To the Secretary of the Smithsonian, Larry Small, to the director of the National Portrait Gallery, Marc Pachter to Paul Peck, who most graciously and generously conceived of and endowed these two awards, to the distinguished nominating and selection committees, to Ambassador Thomas Pickering, whom we so admire, and who I am so honored to share these awards with tonight, to my dear and wonderful friends who have come here with me to celebrate, each of whom have either helped me greatly in my career as a photographer, or have simply been there for me with affection, encouragement, and comfort, and to my wonderful family, whose love and support has allowed me to do this work, may I say how deeply honored I am to receive this award from the National Portrait Gallery. To be acknowledged this way, for doing something I have loved doing, is somewhat like the delicious icing on a wonderful cake.

As just one of many who spend or spent their days photographing the Presidents, I feel I am accepting this award for all the White House press photographers, many of whom are better at their jobs than I am. I am thrilled, delighted, appreciative, and somewhat astounded.... When I asked my dear friend Art Buchwald what I should say to you, he gave me this line: "I don't know whether I deserve this prize--but I WANT IT!

People are curious as to how I came to do what I do. When I was in my thirties, my great pal Gail Tirana convinced me I should go into the photography business. It had been a lifelong hobby. And so "I am a camera" was born. We did pictures mostly of weddings, bar mitzvahs, authors—anything and everything!

One day Linda Smith, who was then working at the *Washington Monthly* for Charlie Peters, called me to offer me my first assignment in a magazine: would I be available to photograph bunches of asparagus at the Safeway? I must have
captured the essence of the vegetable, as Charlie then hired me at $25 for each picture he used, and acquired for me press passes for the Hill and the White House. I was launched, and Gail, with a sigh of relief, went on to graduate school.

My editor and great friend Michele Stephenson at *Time* gave me my first assignment there: to photograph President Ford's son on a date with tennis star Chrissie Evert. From here on, there was no place to go but up!

As I think back on the years I photographed the Presidents, I think first what fun it has been. Racing around the world on and off Air Force One, seeing the inside of the Kremlin or the disturbing Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand, the funeral of the Emperor of Japan, the President wishing the troops well on the eve of Operation Desert Storm. Or seeing from the window of the press bus the endless flat fields covered in a thin layer of snow on the umpteenth trip to Iowa in freezing February; falling through a frozen New Hampshire puddle while hearing once again how much the President needs your vote; or racing out of a motorcade, running toward the President's limousine, arriving out of breath, cameras flying, just in time to see him, alas, get back into the car after greeting 200 school kids with American flags on the side of the road—another "missed opportunity."

We would watch the President's sadness, his grief, as the last flag-draped coffin was carried from the plane with the Marine band's unforgettable dirge filling the air. Whether throwing out the first baseball, comforting a policeman's widow, scowling at Newt Gingrich, or waving out of a window at Bethesda Naval Hospital to indicate health and vigor after cancer, to photograph a President is exhausting, sometimes boring (the hurry–up–and–wait syndrome), oftentimes exciting, moving, vexing, frustrating, but, indeed, a fabulous opportunity and, for me, a great honor.

We move in a pack, we are restrained by ropes, stanchions. We stand on tall risers, use heavy long lenses, borrow film from a pal, consult on light readings, and miss our families while on a stake-out in the snows of Belarus. These are the pictures we take, never letting the President out of our sight, especially when he is in public, getting the action, the news event of the day, but trying to get a little under the facade, a bit beyond the staged event, for your paper tomorrow, your news magazine the next week, or, if I might say, for the history books. We have been sent out there not to miss anything.

I have considered it my job always to try and show you, to the best of my ability, who our President is, and hopefully something about his character. I have strived always to keep myself, my own ego, my political persuasion, out of my pictures. I am looking at the President purely as a man, not Republican or Democrat, watching always for that look, that touch, that relationship which will help us better to understand him.

I believe that I was aided in this effort by the times our magazine requested of the White House, as other magazine and papers also do—and "behind the
scenes" access, the President away from the lights and mikes, in the Oval Office alone or with staff, or in a conference with the secretary of state, or just kicking back with family. Of course the White House controls when and what I see, and I have gotten access often when the staff thinks it helpful to be in *Time* magazine, but I took every opportunity to have this somewhat-private view of the President and first lady, as I never saw a President who didn't show me something of his personality, his character, with a laugh, a touch, a flash of temper in those times when I was the only photojournalist in the room. Of course he knows I am there—he, in fact, would sign off on the permission—but with his familiarity with the constant presence of his own staff photographer working, I hoped he wouldn't pay that much attention to another camera, working as quietly and unobtrusively as I attempted to do. I used no strobe, fast film, quiet cameras, no talk, no eye contact and no ears. There is the age-old question whether one acts for the camera—what is really true, what is not. But I simply take the pictures for you to interpret as you will. But I sincerely believe most Presidents are not actors.

I believe that some of the behind-the-scenes pictures such as these do show you a bit more of the first families: Bill Clinton behind stage, hearing the roar of an excited convention, pausing to take an enormous deep breath; Hillary Clinton's body language as Chelsea opens her coat to show her mother what she is wearing to the inaugural parade—a mini-skirt! the image of President Bush "41" intently studying his speech notes in his office on board Air Force One while his grandchildren careen around the corners and are nabbed by Marvin to get ready to exit the plane; the already somewhat icy looks on the faces of Raisa Gorbachev and Nancy Reagan as they met privately for tea; the actual evidence of communication at a peace summit where Netanyahu and Arafat spoke to one another on a love-seat in the Red Room of the White House.

This is the way in my work that I have tried to portray the presidency, with much of the public view, and some of a private view. I have done this with the help of superb editors, wonderful colleagues, many of whom had the patience to teach me along the way, like my *Time* colleague, Dirck Halstead. I have had those wonderful, exciting moments when you get it all right, and you say to yourself, wow! Henri Cartier-Bresson once described this feeling something like this: "It is when your head, your eye, and your heart are on the same axis."

As I grew up, my mother took me to every museum she could locate in any city we visited. She tried to show me things beautiful of both color and composition. She sharpened my eyes by quizzing me on the color of the tie or socks of someone we'd just met. My father taught me to read, though his emphasis on Thomas Hardy was a bit much for me. He shared with me his intellect, his love of athletics, and his gentle humanness. My parents gave me a great start in life. I miss them here tonight.

As an observer, not a player, I have kept my lens on dedicated public servants like Ambassador Pickering, and most especially the Presidents he so ably served. I hope I have, in my work, shed some light on these remarkable men.
and women who have occupied the White House. I have had a perfectly
wonderful time trying. Thank you all for this evening from the bottom of my
heart.

**Image:**
Paul Peck Presidential Award recipient Diana Walker during her acceptance speech

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