. And that bomb had hit a family of, seven, and it killed the two parents, three



children and two other cousins. So five kids, all under the age of 15, were dead. And they were trying to, you know, bring down the bodies. And and it was horrific and the scale of it, but also just I think nothing prepares you for seeing kids being killed and maimed in that way. And I know that Jim really loves kids. So, you know, we were both just we didn't say anything until we got to the field hospital where they were bringing the bodies. And, you know, one by one, they were laying out, you know, the 15 year old, the 13 year old. And then there was the eight year old, and then there was the one year old. This baby boy. They sort of like, put him on to the gurney and, they couldn't do anything from, you know, so the doctors were just like, you know, and it was like in this basement where they wanted to hide the hospital because they were worried I was going to get bombed or targeted. So, you know, we just kind of. There was really nothing for us to do. And there was a relative there who was screaming over their bodies. And I said to Jim, I was like, I can't believe, you know, kids. And he didn't say anything to me. And then that night we were, you know, scrambling to find internet again and trying to file all this stuff that we'd seen. I think we were just like in this mode of just needing to get the pictures out, that we really didn't have time to talk about it or consider what had just happened. I think when we were finished that though, we kind of like sat down and lit a cigaret and we just started talking about it. Really, there wasn't very much to say, though, you know, and like, what is there to talk about when you witness something like that? And for me, it was the first time to see dead kids. So we just sort of sat in silence and that was enough to that was enough conversation to kind of get to the heart of what we were feeling. I think that was more powerful than just exchanging words about how terrible it was. You know, there was and we



understood each other in that way where we'd seen things and, you know, we didn't really we're there for each other, but we didn't need to talk about it.

00:49:59:00

BRIAN OAKES:

Both of you guys have lost. Dear friends and colleagues in the field. Was it Chris? And, you know, Jim went through the experience of Anton. Did you guys ever going to talk about those things together and.

00:50:14:00

NICOLE TUNG:

Jim and I briefly exchanged words about. You know what? I knew he was very. He felt really guilty about it in time, and that's why he poured so much energy into raising. You know, some money with the auction and, for, for his family afterwards with. You know, I think that when we were in Syria, we just didn't want to jinx anything. So there were certain issues that we didn't really touch, like, what if this happens or what if that happens? And, you know, we talked about the things we needed to in terms of risk. But. I think there's also this tendency to shy away from that conversation. You just you never want to be in that place. And I knew Jim never wanted to be in that place again, where he put his family in such a worry. You know, so we had those conversations, but we didn't really get into it to try to avoid jinxing it or anything we had. There are superstitions when you're in a war zone.

00:51:20:00

BRIAN OAKES:

Did you ever talk to you about his family members?



00:51:23:00

NICOLE TUNG:

No. I think, and we never really had time to, like, sit down and really talk about home and family. I was always just running from one place to another, and just the downtime was always with other, you know, people around. Yeah. But. I know that he was. I knew he really wanted to get out for Thanksgiving, and he was like, I got to call my family and. And so. And I knew earlier that his. I think it was his grandmother who had passed away. But he was very pretty quiet about all that, actually, with me. You know, there's just so much about Jim as a character that you know how he had this machismo and. And sometimes I didn't. I don't know, sometimes I don't know if he meant it, but like just being kind of so modest in a way, you know. And I would just looking at him like, are you serious? Like, but I did. I sort of got the sense that sometimes he couldn't really understand the female mind. So, you know, he had a hard time figuring me out. And I remember, like, one night we had this whole conversation in Istanbul that was, like, really full of tension because we, you know, we'd just come out of Syria and, his crashing at my place for a night before he went back to the States. And, I think that trip in Syria had just sort of ground us down. We'd done so many trips into Syria, and it was just like an awful, you know, we were just like, psychologically done. And we were sitting down in this cafe in Istanbul having drinks, and it suddenly broke out into this argument for no reason about, you know, like what I thought he did wrong and what he thought I did wrong. And then, like, at the end of it, I was like in tears. And he's like, why are you crying? Oh, like, because you're like, whatever. You know, you're blaming me for something. And he's like, I don't know, it's all good. He just ended it with a hug. And I'm like, you know,



sometimes it was hard to relate with each other. I think he I had a hard time understanding him and he had a hard time understanding me. We understood each other in the context of dangerous environments. So when we came out into this like normal atmosphere where things should be normal and there was no immediate physical danger to us. We sort of just didn't know what to do. It was really odd. You know, how do we talk about now? You know, what do we do? We're just going to go out for beers. And that decompression stage of the few days when you come out of a dangerous place can be, like, the most messed up. You just. You don't know what to do with yourself. And, I think that's what, you know, he and I, we're going through, you know.

00:54:22:00

BRIAN OAKES:

Did you guys ever talk about how the toll that what, you know, what you were doing was taking on your family's?

00:54:33:00

NICOLE TUNG:

Yeah, we briefly talked about it. You know, I remember the issue of kidnaping. You know, came up when, in July of 2012. When when John Cantley, who was Jim's friend, had been taken for the first time in Syria. I don't know how much I should talk about this, but like, we had just come out of Syria and John was supposed to have contacted Jim, we were all supposed to meet up in Antakya, and we'd figured something had happened, because I guess we thought that John already gone in without telling us. And Jim immediately kind of became very suspicious and concerned that he hadn't heard from him. And when we



sort of learned what happened, that that John had been kidnaped. You know, Jim and I, we're frantically looking for leads, and we'd spent that whole week trying to figure out who they were with and how to get them out, etc., and Jim really led that effort. But in between, you know, we briefly talked about. What would. What? You know what's going on like? You know, there are so many foreign fighters now coming into Syria. How are you going to work this? How are we going to go back in and operate safely? And I just remember him saying, I never want to put my family in that position again, where, you know, when I was in Libya for those 40 something days, like it was awful, like I knew what was happening to me, but they didn't know what was happening to me. So all sorts of things can come up in people's imaginations. I just don't want to do that to them again. You know, and so if he wanted to avoid that at all costs as much as possible.

00:56:20:00

BRIAN OAKES:

The risk program. You need to tell me a little bit about just the experience in that class and why you did it.

