



## KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

### W. Eugene Smith (1918-1978)

W. Eugene Smith was a true master of his craft. From epic battle scenes to the lives of the working class, Smith photographed a wide variety of subjects with one goal in mind: to open viewers' eyes to the social injustices of the world and inject a sense of conscience into their hearts and minds.



A Wichita native, W. Eugene Smith learned about photography from his mother as a boy. He attended Wichita North High School and began taking pictures for local papers immediately following his graduation in 1936. He attended the University of Notre Dame for a year but left due to restrictions put on his work. By the age of 21, Smith had been published in numerous magazines and moved to New York to pursue his passion for photography on a grander scale.

Smith took a job working for Newsweek but was fired for refusing to use medium format cameras. He then began freelancing for various publications. In 1942, Smith's career took him to the front lines of the war. At first he photographed as a correspondent for Ziff-Davis, but later for Life magazine, during which he was stationed in the Pacific amidst gruesome island-to-island fighting. Smith photographed U.S. soldiers on land, sea and in air, risking life and limb to get just the right shot at all times. He participated in 26 carrier combat missions and 13 invasions at Saipan, Guam, Iwo Jima and Okinawa.



The danger of the job finally caught up with Smith when, on May 23, 1945, he was wounded in the head and left hand by mortar fire. He returned home where he faced a long and painful recovery, wondering if he would ever again be able to take pictures. On an outing with his family, however, he captured a photo of his two children entering a clearing titled "A Walk to Paradise Garden," which would become one of the most memorable photos in history.

After two years of recovery, Smith returned to work for Life and began producing a series of photo-essays. To develop the photo-essays, Smith would spend weeks with his subject to get a better perspective on his/her life. He was always committed to providing honest and intimate portrayals of his subjects, conscious of a social responsibility to his viewers.



Smith truly changed the meaning of photojournalism as he mastered the photo-essay, and his work received much acclaim. However, Smith still felt bounded by the confines of the magazine and left again in 1956 to create a book of photographs on the life of Pittsburgh and the city personified. He then decided to create a series of portraits of the city from his loft window. Eventually Smith published "Let Truth Be The Prejudice," a masterful representation of his many works.

After collaborating on a book about Japanese victims of industrial pollution in Minimata with his second wife, Smith moved back to Tucson, Ariz., where he died in 1978. Smith's legacy lives on through a fund created in his name to award humanistic photography excellence.

