

The use and misuse of emotion. Section 4: emotions and donors.

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It's the picture not the frame

by Lyndall Stein

In this first of two articles veteran fundraising leader Lyndall Stein explores the dangers, pitfalls and opportunities when using powerful emotional images. and concludes that fundraisers need to be bold as well as truthful, however uncomfortable that may be.



'At that moment, when I saw the three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, I was petrified. [He] ... was lying lifeless face down in the surf, in his red t-shirt and dark blue shorts folded to his waist. The only thing I could do was to make his outcry heard.'

Nilufer Demir, photographer.

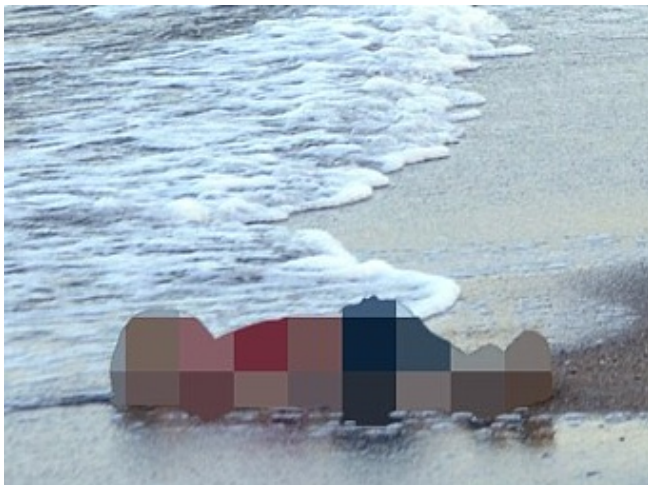
The tragic picture of Aylan (Alan) Kurdi, the drowned child on a beach, is a vivid testament to the power of images to generate passionate responses. It has transformed the narrative around the world and delivered an

extraordinary outpouring of empathy and action. Hundreds and thousands of people mobilised and showed their support for refugees by marching, campaigning and giving.

It challenges our own 'rules' not to use images of those who are dead and our concerns about images that might have an impact on the dignity of those portrayed.

'The Independent has taken the decision to publish these images because, among the often glib words about the 'ongoing migrant crisis', it is all too easy to forget the reality of the desperate situation facing many refugees.'

From *The Independent*, 2 Sept 2015, under the headline, 'If these extraordinarily powerful images of a dead Syrian child washed up on a beach don't change Europe's attitude to refugees, what will?'



Are we protecting
Aylan Kurdi, or
ourselves from his
tragic story?

However this imperative to build positive images can work against our determination to build support for people affected by poverty, displacement and conflict.

We are caught in a bit of a bind – worried that people on the one hand are losing interest in development and then unable to find the vivid and compelling visual images that communicate the problems.

Visiting the offices of some international development organisations you might think you are in an upmarket travel agent – the images all jollity and lovely landscapes. Is this the reality of inequality, poverty and war? The Independent has taken the decision to publish these images because, among the often glib words about the 'ongoing migrant crisis', it is all too easy to forget the reality of the desperate situation facing many refugees.



There have been many interpretations of this dramatic and pitiful photograph, from artists all over the world.

We have a responsibility to bear witness; to reach into the hearts of our audiences and bring them closer to the appalling experiences of people living with poverty, oppression and violence.

Those who have seen, at first hand, the horror that a mother experiences when her child is near death because of malnutrition, who have seen the pain and terror of those affected by disease and the effects of brutality and war must continue to find ways to tell those stories to the world.

Most people have their own worries and concerns and need to have these visceral realities brought home to them with real passion. Compelling photography has to cut through inertia and indifference and turn emotion into positive action; to achieve this we must use vivid, truthful, bold images.

Important, relevant pictures, critical agents for change can be difficult and upsetting, we must not sacrifice the power of an image that is telling a story that matters and turn it into something well meaning but bland. The iconic images, so essential to communicating brutality, inequality, conflict and poverty, cannot at the same time be expected to build a comfortable and positive narrative. We have to show the problem and the solution. We have to show people's strength and power, but also the forces that undermine their potential.

Some of the most exceptional photographs I have worked with have been finely balanced and complex. They have communicated jeopardy, empathy and passion and have driven strong emotions: anger, compassion and even outrage. They have shown both tragedy and heroism.

The critical challenge for all of us working with images is to understand your message and your audience. We must work with great photographers, who understand the story, share our values and will work bravely to describe both the courage and resilience of poor people but also their suffering and their pain. We must have the courage to tell the truth however painful and uncomfortable.

The transformative impact of Aylan's picture cannot be underestimated in changing the image of those seeking refuge. Its use, sanctioned by his bereaved father, shows us all the horrors that refugees endure with such courage in their search for safety and sanctuary.

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Lyndall Stein

Since her amazing entrance to fundraising, Lyndall Stein has, perhaps not surprisingly, become a leading authority in campaigning, fundraising and communications. She has worked for a variety of organisations, including CARE International UK, VSO, the New Economics Foundation, the Resource Alliance, ActionAid and the Terrence Higgins Trust. She was responsible for launching the charity Concern in the UK and developed the founding board of trustees. She was the first fundraising director for the Big Issue Foundation and is founder editor of Positive Lives, a photographic project showing the global human response to HIV/AIDS, an exhibition seen by over two million people worldwide. She is a board member of the Refugee Council and Greenpeace UK.