

NEWS PHOTOGRAPHER

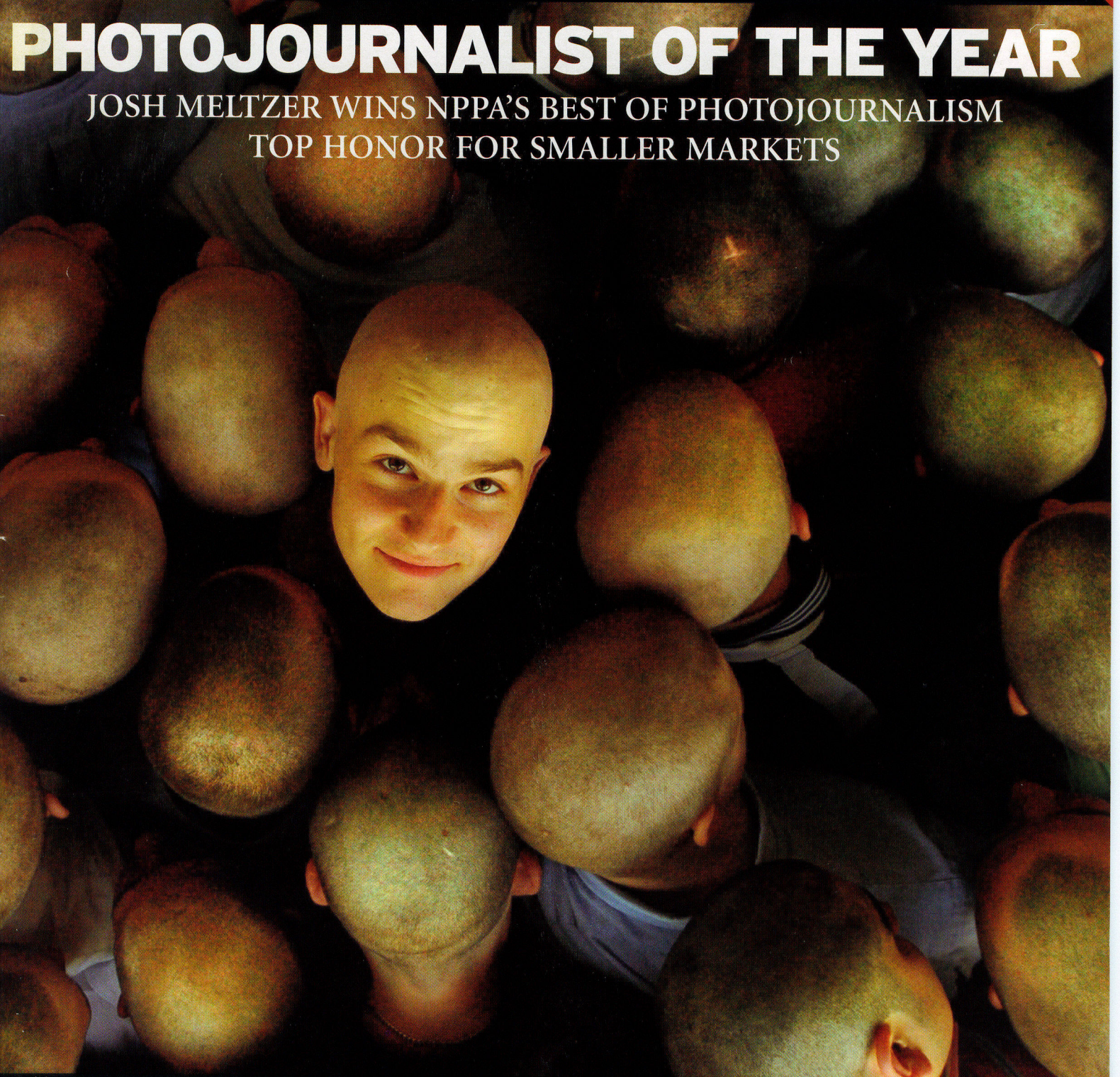
JULY 2006

NATIONAL PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS ASSOCIATION ~ WWW.NPPA.ORG

INCLUDES: THE
SPORTS SHOOTER & EDITOR

PHOTOJOURNALIST OF THE YEAR

JOSH MELTZER WINS NPPA'S BEST OF PHOTOJOURNALISM
TOP HONOR FOR SMALLER MARKETS



GREG GARNEAU RETIRES | NICK UT 34 YEARS LATER | CONTRA COSTA'S
"WHERE WE LIVE " | COAL HOLLOW | TRIBUTE TO A GREAT EDITOR

The Spirits On The Street

Overcoming
hardship, and
turning it
into a gift



I FIRST ENCOUNTERED PHOTOGRAPHER Leroy Skalstad, 58, of Milwaukee, a few years ago when I was helping Brother Vincent Reyes, a Capuchin friar who is a documentary photographer. He works in the Capuchin Soup Kitchen in Detroit, which feeds legions of homeless men, women, and children. Brother Vincent organized and launched the photo project "Visions of the Sacred" (www.visionsacred.org). "Visions" is an online print auction to benefit the homeless, and photojournalists around the world donate signed prints. That's how I happened to get an eMail from Skalstad, a photographer who has himself been homeless. He wrote that he wanted to donate one of his street photographs to Brother Vincent's auction and asked whether I thought his picture would fit the collection's theme of "the sacred."