00:56:28:00

NICOLE TUNG:

So risk, stands for reporters, instruction team and colleagues. And it was set up by Sebastian Junger, who was a friend of Tim Hetherington. Tim was killed in Libya in 2011. He was actually injured by a piece of shrapnel from a mortar that had landed nearby, and it basically severed his artery in his leg. Sebastian always thought that had people around him knew how to treat that wound. Maybe Tim could have been saved. Chris died from the same incident. And it



was actually a piece of shrapnel that went under his helmet. So he was wearing full protective gear, but still died because of a little piece of shrapnel that went under his helmet. And so it was just this time where we realized freelancers and many journalists didn't know how to treat wounds. And I think, you know, that experience. I was in Misrata at the time that Chris and Tim were killed. I was close friends with Chris, who was like a mentor to me. And, I had known Tim just, you know, passing in and out of New York and Libya. And I admired both of their work deeply. So just I think this, in that whole tragedy sobered me up to the profession, but also the necessity for, having certain skills going into the field, being prepared. And that first course that we took was the inaugural course, a year after they had died. So it was April of 2012 that, you know, there were about 20 of us, gather at the Bronx Documentary Center. And, I think it was just so it was just this great community of people and, you know, freelancers, we all knew we had to look out for each other. Everybody was friendly. And, but we were there for this very important mission, basically to learn how to treat wounds. And in case, you know, when so many of us had been to these dangerous places like Afghanistan, Iraq and you name it, you know, all of the places like in Africa, wars that we cover. But we didn't have this essential skill. So it was this moment of realization, I think for a lot of us that was like, wow, this is something we need.

00:58:45:00

BRIAN OAKES:

Do you feel like you you have a responsibility for your colleague?

00:58:52:00



NICOLE TUNG:

Yeah. I mean, I think I always feel like when I'm working with people, whether it's a local person who's helping me, translate or get, you know, contacts or if it's another journalist that's next to me. I do have a responsibility to protect them, keep them safe, and help them if it comes to that. I think there's a tendency within the journalism community to, you know, we're all very kind of picky and very competitive. But as freelancers and in this kind of day and age where conflict coverage has become so risky, we've actually become, you know, a lot more, or less competitive in a way. You know, we really the safety just trumps everything else. And and so we've sort of left behind the competitive edge. Obviously we still have to work, but, the safety really is the issue for a lot of us.

00:59:54:00

BRIAN OAKES:

Could you kind of describe the the dynamic of the journalists community that you're in, in these conflict areas.

01:00:03:00

NICOLE TUNG:

In these particular places like in Libya and Syria? The more seasoned correspondents always have a lot more respect, obviously. You know, we we look up to them and we kind of know their work from, just, you know, my experience of growing up in, in the decade of the Iraq, Afghanistan war, you know, I would read a lot of their articles. So it's just it's quite amazing to meet somebody who'd been you. That's how you learn about these wars in the news and through these people. And so when you meet them, it's quite an



honor in a way, and quite an experience. Most of them are, you know, extremely, fascinating, amazing people who do care about younger journalists. And I've had that fortune of, you know, spending time with, those correspondents. And, but within the freelancers, many of us in this particular generation, in our 20s, 30s and 40s, have, you know, never really experienced the luxury of, journalism in its heyday. So, you know, we we always hear the stories about, you know, being flown first class halfway across the world and, you know, staying in the most expensive hotels, like, we have never experienced any of that. Like what we do is journalism on a shoestring budget, basically. So we've had to be a lot more resourceful in a way, and, just more street savvy. And we're always, like, trying to help each other out with that. What we know and, you know, Steven Sotloff was, like I was trying to get a visa back to Libya, and I barely knew Steve. But he messaged me that day on Facebook, and he knew that I was looking for a way to get a visa, and he just gave me all the information. You know, that was just, you know, that's our community, you know, and it's it's nice to have that, kind of support from each other.

01:02:01:00

BRIAN OAKES:

The fact that he was older, did that kind of affect how he fit into the community? How did he fit into this, into this journalist community?

01:02:08:00

NICOLE TUNG:

I really think it has a lot to do with the level of experience. You know, he'd been to Afghanistan prior, to Libya, when I met him, I Libya was my first



conflict. I'd never, you know, covered a conflict. And, you know, I was younger, but he never put himself up on this pedestal was like, I am experience and I will tell you what to do. And I think he fit in so well with everybody because he just level down to people, you know, you'd always kind of meet people and I'd. I level wasn't ever like he was above you or anything. And that's why he was so likable and you just kind of connected with people very easily.

01:02:52:00

BRIAN OAKES:

Someone described Jim. He was a journalist's journalist. Can you kind of tell me what? What do you think that means?

01:03:01:00

NICOLE TUNG:

I think when people say that Jim was a journalist. Journalist, they really mean that he was just this. Charismatic, very young, very intelligent and very caring kind of person. And it was really about his personality. And, you know, journalists are all very varied people, and we all come from very different backgrounds. But I think that, the way he associated with people, where he connected with them and the fact that he was so both resourceful and helpful to others without ever seeming like he was competitive, just made him, you know, so likable, you know, and I think that's what people mean when they call him a journalist. Journalist. He cared a lot more about the stories than your typical journalist will.

01:03:56:00

BRIAN OAKES:



We all love Jim. We talk about him and he. He's great. You know, everybody would probably say the same thing. And I think what makes people really relatable are their flaws. Can you tell me some of Jim's flaws?

01:04:11:00

NICOLE TUNG:

Jim and I both share the same class. We hate admitting being wrong, and there was a time when I was wrong and I refused to admit it to him, and it was a dangerous situation. So we were in Aleppo again, and we had gone to, the university where refugees or internally displaced Syrians had, started flooding into the university because there was some shelter for them and it was technically in control of the government there. We weren't really supposed to be there. And the people working there with the Red Crescent were seen as being kind of on the government side. So when we started getting questioned by the staff there about what we were doing and if we were there, if we were really allowed to be there, I was like, of course we're not allowed to be here. We're here illegally. And Jim was like, Nicole, what the fuck are you doing? You know, I, I got into a kind of argument with this guy who was questioning us, and I got very angry with him, and Jim was like, Nicole, are you going to calm down, get in the car, let's get out of here. And when we got out of there, he was like, you realize that was like, really stupid. And I was like, no, I refuse. You know? I was being really stubborn. And I was like, no, it was just that guy was being a pain in the butt. And. And finally, late hours later, he was like, just admit you were wrong. I was like, okay, fine, I was wrong. And in the same vein, Jim didn't like being wrong either. We were approach. We were. We somehow had gotten separated from a group of rebels that we'd spent a lot of time with on the front line. We were looking for



