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Carolyn Jones

Founder and President, 100 People Foundation

It all began with an email that landed in Carolyn Jones’ inbox, asking the simple question: What would the world look like if it were 100 people? The statistics that followed were fascinating: 50 would be men and 50 women; 60 would be Asians, 15 Africans, 11 Europeans, 14 people from the Americas; 33 Christians, 22 Muslims, 14 Hindus, 7 Buddhists; 17 would be unable to read and write, 13 would have no safe water to drink, 21 would be overweight, 15 would be undernourished, and only 7 would have a college education. Jones immediately saw this factual snapshot of the world’s population as an opportunity to tell a deeper story about our global community. She wondered: Who were those people? Where and how did they live? How were they different or similar to us and to each other? Known for her socially proactive photographs and documentary films, Jones set out to use her gifts to tell the story of 100 people who exemplified all of the almost 7 billion of us sharing the planet. Her vision was to create visual and educational tools that “facilitate face-to-face introductions among the people of the world in ways that cultivate respect, create dialogue, and inspire global citizenship.” So she has asked 500 schools from 100 countries to nominate 10,000 people to help her find the 100 people that best represent the world population. “We are,” she says, “asking the children of the world to introduce us to the people of the world.”

I started out as a fashion photographer. I did some work with *Italian Vogue* and *Interview* magazine that I loved. But I was just a beginner, and there were lots of hills to climb, and fashion wasn’t a perfect fit for me.

I had a very, very good friend, named B. W. Honeycutt, who started *Spy* magazine. I shot many of their covers with B. W., and we worked very closely together for two years and had a great time; he became such a dear friend of mine. So when B. W. told me that he had AIDS, it knocked my socks off. There was no drug cocktail then, so it was a death sentence. I didn’t know how to help. I remember when he told me and I sat down on a street corner with him and cried. Only later did I realize that that was about the worst help I could have given him.

The whole reason that I got into photography to begin with was so I could better understand things. So at the time, the answer to me was to really dig into that world and find out as much as I could. A friend came

to me with the idea to photograph people living with AIDS positively, to offer role models celebrating the time they had rather than dreading it. We created a series of portraits called *Living Proof*, and we had a show at the World Trade Center with four-foot-square prints portraying fifty people with AIDS.

I come from a conservative community in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. I remember saying to people, “I’m going to do this book about AIDS,” and I was asked, “Why? What does that have to do with you?” I thought, that’s really the problem. So instead of hollering at people, I decided to use photography and stories to try to change their minds about things that were going on in the world. *Living Proof* did help change minds. It was a turning point. There was no going back.

I did a couple of other books, and then my husband—who is French—and I moved to Paris, and that’s where 100 People was born. I was taking French classes in Paris. I was the only American in a very

Carolyn Jones at the 100 People Foundation headquarters in New York City.



diverse group of students. September 11 hit, and I felt completely helpless. I couldn't get home or get through to anyone on the phone. On September 12, I woke up and I didn't know what to do with myself. At the last minute, I decided to go to my class. And when I arrived—late—a woman from Iran walked over and gave me a hug in front of everyone. And it was just the most powerful moment. What went through my head was, "How did you know that was the right thing to do?" I don't have that tool. I wouldn't have known that that was the perfect gesture. But it was, and it was so generous. And it put me in this head frame of wanting to do something that would foster understanding between cultures.

Soon after, my friend Isabel Sadurni sent me an email titled, "If the World Were 100 People." It offered an accurate description of the world population proportionally represented by 100 individuals (1:62.5 million), based on criteria such as age, nationality, gender, religion, and language. When I saw it, I thought, I want to meet these people. The statistics are great, but I really want to attach a face to each one of them. It was one of the most powerful ways of looking at the world that I had encountered, and a really simple and beautiful way to get away from the quagmire of problems and issues that weigh us down so deeply we often can't get anything done.

I started thinking about how the world's diversity could be represented if there were just 100 people. Then my daughter came in and looked at it, and commented on how many people wouldn't be able to read or write. And I thought, you know, she gets it. At her young age—I think she was in the third grade—she could understand it. She grasped precisely what was important about it.

