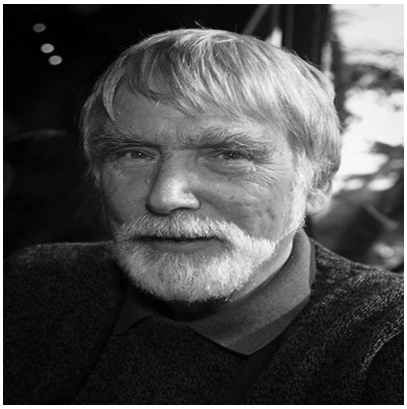

â??Mostlyâ?? retired photographer shoots for meaning after hurly-burly of Grateful Dead concerts

Description

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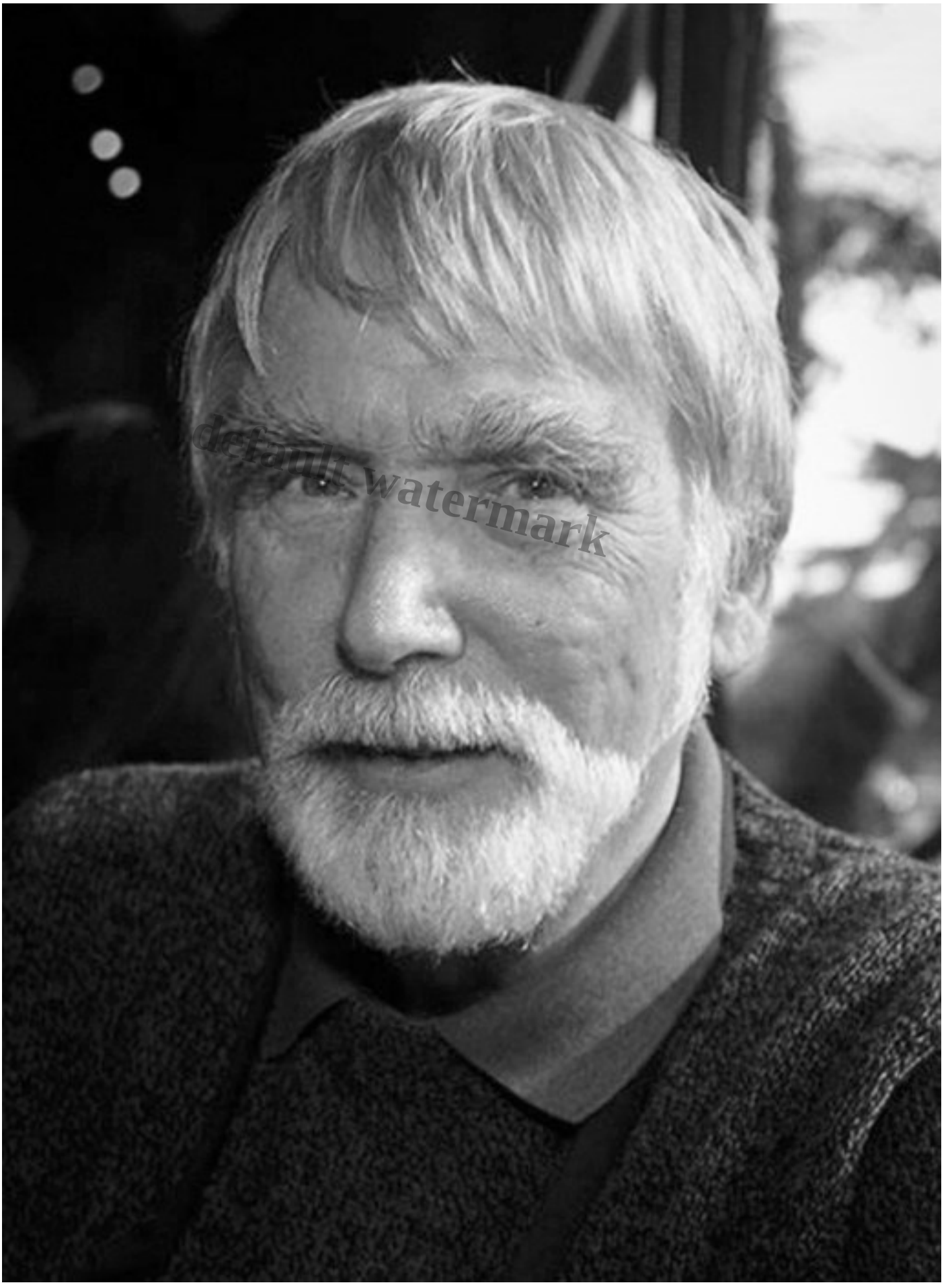
One of the best things about his work as a cameraman and sound engineer was that it enabled him to â??meet people and go places other people donâ??t,â?• said Dennis Minnick.

A self-acclaimed â??Deadhead,â?• Minnick was on the crew filming those New Yearâ??s Eve concerts with the Grateful Dead, and at the 1982 show, Vietnam Veterans for Bill Graham Presents. Heâ??s shot commercials for Comcast, became an expert on angioplasties after an eight-year stint with a medical equipment manufacturer, flew to the Vatican to assist in documenting the transition of books to tape and was part of the video and audio crew for numerous corporate meetings. â??If those suits knew that half the guys behind the camera learned their skills filming rock and roll,â?• Minnick mused.