them that one day, and it was in this neighborhood called Salahuddin. We didn't really know where to go. And it was, you know, at this time in this neighborhood, it was a very, you know, the front lines were always shifting, and you were literally never further than 2 or 3 buildings away from the government forces. So we were trying to decide which direction to go. We had no idea where we were. We were lost. A very bad situation to be in. One of the civilians came up to us and we'd never met him before. And he was like, you know, come with me. I'll show you, you know, where you want to go and whatever. And I was like, Jim, I don't think we should trust him. You know, we don't know if he's like a spy or, you know, where he's going to take us. Maybe he doesn't even know where the snipers are. I I'm going to stay right here and, like, try to figure this out. He's like, no, let's just go. We had this back and forth and we had this whole argument about it, actually. And he had it all on video tape. And something inside of me was just saying, I can't go any further. I don't want to. I don't trust this person, I don't know. We don't know where we're going. We can get into trouble. And Jim was like, we gotta go, let's go, let's go. And he started walking. And I was like, Jim, you know, if you go, we're going to be separated. You know this, right? And, got into this argument again. And finally he's like, all right, fine, okay, I'll come with you. So we walk back in this other direction, we find our guys, and five minutes later on the street where we're going to cross, comes this government tank and starts firing at the positions of the rebels. And I was like, see, we got into a lot of shit. And he was like, no, we would have been fine. Was like, Jim, you were wrong. Admit it. And, he wouldn't admit it until hours later. He played back the video and he was listening to the audio of us arguing, and he was laughing. He was like, this is how we argue. I was like, yeah, it was really bad.



And he was like, I was wrong. So neither of us, we had the same flaws but many different aspects of character.

01:08:00:00

BRIAN OAKES:

Jim stayed in the homes of Syrian civilians. But like, as just like a day in the life where, like, where would you guys stay at night?

01:08:16:00

NICOLE TUNG:

So working in Syria was really difficult because there was no place where we could be safe. You know, we were living with the population and with the the rebel fighters. For a lot of the time we spent in Aleppo, we were staying with activists, the same activists that had taken us in on our first trip into the city.

We stayed in their home, which was in a government neighborhood. So somehow we managed to kind of sneak in and out. And, you know, they very kindly gave us their rooms and their beds and shared their food with us.

There were, you know, it wasn't possible for us to stay in hotels because those were all in the government neighborhoods, and there was nobody who could help us around there. But when it some in some other areas we stayed with, with the rebel fighters and this was often probably like the hardest situation to be in because, they would separate me as a woman. I would have to sleep in a separate room from the male fighters. And, you know, Jim and I never really like to be separated. And culturally, it was just weird for the Syrians to be like, you guys aren't married, but you're sleeping in the same room. So sometimes we had to, you know, separate. And in in a war zone, you don't like being separated. So. Yeah, sometimes, you know, he would sleep with, like, in



the same room as the rebels, and he would just she could fall asleep anywhere he put. So I think everybody knows him, knows this. And, all he needed was just a little space on the floor and. No, nothing. Nothing else. Just fall asleep. And the Syrians would often make fun of him, like he was like a cat. But, yeah, there was this other time where you had to stay in, in, in the house of a an activist. And, you know, he had his whole family. It was his wife and his children, and there was no other space for us except for the living room. So it was like male, female foreigners, not married, sleeping in the same room. And it was just so awkward that, you know, at the end of it, Jim and I were like, we got to get out of this. It was like, mortifying because they don't understand that, you know, we can be friends and sleep in the same room. But, you know, so I did a lot of cultural things to kind of get over.

01:10:36:00

BRIAN OAKES:

That ability to be kind of chameleon and, and then fit into all sorts of different situations easily. Did you kind of ever see that, as you know, that advent as advantageous for him? And that kind of helped him, like in the homes of the Syrians.

01:10:54:00

NICOLE TUNG:

And in that way, I think what made Jim such a special person and a good journalist was the fact that he could fit in anywhere. You know, he was just it wasn't even just about his physical appearance. In Syria, he could almost pass for an Arab, even though, you know, he still had a very cut, dashing, you know, American base. But I think had he just changed a few items on his clothing, he



would have just fit in fine. And he grew a little bit of a beard and stuff. But it wasn't even just about the physical characteristics of him that made him fit in so well. He sort of enmeshed with people really well, in a way that he tried to, you know, even just speaking to people, there were language barriers. So he would use very simple English. And he would, sort of mimic people's habits of eating or, you know, greeting each other, which is a very kind of important thing in Arab culture. All those formalities he just adopted and he was really good at that. And I think that's what made him likable and very, very easy to connect with for the, for the local people there. Because he was just, he, he could really just adopt the same habits and, and in a way come to an understanding of people, too.

01:12:19:00

BRIAN OAKES:

When you first went to Syria, what was it that drew you there?

01:12:26:00

NICOLE TUNG:

When I first went to Syria, the media had started already shying away from from the country. It was it was starting to get very dangerous for journalists because of Marie Colvin and Remi, like having been killed in Homs earlier that year. But also, I think that the media was just scared that it was so complicated to explain and there was so much else, you know, that year it was just crazy. There was so much happening around the world. There were revolutions everywhere. I think, you know, and the editor started getting worried about, putting staff journalists in. So when I first went into Syria, I realized that there was just very little media coverage and understanding of



what this conflict and what these protests were about. And I wanted to keep it. On the front pages, and that's why I went in and continued to want want to go in.

01:13:18:00

BRIAN OAKES:

How did you guys navigate the constantly changing political landscape of Syria, and were you aware of all the moving parts that were happening politically in the country?