Skalstad is a disabled Vietnam veteran who at one time was eating and sleeping and fighting for survival on the cold Wisconsin streets. He served in a reconnaissance platoon until 1968, coming home with post-traumatic stress disorder. Unable to hold a job, he depended for survival on the services of St. Ben's Community Meal and Clinic in downtown Milwaukee. Skalstad's mother, an advanced amateur, had introduced him to photography when he was nine, and he returned to it as an adult while he was still living among the homeless. His camera, a beat-up Pentax K1000 SLR bought at a resale shop for \$40 and loaded with

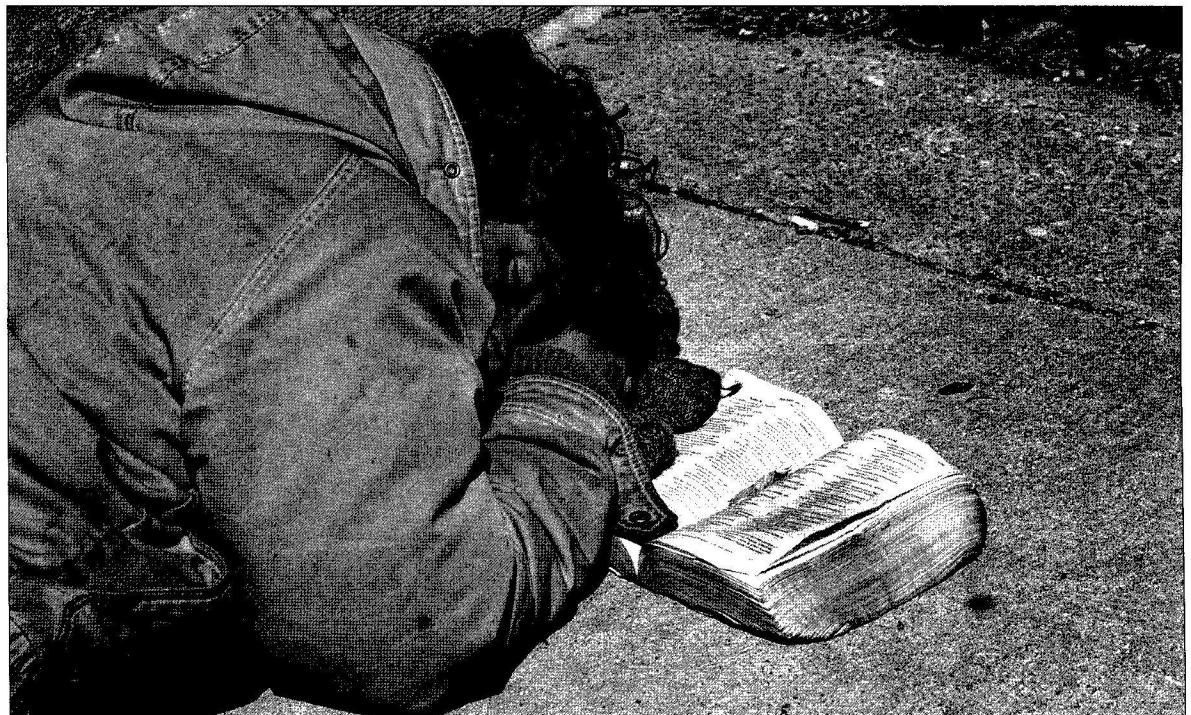
black-and-white Tri-X, was always with him, until he had to sell it again for cash.

A picture he took of a young homeless couple touched his heart. He entered it in the 1993 Eastman Kodak KINSA photo contest, sponsored by *The Milwaukee Journal* and judged by its staff photographers. It won first place in the black-and-white category. Later he entered it in the 2005 Gordon Parks contest and his photograph was a finalist. Parks personally judged the finalists to pick the winners. "It was an incredible honor to have Mr. Parks judge my photo," Skalstad told me. That's the picture he donated.

With time his disability income helped him get a small apartment near St. Ben's, but his spirit is still with the city's homeless. Today Skalstad takes pictures of the homeless and hungry at St. Ben's who are living the life he once lived, and his photos are used for the center's annual fundraising calendar. He's also one of St. Ben's volunteers, serving meals and assisting the homeless with their many daily needs. "It's my way of giving back," he says.

Skalstad took a new picture in May near a Milwaukee library. A homeless man sleeps with his cherished possession, a Bible written in Spanish. He titled it "Heaven Is My Home." It's an image Skalstad can empathize with, having been that man on the sidewalk on the other side of the camera. Only now he's found a way to turn his life's hard experience into a productive way of giving back.

And it's a pointed reminder to me to do the same. ■



HOLDING ON TO HOPE. A homeless man sleeps with his Bible on a Milwaukee street. Photograph by Leroy Skalstad