Statistically, you can't exactly represent the entire global population with 100 people, so it was always meant to be an artistic interpretation. The idea was to find 100 people that could provide us with a better understanding of the world and who we share the planet with. I would photograph them standing in the doorways of their homes, like crossing the thresholds into their worlds. It was never meant to tell the whole story, but it's meant to tell the beginning of the story—and introduce the world's population.

Isabel and I connected with our third partner, Michal Chrisman, and we decided if we're going to find 100 people to represent the world's



population, we should make it a school project so that children all around the globe could participate. The kids could nominate someone in their community that they really thought best represented their corner of the world. It would get the students out in the community, armed with their cameras and their notebooks, to gather the information and find out who best represents them. We thought by doing that, we could get away from politics in every way.

The original idea was and still is that the students send us photographs and stories and we sift through those submissions, select 100 people, and I photograph each one in the doorway of their home. What I envision is a traveling exhibition of life-size portraits all in a circle with a huge map on the ground. You can walk among them and stand on the map and see a red line from the person to the place, and then hear the audio of their interview.

But the student nominations have been even richer than we imagined, and it turned out that following the students into their communi-

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ties and meeting the nominees was much more significant than we'd originally expected. Some schools have even created their own community of 100 people, and uploaded those videos to our site. So 100 People really became more about creating tools—including the videos of some of those meetings—to help teach global understanding at schools. The exhibition will still happen at some point, but it will be just one more tool; it's not the entire goal anymore. The value has become much bigger than any one thing—now the State Department has even recommended us as a program that helps students to understand different parts of the world.

After three years, Lisa Frank came on board and helped focus things by saying, "Let's concentrate our attention on global issues, and get people talking about the same things, but in different parts of the world." I love that. So now we have zeroed in on ten issues that we all share and feel strongly about: water, food, transportation, health, economy, education, energy, shelter, war, and waste. Our goal is to create media that illustrate each of these topics; the media can then be used by teachers and students as educational tools. So we asked ten very bright students to interview ten leaders in fields relating to those issues. I'm always interested in looking at things from space, if you will. If you put two scientists together, and they start talking, I'm lost. But if you pair up people from different disciplines or different age groups, you get a layperson's explanation. Plus it's irreverent and funny, and those young students ask fearless questions.

Our perspective as Americans has been to go out and fix things. That's what we do. We think we've got it all figured out—that the way we live is great—and people should be able to live like we do. But I've gone to places and I've interviewed people who have so little in terms of material wealth, and I've discovered so much wisdom there by listening. We have to be really good listeners. If there's one thing I want to do with 100 People, it's to really show how much richness there is in the world that's different from what we have.

I like to stay really light on my feet when I travel, and I usually just have one cameraperson with me, and one producer. That way we're able to get into small corners, which is always my dream. You simply encounter people and follow your nose. For instance, we met a young man once in

Africa who suggested we go meet this healer. So we arrived at this village outside of Niger to an enormous amount of fanfare and were finally able to meet him. He had no shoes—nothing, materially. But I will never forget how he spoke to me about the need for world peace. I barely said anything. He spoke so beautifully about humankind. He said we had to all speak with the same mouth, and care about the same things.

"If this is what the next generation looks like, we are going to be okay. We are in very good hands."

I have also had some incredible experiences watching teachers teach. We went with a school from Wake County, North Carolina, to visit their sister school in Hiroshima. They pick an annual project, and they had chosen 100 People that year. We filmed the American students teaching about 100 People to their Japanese peers. To see them so proudly represent those they had selected from their community, and show their artwork and essays and answer questions from the students from Hiroshima, was so simple and beautiful. It opened the lines of communication: they found simple commonalities—"You nominated your bus driver—we have a bus driver here"—that were conversation starters that led somewhere.

It's like our organization has been building a house all this time, and we made the bricks ourselves, and then the mortar, and then the structure. We've got the best foundation I could have ever imagined. When you look at the website and all those red dots on the map, you can see a really broad scope of schools and students participating in the project. Next we are going to India to bring a lot more schools into the project. I'm still in "building" mode, but if all the stars align, I could be shooting the exhibition soon.

If I don't do anything else but this for the rest of my life, I will be thrilled. Having a chance to help students teach one another, that's where it's really golden. If this is what the next generation looks like, we are going to be okay. We are in very good hands.