01:13:34:00

NICOLE TUNG:

This must have been October, November already just before Jim had been kidnaped. We were in Aleppo on the front lines in this neighborhood that had been completely devastated. And we, you know, crossed a few front lines. And then we got into this building where there were rebel fighters, and we knew that they were going to be more conservative than the ones we were sort of hanging out with a lot. But we didn't realize that there were going to be foreign fighters there. So when we got upstairs, they the fighters just kind of, like, separated us into another room. We'd passed one room, seen a bunch of people inside, and then they were like, no, no, no, go into the other room. And, we started asking questions. We were like, well, who's in the other room? And, you know, who are they? And just like trying to be casual about it. And they were like, oh, there's like some Bosnian guys. And like, you know, that was a moment where I was like, this is bad because John had already been kidnaped. And, we just you just never knew what was going to happen. It's I think it's one thing, as a journalist to be working in a place where, you



know, there are all the elements of a conventional war, like bombs and bullets, and that's you can deal with that. But the uncertainty of another person turning against you, is it's so random that, I mean, that was what we were all kind of afraid of. And we'd already come across people that were giving us very, unwelcome, unfriendly looks. And there were parts of this of the front lines we couldn't go to because they didn't want foreign journalists there. So it was already changing, and it was becoming this, dangerous environment for journalists to be in. But keeping tabs on the the changing political landscape in Syria was next to impossible. There were so many groups and splinter groups and leaders and things that were happening and moving parts that, you couldn't really even be aware of, especially when you're on the ground, because so much of it was rumor. And separating fact from fiction was really difficult because of communications. And also you stay with, activists and rebel fighters who have an agenda. So sometimes, you know, their views are skewed as well. And then that informs your information, which can never be good. So it's really not until you get out and kind of can zoom out and see the context in the war for what it is and the different, you know, parties involved that you understand what's actually happening when you're there, you know, you're just so focused and narrow, on the immediacy of what's around you that it can be hard to contextualize.

01:16:24:00

BRIAN OAKES:

Can you tell me about your encounter with those those foreign fighters in that room?

01:16:31:00



NICOLE TUNG:

It was that time, time in that building with the foreign fighters. It wasn't the first time we'd come across them. You know, sometimes we just sort of randomly run into them on the on the street or in, you know, media centers. And it was always this look that they gave you. It was just this very, I don't even want to say blank look, but it was a complete kind of look of resignation in their eyes, hatred that for, for, you know, Western journalists being their women. And it just created this, like, very unsettling feeling for me. I just I didn't really want to approach them. I didn't really want to talk to them because I didn't want to get into that situation where they would start asking me questions and then assume, so, you know, it. Yeah, it just, but we all saw it coming. You know, we all saw that side of the conflict coming because so much it happened to the Syrians who are moderately religious, that, you know, nobody was coming to help them. You know, they weren't journalists. They're like, "Al Qaeda's coming. You know, maybe even worse than al Qaeda's coming. And nobody is gonna help us against the Assad regime except for these guys." So it was all there.

01:17:58:00

BRIAN OAKES:

What sense did you get from your colleagues about the situation for journalists in Syria?

01:18:04:00

NICOLE TUNG:

We'd spent the beginning of November in Aleppo again with, with Jim and John. John Cantley is a freelance British journalist and photojournalist and



had also covered numerous conflicts. He was in Libya as well, and covered Syria earlier in 2012. He wrote for a lot of different, mostly British publications. And he and Jim had done their first trips into Syria together, into Roston and Saqib and other places. So they become very close friends. And Jim always been the loyal friend, you know, wanted to always make sure that John was, you know, safe and comfortable. And if he needed someone to work with that Jim would be there. Yeah. So John had been kidnaped in July of 2012 by foreign fighters, by jihadists on the Turkish-Syrian border. And when he was released a week later, you know, he went back to the UK, kind of healed up and, then decided to go back into Syria again in the fall. And that's when the three of us went to Aleppo together, to just see what the situation was. I had had some issues with my camera that week, so, I just I was like, Jim, I gotta go back to Istanbul. I need to, you know, get all this equipment fixed so that I can come back and properly work. So I was like, okay, I'll be gone for a week and, you know, I'll see you guys in a week. And so it was just Jim and John and, their translator Mustafa, who's become a friend of ours. They decided to go further west into a loop and back into another town that Jim and I previously gone to. We knew the commander there, and we knew kind of we knew the area. And, so him and John had gone back to that area and, you know, we're doing stories and stuff like that. And, you know, meanwhile, I was like, trying to make my way back down to southern Turkey. And I was on email with Jim here and there, and I was just, you know, catching up with him. I was like, hey, you know, I'm gonna see you in a few days, right? I'm planning on going in, and I want to do some refugee stuff. And I remember the whole kind of thread of emails, and I think it must have been, like the 17th or 18th of August. When? Not August. Sorry. Of November. It was. It must have been the 18th or 19th of November when Jim had emailed me and



he said, you know, I had a close call with a tank shell yesterday. I was good, but the bells rung a little bit. And, you know, I think I'm gonna get out. And I knew from that message that when things weren't okay, things really weren't okay because Jim had a high tolerance for danger. But also, he must have been really close to that tank shot. John had been lightly injured by shrapnel. So Jim was like, okay, I'm gonna come out and, you know, I'll see you, fairly soon.

01:21:26:00

BRIAN OAKES:

What were John and Jim working on? What was the assignment that they were working on?

01:21:31:00

NICOLE TUNG:

So when John and Jim had gone in together without me, John was trying to come out with a story about his captivity, about his first kidnaping. So they had actually, returned to the same spot where John had been held. You know, I guess tried to do a story about that and then went further into Idlib province to march on the mission, which is, the town that Jim and I previously went to. And the same commander that we had met there before was still there. And but the situation changed a lot. You know, there was there had been really heavy fighting. There were basically no more civilians there. There used to be like 100,000 civilians who had all fled or died. And I remember, Jim, you know, telling me what the situation was, the difference between June and November. And, I think they just really wanted to kind of get an understanding of the, the fighting there, what had happened. And also, you know, people were really kind of focused on Aleppo. And so they wanted



to just do a different kind of scene of, of the rest of the country. And those were the, the final images that they had filed before leaving Syria.

01:22:52:00

BRIAN OAKES:

If you were with the, with, would you have been doing that same assignment with them, or would you feel like your presence would have been directed in another?