45 years of packing, parking and photos

It sounds glamorous, but as he looked back, Minnick recalls â??45 years of packing my car, driving to a shoot, looking for parking places â?? which has become increasingly difficult in San Francisco â?? carrying my equipment, shooting and editing.â?•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Dennis Minnick

For some of his overseas shoots, his crew booked two full containers, each holding 2,000 pounds of gear. And while he always wanted to visit the Vatican, the trip was not easy. â??I arrived in Rome on Wednesday night, shot all day Thursday, and returned to San Francisco on Friday. Everybody asked me why I didnâ??t make a vacation of it. But what are you going to do with the equipment? You canâ??t leave it in a hotel room. Itâ??s just like having kids; you canâ??t just leave them in the hotel room.â?•

For Minnick, what was exciting was the technical knowledge he gained. â??Itâ??s the strength of the experience thatâ??s interesting. How techniques used in one sort of project solve an issue on something totally different. The device that opened the door on my medical work was adapting a piece of equipment initially used for Sun Microsystems.â?•

Awe at the top of the towers

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Still, he reserves a bit of awe for some of those experiences. His most memorable photo shoot happened 30 years ago on the top of the Golden Gate Bridge. â??It was such an iconic spot for me as a San Francisco native. So few of us have this opportunity, Iâ??ll never forget the view. Nor the ride up to the top of the towers â?? three men with multiple cameras jammed into a small elevator.â?•

Today, Minnick describes himself as â??mostly retiredâ?• and does not actively pursue contracts. â??Iâ??ve helped a local restaurant owner develop a website, filmed the Kidsâ?? Science Fair in Santa Rosa as a favor for a friend and am part of the production crew for the annual Goldman Environmental Prize ceremony. â??I do that one,â?• he said, â??because itâ??s worthwhile; I believe in it. We complain about needing to recycle, but when you see what the honorees do in their homelands, itâ??s so meaningful, youâ??re in awe.â?•

Work thatâ??s â??so meaningfulâ??

The event will mark the Goldman Prizeâ??s 31st year Âand Minnickâ??s 30th year on the crew. He started out editing the photographersâ?? work for the Showtime video and directing the show. But that changed when the event outgrew its space at the Herbst Theatre and moved to the Opera House, which has its own production crew

â??Now I fit in where Iâ??m needed. Lately, Iâ??ve been responsible for creating the transitions between the videos and interviews. I wonâ??t know what theyâ??ll need me to do until January when they start putting this yearâ??s show together. But whatever it is, Iâ??ll be there. All of us stage crew guys want to be there, itâ??s so meaningful.â?•

Minnick, 72, received a degree in TV production from San Francisco State University in 1970, when it was one of the two top schools in television technology. â??It was before the advent of portable cameras and recording equipment. We learned to work with multiple cameras. Today you can make a video just using your cell, and the editing is done online, instead of with razor blades and tape.â?•

His first job after graduation was as a junior assistant in a recording studio. â??I cleaned bathrooms in the morning, and equipment in the afternoon.â?•

Chasing changing technology

Technology has changed a lot since Minnick studied video and audio production. Pulling a Canon g7x Mark III out of his pocket, he said, â??even high-def is becoming obsolete. My little camera shoots 4K.â?• (4,000 pixels is the current resolution standard for televisions, but 8K models are beginning to arrive.)

Minnick stopped doing a lot of contract work about five years ago. His doctor told him he needed to walk at least 30 minutes a day. So, camera in hand, he began walking around Golden Gate Park and his neighborhood, Sunset Heights and the Inner Sunset.

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A photo by Minnick in Golden Gate Park.

â??It gives me great pleasure to be able to pull a camera out of my pocket and take photos. I come home, put the chip in my computer, transfer the photos, and then I edit them using Photoshop. I shoot in color and then convert some of these photos to black and white. I donâ??t just strip the color, thereâ??s a whole lot to conversion. I guess I like black and white from all my years in the darkroom.â?•

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Minnick has always loved black and white photos.

Minnick has lived in the Inner Sunset since 1975.On a short walk through the neighborhood, he pointed out the site of a former drugstore, now a dress shop, the â??five-and-dimeâ?• reincarnated as a womenâ??s art gallery and the many stores that have come and gone in that stretch of the neighborhood. For the past 15 or so years, heâ??s been a board member of the Sunset Heights Association of Responsible People (SHARP). As president, he updates its website, sends out meeting announcements and attends meetings of other neighborhood organizations.

Minnick sells prints of his photos, although he confesses, heâ??s sorely behind on updating his website. â??itâ??s a matter of not being able to transfer the program to my new computer. Someday Iâ??ll make the time.â?•

And, as much as he values the ease of taking photos and filming videos on todayâ??s equipment, he admits he â??just recently I bought a new light, so I guess Iâ??m still a gearhead.â?•

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