

JACK'S JOURNEY

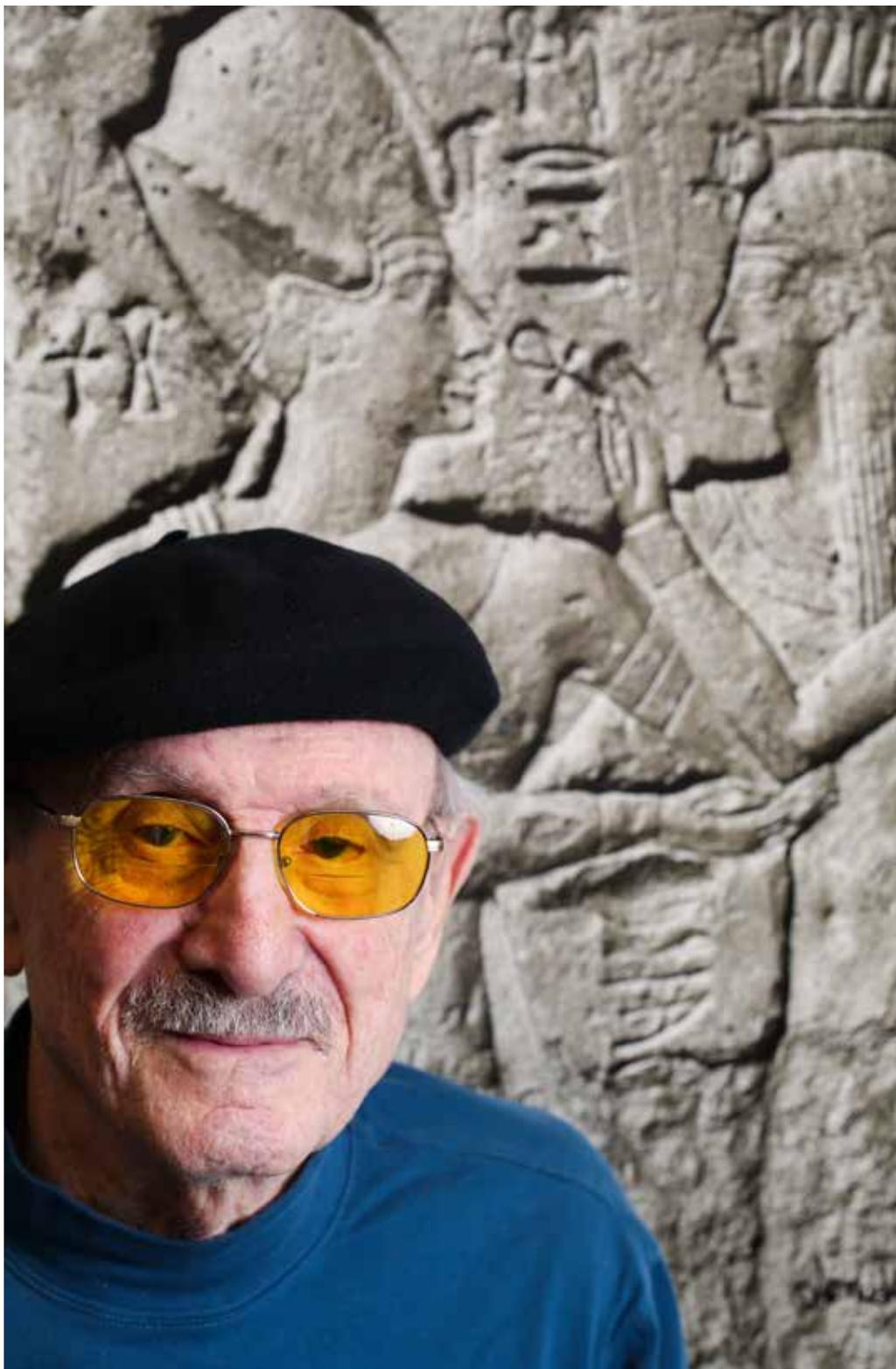


PHOTO BY JIM BARCUS

Long-time KC resident Jack Jonathan, shown standing in front of his photograph, *For a Long Life*, plans to travel to Egypt in January for an exhibit of photographs he created of the country and its people 64 years ago.

HOW A PHOTOGRAPHY SHOW PAVED THE WAY FOR AN EGYPTIAN-BORN SON OF JEWISH REFUGEES FROM PALESTINE TO ACHIEVE A BRILLIANT CAREER IN KANSAS CITY

BY ELISABETH KIRSCH

In 2016, at age 95, long-time KC resident Jack Jonathan hopes to return to Egypt, 64 years after he left that country. It seems fitting that a photography show, which enabled him to leave an Egypt in turmoil all those years ago, is the very thing impelling his return.

In January, a reprise of that first photo exhibition, now titled, "Egypt: The Eternal Spirit of its People," will open at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria, Egypt.

As is typical in Jack Jonathan's extraordinary life, the unexpected suddenly becomes reality.