01:23:05:00

NICOLE TUNG:

Another story. You know, the moment when I said by to Jim, in, in Turkey before I went to Istanbul to get my cameras fixing him, going back into Syria. We're standing outside the hotel where we're staying. And I remember, just like I had all my gear with me, and I was like, okay, I'll see you, you know, soon. And I had this feeling of reluctance to leave because I was like, I'm going to miss something. And, you know, it's always just like this curse that journalists have. I think they're going to miss something. And large, in the grand scheme of things, does it really matter? No. But I remember feeling kind of like. Like I shouldn't leave him. But I have to, because I don't have gear. I don't have working cameras right now. And I'd stuck with, you know, he and I had stuck together for so long working in Syria and having gone through so much that it almost felt wrong to not go in with him again. But I, you know, I trusted him, and I knew that he was going to be okay. I think had I been with them on that last trip, I would have probably been doing the same story because they were doing stuff on the fighting and, you know, there was heavy fighting where they were. I'd already sort of grown a little bit tired of



that. And so had Jim. But, you know, it's always just that, you know, we got to get the story out. We got to get that story out. So, maybe I would have been doing something on civilians or. I'm not sure, but there's always that 1 or 2 days where you just want to, like, cover the front line. And, you know, maybe that was the 1 or 2 days I would have spent with them knowing that he was going to go into Syria. And without me, it's it haunted me a little because for that week I was like, you know, I was checking in with him every day. I was like, I haven't heard from you. I was like being a nagging mom, you know? I was like, you know, why aren't you emailing me? Why haven't I heard from you? And he's like, dude, you know, I was like, I have no internet. There's no electricity here. He was like, I'm fine. And, so I was worried about him, you know? But. There's this, there's like this one thing that he and I shared, which was our lucky lighter, and I'd bought it in Turkey, was like, I was like a little blue lighter with the. It's very common in the, in the Middle East. It's like the evil eye to ward off evil spirits, you know? And it was printed all over the the lighter. And Jim and I had that for months when we were traveling in Syria. And for some reason, I never ran out of lighter fluid. We used it for, like, everything, you know, lighting stoves to make coffee and lighting cigarets and whatever else we needed it for. And, between him and I, we just called it the Lucky Letter. He's like, hey, I need the lighter. I need the lucky lighter, to let my cigaret and wherever. So it was just that superstition that if we'd had this lucky lighter, we would have. Everything's gonna be okay. You know? It's just like this stupid idea. You put your hopes into one object to make it feel safe. And, I think about, I thought about. I think about this a lot. I think about a lot afterwards that he didn't have it with him. Maybe if I just gave him the lucky lighter, everything would have turned out okay. I don't know. But yeah, it's it. I think in a way it maybe did upset the working relationship or the balance



that he and I had shared for so long on the road. I don't know. It's a lot of what ifs, maybes.

01:26:46:00

BRIAN OAKES:

Can you kind of paint a picture of the day that Jim was kidnaped?

01:26:49:00

NICOLE TUNG:

The day that Jim was kidnaped? I was in Antakya and I was going to go to Reyhanli, which is the border town where I was going to meet him, actually. So I was actually on email with him. You know, we were he was at this internet cafe in Binnish and he'd been there for a couple of hours, you know, he was filing and I'm like, you don't think that thought had occurred to me yet? But I was like, why aren't you filing when you come out, you know, was he was there for a period of time and we were back and forth on email and we're talking about, what we would do and how well, you know, basically the plans of where to meet and what time to meet. He was like, yeah, you know, I'm ready to get out. I have this other assignment with a German TV, you know, broadcast group in a couple of days. I just want to come out for a bit. So, you know, we were also talking about how, the Doral, if our hospital in Aleppo that we'd been documenting had been destroyed. And we both felt terrible about it and we felt like, so, you know, hopeless and sort of useless. So these little conversations and strands of conversations that were happening in the email threads, came up and I was like, well, are you going to come out? You know, what time should I meet you there? I'll make arrangements now. And, you know, as Mustafa or translator, we're going to



come out with you. And he was like, yeah, yeah, it's all fine, you know? I'll see you at. I'm leaving in about an hour. This is probably at about 2:00 pm local time, and I would have seen him in about five because it took around two hours. Normally it's just a 45 minute drive, but because you had to go through smaller roads to avoid government areas. So I went to, reyhanli. And I was driven there by actually one of our mutual activist friends from Aleppo. And I was looking for hotels, and really, a lot of them were full. And I ended up going to some place a little bit outside of the town. It was just a very weird situation. The hotel itself was kind of, you know, very quiet, very eerie. It's called like a spa hotel. And, and it's there's a, there's like this assortment of Syrian activists and probably people selling weapons, etc., trading in whatever guns that come through wars. And so I checked in and I told Jim, I'm like, hey, you know, I'm here. So text me when you get in, when you call me, you know, 5:00 rolls by. And I was like, okay, he hasn't arrived yet, and it's 5:30 and then it's six. I'm like, you know, just wondering. I started to worry that I didn't know what was happening. 7:00, 8:00 rolls around and I'm like, something's really wrong. And I start making phone calls to all of the phones that I knew he had here. The cell phone had his U.S. phone in a cell phone. And I couldn't reach any of them. So I called Mustafa, or translator. I couldn't get through to his cell phone, but I reached him at home, and the moment Mostafa picked up the phone at home, my heart sank. I was like, what are you doing at home? And the first thing he said to me was, Nicole, I'm so sorry. I didn't I couldn't do anything. I was like, what are you talking about? Like what happened? He was like, you know, we were on the road and we were coming. We were in the taxi. We were coming to Turkey to meet you. And, this van with these four guys with guns, they stopped us on the road and they told us to get out, and, they were pointing their guns at us and screaming and get



down, get down on the ground. And, you know, I couldn't do anything. And this was just Moustapha telling me, recounting the whole story. And they were telling us to shut up. Just shut up. Don't say anything. And Mustafa told me he was trying to placate them and then saying, you know, what do you want? If you want our equipment, you know, we're journalists. Just let them go. Let us go. We're, you know, we're just trying to leave. We're leaving. And, Mustafa told me the gunmen just kept telling us to shut up. Don't say a word. If we say anything, they shoot us. And, as Mustafa was recounting the story, I was, like, playing out these images in my head and what it might have looked like. And he was saying that, the gunmen made Mustafa tie up their hands. John and Jim's hands, the gunmen forced them to do forced him to do it. And so it was him in the taxi driver that were let go. And they very purposefully took Jim and John's equipment and divided it from Mustafa and the taxi driver staff and said, okay, you guys leave. And they they put, John and Jim into the back of their van. And, Mustafa was like, I remember that van. It smelled like, you know, gasoline in the back. And I would recognize it if I see it again. I have to go find them, and I'm looking for them. And I just knew at that moment, somehow it was different. From Jim being taken to Libya or John being taken before. And I said, okay, Mustafa. Well, all right, you're going to go to all the local commanders, you know, and talk to them and try to find out what happened and just be careful. You know, if you need anything, just call me. So I hung up and I just started crying. I was like. I didn't know if I was going to see Jim again, and that was the first thought that came to my head. Not the most positive thought to be thinking, but you did already. The kidnaping, injury gone on for a few hours. So I was like, okay. You know, I just sort of switched to this, like, okay, I need to need to focus and figure it out. So first thing I did was actually I called Claire, or I emailed her and I was like,



