

This is Santa Cruz



Photos © Shmuel Thaler / Santa Cruz Sentinel

Santa Cruz Sentinel photojournalists capture our precious moments

By Isaiah Guzman

I'm sitting at my desk, looking through a bin full of articles I've written for the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* over the years, and the photographs that went with them. My assignment is to write about *Sentinel* photographers Dan Coyro, Shmuel Thaler and now-retired Bill Lovejoy, and how their images have preserved this county's history like some kind of endless flip book.

With all their news-making and award-winning shots, I'm almost certain those guys don't remember these shots. If they do, their memories are as impressive as the canon they've created over a combined century of experience.

Certain images catch my eye and I'm right there when I started writing for newspapers 10 years ago. I see Coyro's shot of an old boxer nicknamed the Blonde Bomber hitting a heavy bag, and I can feel what his sweaty, wrapped fist felt like when he gently tapped my chin and made me realize he could still, at 78 years old, probably knock me out. I think about the close relationships I've formed with world champion Carina Moreno and her manager Rick Noble as I've written about them over the years.

I see Thaler's portrait of a high school basketball player I wrote about in 2006. The kid's mother was a prostitute, his father a pimp in inner city St. Louis. His football coach brought him out here for a better life. I think about how this kid and I stayed in touch for years and about how meeting people like his coach inspired me to become the teacher and baseball coach I am now.

On my wall, I see Lovejoy's photos for a 2011 story I wrote about a friend's annual Christmas light show he does in spite of his failing health from hepatitis. I think about how that friend, in his late 50s, has been like a father to me and how the story was probably too close to home for me to be writing, but nevertheless was one of my most

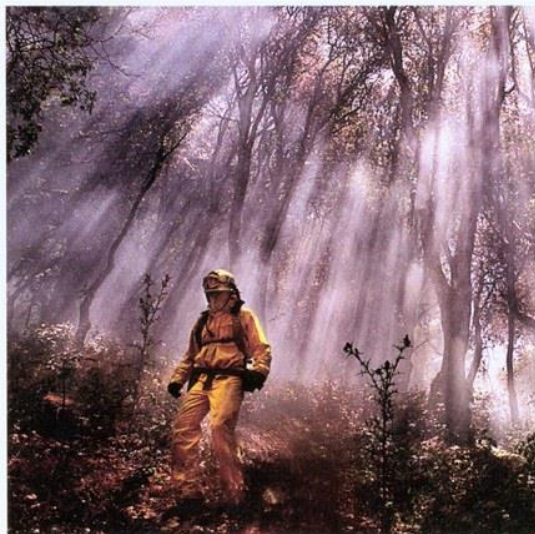


Photo: © Shmuel Thaler / Santa Cruz Sentinel

(Top) A herd of cows graze serenely as a massive fuel-oil tank fire rages near Duke Energy's Moss Landing, California power plant. *Shmuel Thaler 2006* (Bottom) Sunlight streaming through the smoke of a wildland fire creates a dramatic backdrop as a CDF firefighter searches for hot spots. *Shmuel Thaler 2003*



Photo: © Dan Coyro / Santa Cruz Sentinel

Ion Banner gets blown off the wave face and breaks his board in two in one of the most spectacular wipeouts of the Mavericks' surf contest. *Dan Coyro 2012*

cherished pieces.

And I'm thinking, 'If these few shots hold that much for me, how much more life and history have Lovejoy, Coyro and Thaler preserved for the thousands of other people they've photographed over the years?'

"The biggest thing about them," said John Lindsay, *Sentinel* executive editor and general manager until 1998, "is that they're not just guys who run a camera. They're writers, reporters, storytellers, each of them."

Lovejoy started shooting for the *Sentinel* in 1969, though he was stringing sports stories as a high school student before then. He retired a few years ago, but still fills in when Coyro and Thaler go on vacation. Coyro has 34 years full-time with the *Sentinel*, and Thaler has 23.

Their work has earned them numerous awards from the Associated Press and California Newspaper Publishers Association. But to leave it at that would leave out so much of what they really do and what really matters to them.

At lunch in Scotts Valley recently, they told me about how having the respect of the community is more important to them than recognition from the industry. They told me they know they're photojournalists, not artists like some of the other photographers featured in this issue.

Coyro, Thaler and Lovejoy sometimes have as little as 15 minutes to shoot an assignment, not weeks like magazine photographers. Even by daily journalism standards, they are stretched thin, covering six or seven assignments in a day.

A schedule like that might seem



Photo: © Shmuel Thaler / Santa Cruz Sentinel

An incredible sweetness emanates from Gabriella Cosner, of Scotts Valley. Gabriella was going through treatments for rhabdomyosarcoma. *Shmuel Thaler 2012.*



Photo: © Shmuel Thaler / Santa Cruz Sentinel

Harbor High's Sam Jackson blasts out of a bunker on the third hole at Pasatiempo Golf Course. *Shmuel Thaler 2013*

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Photo: © Dan Coyro / Santa Cruz Sentinel

Surrounded by searing gas jets and glowing tubes in his studio, internationally noted neon artist Brian Coleman takes on a mad scientist visage. *Dan Coyro 2004*



Photo: © Bill Lovejoy / Santa Cruz Sentinel

A Corralitos elementary school principal signs a greeting to a hearing-impaired kindergarten student on the first day of school. Awarded 1st place in California by the Associated Press. *Bill Lovejoy 1993.*



Photo: © Photo: © Bill Lovejoy / Santa Cruz Sentinel

San Francisco 49er quarterback Steve Young stretches over the goal in a NFC championship game. *Bill Lovejoy 1995*

overwhelming to some but not to these seasoned veterans. Bill Lovejoy summed it up.

"It's not as bad as it seems," Lovejoy said. "When I was actually working I got used to thinking about the situation before I arrived at whatever I was taking a photo of. Most things we've done a hundred times. I don't try to reinvent the wheel. Just be nice to the person I'm dealing with. Set 'em up, shoot the photo and move on. Breaking news and sports shots are a different story. They usually don't conform to a schedule very well. That's hard to explain to some editors."

Their job is a grind and it's rarely glamorous. It's tough hours and low pay, low enough to coast in neutral on the downhills to save gas the way Lovejoy and I once did on the way home from the high school state cross-country meet in Fresno.

But they say they still find something new in every shot, or at least put forth the effort to try and make the shot new, even if it's their 300th Little League game.

I'm humbled and, in a way, reprimanded by the grace with which they handle some of the monotony of daily journalism. You shouldn't, but you can become a bit cynical when you come across the same story year after year after year.

"That's the thing I tell myself," Coyro said. "You might be going to a Little League game and you're not in the mood to do that, but to these kids it's like the most important day of their lives."

They've used that same grace in handling industry changes, particularly from darkrooms to digital. But their approach has always been the same: Capture the people, tell their story, preserve the history.

I think about how they've done that for me, even though I've never even been the subject of their shots.

"A hundred years from now," Thaler said, "people will look at our pictures and see what was going on here." 🍷



Photo: © Dan Coyro / Santa Cruz Sentinel

Firefighters standing atop a fire truck parked on the Pasatiempo Highway 17 overpass salute the passing funeral procession of slain Santa Cruz Police detectives Sgt. Loran 'Butch' Baker and Elizabeth Butler. *Dan Coyro 2013*



Photo: © Dan Coyro / Santa Cruz Sentinel

Edith Dominguez is pulled from the rubble of Ford's Department Store by volunteer bystanders who rushed into the collapsed building looking for survivors following the Loma Prieta Earthquake in 1989. *Dan Coyro 1989*