While watching Cairo burn during Egypt's national revolution of 1952, Jonathan realized that he and Rena, his American wife of one year, needed to get to America. So he hatched a plan.

Born in Egypt, the son of Sephardic Jewish refugees from Palestine who were accepted into Egypt as stateless people, Jonathan worked for the United States Office of War Information in Cairo during World War II; postwar, he was head of the printing and publications department at the United States Information Service at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo.

But Jonathan was also a self-taught photographer. He decided to gamble and create an exhibition, hoping it would help establish his credentials to start a photography career in the U.S.



Many of the photographs Jonathan shot in the early 1950s are candid images of everyday Egyptians, including children, as seen in this shot titled *Studying for the Future*, (above) and *Future Fella*, (top right) a portrait of a young *fellah* (farmer).

Jonathan had worked with the great *Life* magazine photographer David Douglas Duncan at the embassy in 1947, and was an expert with the Rolleiflex camera. The Rolleiflex allowed Jonathan to take straightforward shots of subjects in motion and in low light.

For his first public show, Jonathan wanted his photos to be different from the generic tourist pictures of antiquities. When he was young, he had lived on a dairy farm, and he decided to reconnect with scenes from his past. The camera let him shoot candid images of his favorite subject matter: everyday Egyptians—farmers, Bedouins, children—performing quotidian tasks. His pictures of children are particularly moving, highlighting beautiful, serious young faces at work outside.



Other shots capture the country's magnificent architecture and monuments, including this photograph by Jonathan of *Mohammed Ali Courtyard* in Cairo.

Jonathan worked with the great *Life* magazine photographer David Douglas Duncan at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo in 1947, and was an expert with the Rolleiflex camera.



The 2016 exhibit will be a reprise of a show Jonathan presented in Cairo in 1952, as seen in this news clipping showing Jonathan with Hafez Afifi Pasha, head of the Egyptian Royal Cabinet, at the opening of the exhibit.



Jonathan's image of this bas relief, used on the invitation to his 1952 exhibit (above), also caught the eye of U.S. Ambassador to Cairo, Jefferson Caffery, who asked Jonathan to let him use it for his Christmas card. It depicts the Goddess Mout extending an ankh, symbol of life, to King Amenophis II.

Equally fascinating are his portraits of working women, individuals typically overlooked by visitors who preferred mementos of Nefertiti.

Between his job and photography work, he was working 20 hours a day.

"My ambition," Jonathan writes, "was to create the prints as large as possible so that people could really engage with the subject...My enlarger could only produce prints up to 11 x 14 inches. I would have to innovate in order to create larger images. I experimented by turning the enlarger



Working with Jim Stowers, Jonathan was instrumental in commissioning artist Larry Young to create the *Hope for Life Helix Sculpture* at the Stowers Institute.

around and projecting the images onto the floor...I was able to extend the size to 17 x 22 inches while still maintaining sharpness."

When he had completed 61 photographs, enough for his exhibit, Jonathan next had to find the money to mat and frame the prints. Ever resourceful, he worked with a bookbinder to affix the images to binding board with animal glue. His sister Miriam created the invitations for him. He also needed a catalog for both Arabic and English readers, which meant it had to read from right to left and vice versa.

His "Scenes of Egypt" exhibit opened in Cairo in March, 1952 at the Educational Foundation for Egypt. The American Cultural Center sponsored another opening one month later at the landmark Cecil Hotel, the former site of Cleopatra's Needle, where such characters as Winston Churchill, Somerset Maugham and Al Capone stayed. Jonathan and his sister installed both shows. The exhibition was reviewed positively in English, Arabic, Greek, and French journals.

Jonathan notes that “The Arabic press appreciated that I had captured the beauty of the country.” The *Al Ahrām* newspaper wrote that Jonathan “had endeavored, by light and shadow, to reach a sublime climax for Egypt’s scenes and glory.”

A number of photos sold from the show.

“I was amazed,” Jonathan says, “when Hafez Afifi Pasha, head of the Egyptian Royal Cabinet, came to choose nine prints for the palace... At that time it was not public knowledge, nor was I aware, that the king would abdicate in July. In retrospect, it seems that Afifi Pasha carefully selected images that would remind the exiled king of his beloved Egypt.”

Shortly thereafter, the Cecil Hotel was seized by the Egyptian Government.

Jack and Rena were able to leave Cairo for New York in June 1952. The success of “Scenes of Egypt” confirmed his desire to pursue a career in photography. For two months, during a sweltering New York summer, he carried the 61 prints from his show everywhere, showing them to art directors, publishers, and editors of newspapers and magazines.

He also met with the legendary photographer Edward Steichen, who was then head of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art. Steichen had just selected the 503 pictures that would make up the exhibition, “The Family of Man,” a show that would eventually travel around the world for eight years and become the most popular exhibit MOMA had ever produced to date.

“Steichen looked at my portfolio,” Jonathan says, “and told me he regretted that I had come too late to be included in his show.”