there's bad news. I need to talk to you, and you need to get through to Jim's family. And, and then I started emailing a very close knit people of journalists and Peter McCarrick from Human Rights Watch. Just to kind of put the word out there and to see if there was a way we could touch base with the local Syrians that the journalists knew to start putting out, you know, the word information. And nothing came back. We actually held back from telling Jim's family for that night because we wanted to confirm, like, we wanted to make sure he, you know, this was really, you know, we didn't want to upset the family by giving them false information, or going to them and saying, we don't have any information. You know, I felt responsible. I felt like I have to do something, and I didn't have anything. I don't have anything to tell them other than that he was gone. I didn't know where he was. So we kind of kept it to ourselves. And Claire was like, okay, I have Diane's number. And, you know, just let me know what's going on. Whatever she's like, I can come to Antakya or wherever you are, like right now. So, you know, I didn't even, like, get to say bye to Jim. It was just like, okay, see you in a few hours. And it was all just so normal and so kind of, like, casual. He didn't. I don't think he felt that there was anything wrong in the few hours leading up to that. He just seemed like he was focused on filing his stories. So, you know, from that point on, you know, the next day, we had to let the Foleys know. And Claire was the one who made the call because I didn't know Diane. So for the next, you know, three weeks, there was just dead ends and false information and rumors and people being scared of talking because they had a suspicion of who maybe was responsible and they didn't want to get entangled in it. So for the Syrians particularly, they were worried about community. Any information with us?

01:36:05:00



BRIAN OAKES:

So the next three weeks you were in Turkey kind of traveling the border, right?

01:36:10:00

NICOLE TUNG:

Yeah. For the next three weeks, I had to stay in, Turkey basically to coordinate the flow of information. There were a lot of leads and a lot of people looking, and I had to kind of just lay everything out the names and who was who, who could help us. Was there a senior religious figure, a sheik, maybe that could, communicate with the leader of another Islamist group that we know of that might have him or, you know, might be able to reach out to another. You know, there was just like this web of people and information and none of it, which we knew was if it was true or not. So there were a lot of other journalists kind of involved in this effort. And, every day it was just emailing and phone calls and talking to, you know, so that bony and talking to, talking to the Foley's to Michael, just trying to figure things out. But after that, you know, Kroll, hired by the GlobalPost, took over. And, you know, the more experienced and more knowledgeable people take over that role. I was constantly afraid of getting a phone call from the captors and not knowing what to do. That was like a huge fear of mine in those three weeks and sitting in, in Turkey, in southern Turkey, on the border, just wondering, what if I get a phone call and they demand something from me? What do I say? What do I even ask Jim? You know, to kind of prove that he's alive and so that, you know, this was all going so quickly. But those three weeks felt so long. And eventually, when I handed everything over to the relevant people, I actually went into the same place where Jim was kidnaped. I went back to Idlib province, along the same road,



and I'd had trusted people took me in. But I remember just going on that strip of road, the same place where he was, stuff. I had said that they were kidnaped and it was near this tile factory beside this village. And and I just remember thinking, there's nothing remarkable about this road. You know, there maybe there were witnesses. I don't know, you know, there were very few cars. And I was just wondering, you know, where he could have been close by. I don't, for all I know. But I went in and I talked to people from the Free Syrian Army, and I just said, listen, I really need your help. You know, you know, Jim, and you know how dedicated he is. And so people were trying to help, but, you know, they had their own war to fight, and they had their own suffering to deal with it, like I couldn't. There was no way I could expect them to, you know, prioritize, Jim. So it you know, it just seemed very hopeless. But what really hurts me is reading. The investigations done afterwards by reporters of where she was being held. I had done numerous trips into Aleppo in early 2013 and I had driven by the hospital. There was a children's hospital where he was being held so many times. I knew that that, you know, the gibbet must run. I guess guys were in there. And so I never, you know, really wanted to go in there because I didn't want to get involved. And I'd always had this feeling that Jim had been taken by extremists. But I know what that road looks like. Driving by the children's hospital. And he was there that whole time, and I couldn't do anything. I didn't know he was there, first of all. But I couldn't, like, couldn't do anything. I couldn't. Pay enough money in this world to get around it. Couldn't, do anything right to, you know, get them out? So I think that's what really kills me the most is that I had driven by him so many times, and I came out okay, but he didn't.

01:40:23:00



BRIAN OAKES:

It's not that you decided to go back in knowing the landscape of what was going on, I feel like. It's really just really incredible. And it shows that you. You know, you've got a responsibility and you.

01:40:42:00

NICOLE TUNG:

Go from there. Yeah, well, I mean, I went back in because. There was just like this urgency to do something. I couldn't just sit in Turkey and, like, coordinate information for all the help that that might have been or appeared to be.

Didn't really do anything. But, you know, I just felt like I can't sit here and not try to look for him. And maybe it was stupid to go into the same spot where he was kidnaped, because the same thing could have happened to me. And I was very aware of that risk, but the overwhelming feeling of needing to go search for him to find any nugget of information that was truthful was just just overrode everything else. And, you know, I took a lot of precautions. But, you know, in the end, I didn't find very much. And people just sort of gave me their word and that was it. Yeah, but it was like, if I don't go look for him, who's going to. And, you know, it's just so. I think the moment I learned that he'd been kidnaped, I was just like, this is going to be a really long process.

But I'm going to do anything that I can in my power to get him home because I'm. Because I can't stand the thought of him being in a cell somewhere cold and hungry, and the thought of his family having to go through that again. I just had to do something about it. I think.

01:42:16:00

BRIAN OAKES:



Has that changed your approach to, to your job and, and, and how is it kind of changing the profession of journalism in, in general?

