

Journalism in a Pandemic

# XCITY

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**What kept photojournalists smiling?**

Zing Tsjeng • Trevor Kavanagh • Bellingcat



# What made photographers smile this year?

Seven photojournalists share the images that lifted their spirits with *Samyama Kolhapuri*

## Location: London, UK

“ In the last year, we have had to learn how to interact and embed ourselves in our community more than relying on diary jobs.

On Christmas Day I went to a care home to document how families have been separated because of lockdown.

I photographed their 11 residents and it had a lovely community feel.

I remember photographing daughter (Nicky) who visited her mother (Pam) through her ground-floor room window.



**Right Image:** Nicky Clough visits her mother Pam Harrison in her bedroom at Alexander House Care Home for the first time since COVID-19 lockdown restrictions began to ease, in London, Britain March 8, 2021. REUTERS/Hannah McKay

**Left Image:** Nicky Clough looks through the window at her mother Pam Harrison opening a present on Christmas Day at Alexander House Care Home, as the spread of COVID-19 continues, in Wimbledon, London, Britain, December 25, 2020. REUTERS/Hannah McKay

This year, as the restrictions were eased and one resident could have one family member visit, I went back.

Pam has dementia, so we weren't sure if she was aware that she hasn't seen her daughter for so long. But when her daughter came into the room with the hazmat suit, Pam lit up. She was asking many questions and found Nicky's suit funny. I witnessed them reunite; it was the first time in 12 months that they were in the same room and touching. It felt like we were on the road to normality.

**Hannah McKay**  
Pulitzer Prize-winning Reuters staff photographer

McKay got her first cover on her hometown paper by clicking dramatic imagery of a big fire at a local factory. She is now an international photojournalist, covering general, political and business news, as well as sports and feature stories. →





**Location: Warrandyte, Melbourne, Australia**

## New mother, Emma, kissing her son, taken from outside her home

“ Benjamin Ocean was born when the bushfires happened and stayed indoors till November, as the lockdown followed right after.

This photo shows that if you want something bad enough, you can come out of it okay. Emma was very lonely during the lockdown, having a newborn without being able to

see her parents. Also, as a person who is really big on the beach, being away from the water that rejuvenates her was difficult as well. But she stuck it out.

I was there when she finally took Ben to the beach. When he saw the water for the first time, she was in tears, it was just so rewarding. I guess you have to break a couple of eggshells to make an omelette.

For the coming year, Australian photojournalists will be more focused on local stories, like the above. ”

**Christopher Hopkins**  
Nikon-Walkley Photograph of the Year winner 2020; photojournalist; writer.

From rural Victoria, Hopkins travelled for six years before starting out. He explores race, mental health and cultural assimilation - bringing human rights issues to light. →

**Location: Johannesburg, South Africa**

## Ben Amato performing on the saxophone for the rest of his street

**Alon Skuy**  
Pictures of the Year (POYI) Photographer of the Year 2020; author of upcoming book *(BR)OTHER*; chief photographer at *Sunday Times* and *The Times* in Johannesburg.

Skuy's work focuses on issues relating to inequality, resilience and conflict, and life on the fringes.

“ When COVID-19 hit, the South African government declared a state of disaster and dispatched the military and police to enforce the level 5 lockdown. They had a heavy-handed approach and a big presence throughout the country. To contrast the many sobering photos I clicked on in 2020, I wanted to show that there were moments of peace or lightness despite the devastation and hurt.

The evening this photo was taken, there was a moment of freedom. It was a beautiful instance in the middle of such troubling, uncertain, terrifying, constrained times. People needed an outlet to communicate with each other. In Orange Grove, Johannesburg, at 6pm every day for the first few weeks of the hard lockdown, to keep spirits high and gain some semblance of normality, people who could play instruments or sing would go onto their front porch or balconies and entertain each other. ”





**Location: Heligoland, Germany**

## A mated pair of Northern gannets reaffirming their bond

“ Strong winds blew across Heligoland's cliffs, where the Northern gannets nest. I was surrounded by a colony of loudly squawking gannets coming in after making their last fishing rounds before the evening set in. Gannets cruised above my head, carrying pieces of algae in their beaks and beating their strong wings.

