



Tagitu, a photo honored by the Fourth Annual Photography Masters Cup in their Portraits category.

International Photographer and Humanitarian, **Tyler Stableford**

ARTICLE NICOLETTE TOUSSAINT | PHOTOGRAPHY TYLER STABLEFORD



In 2009, Tyler Stableford volunteered to film a documentary about a nonprofit that was helping transform the lives of destitute children in Ethiopia, a country devastated by drought, famine and disease. Sharp increases in HIV and malaria coupled with a lack of healthcare led to a startling statistic: 80 percent of the deaths occurring in Ethiopia were due to preventable diseases.

Stableford, who grew up in Connecticut and now lives in Carbondale, spent a college semester focusing on anthropology and environmental studies in Africa. He says, "I think my time in Kenya really opened my eyes to how much of the world lives. I did home-stays the whole time. That experience was part of my coming of age. I learned that you have to be involved in something bigger than myself. And now I am."

Stableford, a world-class photographer and cinematographer and a first-class storyteller, dramatized the Ethiopian crisis for Wide Horizons, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit. With roots that go back to two couples who cared for dozens of children orphaned by the Vietnam war, the organization has placed close to 13,000 children from 60 countries into adoptive homes.

That Wide Horizons film was one of many contributions that Stableford has given to nonprofits here in the Roaring Fork Valley and abroad. He offers up his talents for free to nonprofits for at least one week a year.

Stableford, who has been named one of Canon Camera's prestigious "Explorers of Light," is an internationally recognized outdoor and adventure photographer and director. He has won awards from Communication Arts, the Global Art Directors Club, the International Photography Awards and many other organizations. Among the recurrent themes in his work are adventure, the outdoors and physical challenges.

In 2005, for example, he filmed inside Iceland's Langjökull Glacier, listening to the moving snow above him creaking and groaning as cracks appeared in the ice cave where he worked. *Men's Journal* named him one of "World's Greatest Adventure Photographers" for that footage. In 2012, Stableford's ice-climbing film





Stableford documented a Guatemalan boy named Lalo foraging in a landfill; photo was chosen as a winner in the American Photography 26 contest.



"Shattered" was an official selection of the Telluride MountainFilm festival.

Stableford's 2010 film "The Fall Line" tells the story of 101st Airborne Ranger Heath Calhoun who lost his legs in a grenade blast in Iraq. Overcoming his disability, Calhoun learned to monoski in Aspen and earned a spot on the U.S. Paralympic ski team.

"What I am attracted to as a storyteller is a transformational challenge," says Stableford. "This was a great opportunity to tell the story of a wounded warrior undergoing a challenge in life, a challenge that is more mental than physical. That's a story about the human spirit, about suffering, about soul searching. It's the reconstruction of a person's sense of self and the connection to self and family that's the story, rather than the disability."

Children and poverty, both at home and abroad, are abiding concerns for Stableford. Between 2008 and 2011, he volunteered in elementary schools, reading to children. Last month, he was busy shooting photos of kids in need of homes for Colorado Foster Services.

Two years ago, he produced, directed and donated a video used by the Manaus Fund and Valley Settlement Project. "The Valley Settlement project is doing such amazing work to integrate Latino families and others into our communities and schools here," Stableford commented. "Their efforts truly benefit everyone in our communities."

George Stranahan, the Fund's founder, explains that the name "Manaus" refers to a city in Brazil where two rivers, one muddy and one clear, meet. The name is an apt metaphor for the work of blending low-income groups and communities of color into our society. "But we had trouble explaining to people what we did," he says. "The movie was useful for that. Tyler did a bang-up job with it, and it's powerful."

Stableford has filmed for Wide Horizons for Children twice, shooting in Guatemala, as well as in Ethiopia. In both cases, photos taken on location won photography awards. The Fourth Annual Photography Masters Cup honored Stableford's image of an Ethiopian woman named Tagitu in their Portraits category. Stableford notes, "Tagitu had lost her husband to illness two years ago. Destitute, she became unable to care for her children and sequentially gave up her two- and five-year-old boys for adoption." In 2010, Stableford's shot of a seven-year-old boy named Lalo foraging in a Guatemalan landfill was chosen as a winner in the American Photography 26 contest. "It is one of my favorite journalistic photos, for the sense of hardship and lost youth that Lalo conveys."

"We all have experience of adversity and adapting to challenging circumstances and a changing world," he says. "I am drawn as a seeker to stories of people who are leading the way and expanding themselves. That makes an interesting story and also makes a strong personal connection for me."