01:42:33:00

NICOLE TUNG:

Yeah, I think the last decade maybe. You know, since the murder of Daniel Pearl and maybe even a little bit before that, just like journalists are now targets and actual direct targets, you know, and we're not just kind of collateral damage or something happens to us anymore. We're seeing as, dollar signs or seen as political kind of pawns. And it's it has this chilling effect, obviously, on the media in a way that, you know, conventional wars don't, just kind of simple fighting. And it's bombs here and there. But the kidnappings and killings, the purposeful killings of journalists is, I don't know, I didn't even know what the words are for it, but, I just think that it's. Yeah, it it becomes it makes your job so difficult to do because it's like, where can I go in this world where people will still treat journalists as journalists and not see them as representatives of their country or spies for their countries or, you know, things like that. I mean, we can't cross both front lines anymore where one side is fighting the other, and on the same day where people used to in, let's say, Liberia, for example, you know, government fighting rebels and vice versa, being able to run from one front line to the next, it's hazard and hazardous enough to be in one place already. And it's especially the case in Syria. And like I said earlier, you don't have a safe place to go. And it's such like this brutal, endless conflict that, you just you feel so kind of alone in the sense that you can't do anything about it. You can't do anything for these people, for the people you've made friends with and for the people who took you in and, shared their food with you and, you know, wanted you to play



with their children. It's becomes very personal. You know, there was reading a very I don't know if this is even relevant, but a psychologist who studies a lot of conflict journalists was talking about why the Syrian war is so different. His name is Anthony Feinstein. And he was saying, because we have to live amongst the local population, that we become the intimate chroniclers of this conflict. We don't have bureaus to go back to. You know, we don't have hotels or we just kick back and hang out for the for the evening and having drinks or whatever that doesn't exist. You're there and every moment of it you share with the locals and what they go through. And while their scale of suffering is so much more beyond what you you experience because you can leave, it's still not to be discounted. And the threat for both you and them, obviously. Is, is just endless and and comes in so many different forms. I think for me personally, having lost so many friends and knowing that, you know, people are purposely out for journalists now, I just. It makes me want to be really defiant because it's just in my nature. I just want to say, well, I'm going to continue doing it because, even though I don't, I don't fight. I'm not a soldier. I don't have a political stake in any of this. I still have a camera. And that is, you know, so I guess you know, what I will use to to show and to represent what I see. Because if I let someone if, you know, witnessing Sheamus murder this publicly, it's it sends a message to all of us. And my I guess response to that is that if I stop because of this and because people are murdering me and my friends and whatever, then they would have succeeded in silencing us. They would have won in a way. And I just I don't want to let them win, and I don't want them to stop, like the media from doing their jobs. I mean, we have to fight back with our pictures and our words. It's what we know how to do, and I'll do it. I'm going to do it because it's it's my way of fighting back for freedom.



01:47:16:00

BRIAN OAKES:

After I spoke with the Michael and John Key. They said that Jim had PTSD. Did you ever think you'd see signs of him?

01:47:25:00

NICOLE TUNG:

Post-traumatic stress? Oh, yeah. I mean, with Jim, sometimes I could sort of see that he really wanted to switch off from everything. So there were times where we were witnessing things that really horrible things happening in front of us. And I didn't see him really registering that or kind of absorbing it to create any sort of emotion. And so I worked about that and I was like, Jim, are you okay? You know, if you realize what we just saw. And he was like, yeah, yeah. And even though we kind of didn't verbally communicate about the the nastiness of it and the emotional side of it, I also worried that he wasn't kind of registering it within his own head, you know. I mean, so I feel like because he'd seen so much, he wanted to, to not get affected by it. And we all go through that, you know, we kind of use this camera as an excuse to not, have to feel anything. So I think, you know, we all deal with trauma very differently. And I think he dealt with it very privately. And then I think that that worried me a lot. You know, he didn't talk to me about a lot of things that we saw. Even though we had this understanding. But when it was time to talk about it, he wouldn't say much about it.

01:48:53:00

BRIAN OAKES:



So Nicole, could you just- That's the first photo. You tell me-- just kind of paint the picture of where you guys were and what the circumstances were of that?

01:49:05:00

NICOLE TUNG:

Jim and I were in Salahuddin in Aleppo, and this was where kind of the first front line had started forming in. This must have been early August of 2012. And, we were with this, rebel fighter. His name was Abu Said, and one of the activists had paired us up with him because he could take us around the front lines. He knew all the Free Syrian Army guys and we wouldn't have problems with access. So, we were there with the rebels here, like just at the spot where they were all kind of like hanging out and drinking tea and coffee. And then sometimes when, you know, peek around the corner and shoot a few rounds off. And it was kind of funny, like, war can be really bizarre in the way that it's so emotional and it's all this, these extremes. And then it just becomes really hilarious at one point where you're just like, it's really surreal. You know, people are sipping tea from these little cups and coffee and like, rocket fuel, you know? So as with everywhere we went in Syria, people being so hospitable, they were like, you know, please have a coffee. I think one of the rebel fighters made us a coffee each. And, you know, we were just standing there hanging out, kind of breaking the ice. And Jim was doing most of the talking. But the backstory to this was that I would say he became our very good friend, and he had been injured before we'd met him. And then, you know, we we stayed in touch with him. He was just one of these amazing people that was very disillusioned from very early on. He could see far down the line what the revolution was becoming, and it was becoming ugly very quickly to him, whereas a lot of people were just very idealistic. I think for a



long time obviously saw that, you know, he was like, we're going to have these, you know, crazy foreign jihadists and the government, you know, nobody's going to help us. And just this day, we after we kind of like sipped the coffee and everything, we were like, okay, let's get to work. And suddenly the shelling just started. It was the government had a tank on the road parallel to where we were, and they just started firing tank shots of the buildings right across from where we were, because it was on the on a road, there's a street here. And then there was a building. We were standing right here. And just the impact of like, the explosions and the debris falling down, you know, it was just it was insane, like, you know, for me, it was, like, really hard to get still photographs of that happening, but, but Jim was like, you know, it's great for video and all the noise and the whatever, the visuals. So we stayed there for a while. And finally when things got really hairy, the shells started coming a lot closer. We were like, okay, we got to get out of here. And the road was like, we got to leave now, you know? And obviously just took us out of there. And he was like, you have to follow me. And you know, he was just our eyes and ears, for all of that. And, you know, I think there's like this relationship that you form with people in a war that because you experience the extreme up and down ups and downs, that relationship's very special. And that was what I had with Jim, and it was what we had with Abu Saeed. A couple of months later, we'd heard that he'd been kidnaped by the government and that he was in some prison with the Air Force intelligence, which is like the most notorious, of the intelligence branches in Syria. And we were really worried about him. We were trying to figure out, you know, there was nothing we could do. You know, so many Syrians have ended up in those jails and just never come out. So we learned that he'd been killed, in prison. And we'd driven by his village on the outskirts of Aleppo, and we saw his



father. This was when Jim and I were on our way out, and actually, we saw his father, and he was, you know, desperate to talk to us. And we couldn't stop. Actually, we couldn't actually, you know, we it was like getting dark that day. And, we wanted to sit down with his father and just sort of talk to him about his son and say, sorry. We never got that chance. And Jim felt really guilty about that for a long time. So this was a back story for two very special people, one who not shown in this picture.