One of these birds landed by its mate and began a greeting ceremony to reaffirm their lifelong bond. Exhilarated, I quickly captured this 'fencing display', the two birds stood breast to breast with wings spread and bills extended vertically. They fenced and clicked with their bills rapidly, calling loudly at the same time.

The love and affection that forms between mated pairs is particularly moving. Their devotion and the way they look out for each other amidst numerous challenges in our rapidly changing world gives me hope that anything can be overcome with fellowship and compassion. ”

**Lana Tannir**  
Award-winning landscape and wildlife photographer; World Animal Protection ambassador.

Tannir's photos document species that are on the brink of extinction and help us visualise the challenges they go through.



**Location: Queens,  
New York, USA**

## Children play in a stream of water from an uncapped fire hydrant

“ Last year was brutal. I was in a lot of hospitals and saw a lot of deaths. Everything was just so heavy and filled with trauma. I didn't have much experience with conflict photography or what it feels like to photograph in very dire situations. Many of us felt like we were thrown to the wolves. Luckily, as journalists, we're trained to be responsive to the world and cater accordingly.

**I remember  
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an isolated  
moment of  
joy**

I remember this photo as an isolated moment of joy. I was walking around the neighbourhood for a *Guardian* article and came across this beautiful scene. The tone was so different. For a brief moment, it felt like a regular New York summer scene. Usually, city workers come in and crack the pipes on really hot days. Seeing these kids playing, their joy, was something to revel in - the purity of it. Going forward, I just hope for a little bit of peace. ”

**Ryan Christopher Jones**  
POYI Award of Excellence,  
Reporting winner (NYT);  
photojournalist; writer.

Being Mexican-American, Jones explores divergent cultures, the US's conflicted history, labour, and migration. →







## Location: Malaysia

### Mr JS and his youngest son

“When Mr JS was 11, he fled Afghanistan after his father passed away, fearing death threats. In Iran, he lived as a tailor, fell in love, and started a family. But, five years ago, they fled again, threatened by the authorities. Today, they call Malaysia their home as United Nations (UN) Refugees. Through it all, Mr JS's hope remained constant – to provide for his family and their basic needs.

Mr JS said, “I try to be a good father for my children and a good husband for my wife. My biggest hope is for my children to lead good lives. We don't need a lot, we are content – when we have each other, we have everything.”

Even during post-edits, this image made me smile because it showed me how simple pleasures lead to contentment in life. This ‘Barehands’ assignment taught me to never take the little things for granted.”

Annice Lyn

Visual artist; documentary & sports photographer; former national figure skater; Winner 2020 Arts & Culture Women of the Future award, Southeast Asia; Winner 2020 Prestige Malaysia 40 Under 40.

Lyn seeks to document community stories and develops an inclusive culture as the co-founder of Women Photographers Malaysia.

“In 2020, COVID-19 increased social gaps and hunger, but Guatemala also faced two hurricanes and massive protests. During these dark times, I travelled to this mostly Indigenous region to document the story of ‘Profe Lalito’, a young motivated educator from the department of Quiché. His character and dedication gave me hope.

With primary schools closed and his students unable to get an internet connection, he bought a bicycle and turned it into a mobile classroom. He rides to his 10 students' homes and teaches them regular subjects but also music, physical exercise, and keeps them in touch with their original language, K'iche'.

In the beginning, people made fun of him or thought he was a food business, but now he is greeted with affection. When hearing the teacher's anecdotes and seeing the children's smiles, everything bad happening in the country feels paused for a moment. ✕”

Esteban Biba

Photography correspondent at EFE international agency; podcast host.

Biba documents the cultural and religious traditions of ethnic groups throughout Guatemala. He has also captured natural disasters and major sporting events.

## Location: Department of Quiché, Guatemala

### Professor Gerardo Ixcoy, aka ‘Profe Lalito’, cycling with his mobile classroom