Rena was now pregnant. Jonathan felt he needed a full-time, steady job. He decided to look for work in the graphic arts, and printing and publishing, which was his background.

“Photography would have to remain my avocation,” he says.

Jonathan’s first job in the States was with World Publishing in Cleveland, Ohio, where he was hired to launch *The Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language*. The president of the

“Jack surprised people when he entered or left a room. . .and he surprised people when the most wonderful things sprang up under his leadership.”

— Mike Anderson, former Hallmark editor and head writer

company was an amateur photographer who admired Jonathan’s photos. Jonathan pursued his interest in photography by teaching a course at the local YMCA and mounting a small exhibition.

The next turn in his career path led to extended relationships with some of the top minds in business and finance in Kansas City.

HURRICANE JACK HITS KC

In 1954, Jonathan took a post at Hallmark Cards, where he found a mentor in the company’s founder, Joyce C. Hall, and was soon managing the greeting card division. Jonathan wanted to go beyond the traditional card concept, so he introduced and developed such products as calendars, books, posters, albums, and Hallmark’s The Little Gallery. He developed patented display units, and also initiated the use of photography for cards, all innovations we take for granted now.

Jonathan set up a dark room in his house, and often took pictures of his three

children, family and friends. His expertise in that arena prompted Donald Hall in the 1960s to ask Jonathan to take informal photographs of him, his wife Adele, and their young children.

In 1970 Jonathan became head of Group 71, the first multidisciplinary creative team at Hallmark, where he earned the nickname, “Hurricane Jack.”

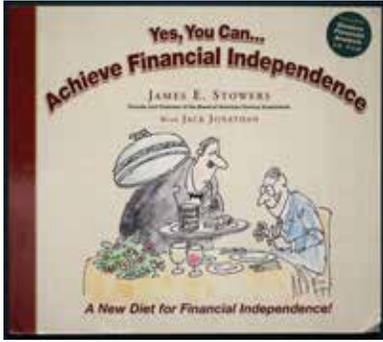
Former Hallmark editor and head writer Mike Anderson said in a recent interview, “I remember what a surprise JJ was. He had an uncanny ability to make creative genius happen. He could extract it painfully (like a breach birth) from pregnant groups who fought him all the way.

“He surprised people when he entered or left a room. . .and he surprised people when the most wonderful things sprang up under his leadership. Just when you thought it probably would have happened without Jack’s leadership

he would call forth some new creative insight. It didn’t look at all purposeful most of the time. But it was JJ magic.”

During his tenure at Hallmark Jonathan had worked with the Swarovski crystal company. In 1983 he was ready for a new challenge, and moved to Europe where he became president and founder of Collection Coeur, a line of gifts and collectibles, for Swarovski of Austria. He developed innovative methods utilizing porcelain, wood and mixed media with crystal production. Jonathan, who grew up speaking five languages, lived in Switzerland and Monte Carlo for five years.

In 1988 Jonathan’s old friend Jim Stowers called and told him he was needed back in Kansas City for various projects Stowers wanted to initiate. Stowers, who founded American Century Investments, was interested in educating people in finance. Together he and Jonathan created and published a book, *Yes, You Can...Achieve Financial Independence*. Six more *Yes, You Can* books followed, and two of them



In the late 1980s and early '90s Jonathan teamed up with American Century Investments founder, Jim Stowers, to create a series of *Yes, You Can* books designed to educate people in finance.

won awards. Jonathan's *Yes, You Can... Raise Financially Aware Kids* garnered three awards.

In the mid-90s, Jonathan was part of an innovative group assembled by Stowers that led to the creation of the Stowers Institute for Medical Research. He later helped Stowers write the Institute's story, *Creating Hope for Life: The Jim and Virginia Stowers Story*.

Always a photographer, in 2013 Jonathan contributed a group of his large, exuberant color photos of flowers, animals and children, which he named "Healing Images," to the Child Life Department at Children's Mercy Hospital. Beautifully shot and printed, this body of work is ample evidence that Jonathan could as easily have been a landscape photographer as a portraitist, and that his art thrives in color.

While attending the 2014 exhibition, "Roads of Arabia: Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Jonathan met Egyptian journalist Hanan ElBadry, who became interested in seeing his 1952 pictures of Egypt. She was very moved by the images.

Shortly, he heard from Dr. Ismail Serageldin, founding director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the new Library of Alexandria. It was time, Dr. Serageldin told Jonathan, for Egypt to see these pictures again. He invited Jonathan to curate a retrospective exhibit of the original "Scenes of Egypt" in January 2016 for the Bibliotheca. Jonathan plans to be there for the show and is producing an accompanying book, *Egypt, the Eternal Spirit of Its People: Stories of an Exhibition*, written by his biographer and co-writer Sheelagh Hope Manheim.

Steve Barr, another longtime friend and creative collaborator, is also helping with the preparations. "At 94 Jack still embraces the new as well as the past," Barr said in a recent email. "His ability to see the beauty and emotional impact inherent in a photograph is just one grain of sand on his creative landscape." □

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