01:53:45:00

BRIAN OAKES:

What it was like about this photo, though, Jim was like seeing that little teacup in his hands. You just had this is your original. This is like mitts and you will never see anybody just give you these, like, hugs. And they were just kind of like these big, like, sloppy bear kind of things. I just really, like, just remember his big hands. When I see that, I just kind of when he's holding that, like being the little teacup. I think it was big hands and just kind of. Yeah, smiles on my face.

01:54:20:00

NICOLE TUNG:

I mean, Jim was a very good looking guy. And I think that, the first thing I noticed about him was actually his, his, like, his hands and his toes, like how long they were. I was like, Jim, you have really, really long toes. And he was like, well, you don't like him. And, yeah, I mean, obviously you spent so much time with that person. You get to know them quite intimately, even though it's not romantic. But like, you know, he was really shy about getting in the pool with some of the Free Syrian Army guys because we were at one of their



bases and they'd basically taken over this villa and it had a pool in it. And, obviously I wasn't allowed in there. They were like no women allowed in our pool. And they were playing, water polo. And Jim, this is like a middle of summer. It was scorching hot and they were like, James, James, Jim, Jim, come, come into the water, you know, and play water polo with us. And he was like, no, no, no, I don't want to. And finally they kind of convinced him and he relented. And, you know, he just, so he, you know, took off his shirt and everything and, they're all like, oh, you tattoos, you know? And he was like, yeah, yeah, he was really bashful about it. And that's what I thought was really funny because he was like this dashing kind of figure. And yet he was very self-conscious in a way, sometimes, you know.

01:55:42:00

BRIAN OAKES:

Yeah. That's great. This photo.

01:55:49:00

NICOLE TUNG:

So the second photo was this was taken in the old city in Aleppo. Again, Jim was came up with this story idea. He was talking about how the ruins or what remained of the old city was being completely decimated by the war, by the shelling. And, you know, these beautiful buildings from past empires and mosques and bathhouses. It was just so rich. And you could actually smell the, olive soap that they used to make in, Aleppo when you walked into the old city. And you could kind of feel the history there. He and I were both fascinated by that, and we were really sad about what was happening to, you know, Syrian culture and history. So he was like, why don't we do a story



about the old city? So this day in particular, we were kind of walking around looking at old buildings and trying to figure out what had been damaged. And he was a, you know, I'm a reach out to this professor of Syrian history. And he did ultimately, he seized me on that email and he was like, can we talk to you about, you know, this building and that building. And then that was a story he wanted to pursue. And I remember we just kind of stopped here. This was outside of one of the bathhouses, was actually a hammam. And, you know, he kind of just sat there and I was like, it's really gorgeous. And I just kind of took a picture of him. And in the frame after this, he was yawning and he was like, please don't show that to anybody. And, so, yeah, it was, that was a nice day where it wasn't crazy and horrible.

01:57:29:00

BRIAN OAKES:

How did you feel when you-- when they-- the Pilsen friends did the mural in Pilsen with that-- with that photo?

01:57:39:00

NICOLE TUNG:

I think that this picture is a really peaceful moment of time. I don't know, it's hard for me to say. I think, I have mixed feelings because this was just maybe a couple of days before he was kidnaped. So I'm glad that they use this picture because it represents, you know. A peaceful dream that, you know, he's always got a sunglasses on and just. Yeah. I'm happy that they used it. It was just like. And it was also this place that he fell in love with that, you know, was very much in his element. So I think it was good of them to use that. These guys. This was. Yeah. So this photo, the third photo was taken in, that



day is talking about when we went into this building on the front lines and saw the foreign fighters. So in this photo, it's me, Jim, John, Cantlay and Mustafa. And I think this was when we had just kind of wrapped up and we, we were about to leave, and one of the Syrians just said, you know, hey, can I help you guys take a photo? We were like, let's get a group photo. And, it was kind of a happy moment. You know, we were staying at, one of our contacts house, and he had young children, and, you know, we knew we were going to go back, and they'd always offered us food, so we were going to get food. And, you know, we had a place to go back to. And we were just feeling, you know, all right, I guess, like, not, but, yeah, I think with Jim, he was never like a very touchy feely person with me, but he kind of like, leaned into, like, put his elbow on my shoulder. I'm like, what are you doing? And he was just like, just be quiet. Just like, let's take a photo and let's get out of here. So, you know, we were in a pretty good mood. Room or this was in the old city, kind of roughly around the same time as this, I think. Yeah. These two. So the one of him with with the helmet on. I don't really remember what happened this day, but I just remember it was pretty quiet. You know, there wasn't much fighting on the front lines. It became this very frustrating, grinding war where all you had was footage and pictures of rebels, you know, looking through sniper holes. And it wasn't very interesting after a while. And, and this one was, in another, another neighborhood, not the old city, where also a very quiet day. And that day we were with another Arab journalist from Dubai, I think. And when we got back to the the rebels base, which was in a school, the rebels were like, come across the street, you know, you have something for you. And it was like this amazing dish. I forget what it's called anyway, but it was like a Syrian dish with, like, hummus and chickpeas and everything inside. It was



delicious. And Jim was like, you just had such a fantastic time and was, like, really grateful for the food.

02:01:04:00

BRIAN OAKES:

Do you-- does Jim have a legacy as a historical figure?

02:01:09:00

NICOLE TUNG:

Selfishly, yes. I want to say, of course, Jim has a legacy as a historical figure. I mean, not just because I knew him and worked with him, but I think he symbolizes so much of, you know, what journalists aspire to and what I think people should aspire to be. You know, he was raised in this kind of way that I will never fully understand because I don't, you know, never had the chance to talk to him about everything. But, his humanity, you know, his care is kind of pursuit, for things that were, you know, true, I guess, you know, and I think that's, isn't, I don't know, I never really met anybody pure in that vision than than he was. Yeah. Of course he was drawn to the adrenaline and the action, but there was a side to him which. You know. Yeah, I think that he symbolizes a lot of what we aspire to be, and I hope that people remember that.

END TC: 02:02:55:00