

Interview with Johnny Justice, Jr. February 1994

This is an edited and revised transcription of a telephone interview between Johnny Justice, Jr. and Richard Hackel in February 1994. The intent has been to review his background and career and to establish a picture of the Ophthalmic Photographers' Society in the early days, and how its founder, Johnny Justice, Jr. happened to pull it off

The following is summary of how much fate has impacted my life and career and the subsequent founding of the Ophthalmic Photographers' Society (OPS).

At age 4, I was placed in an orphanage in North Carolina. During my years there, my mother married a soldier from Monessen, Penn., a small steel town southwest of Pittsburgh. At age 14, the state sent me to live with my mother and step-father in Monessen where I attended high school. For the most part, I received average grades for less than average effort. After school one day I was "goofing off" downtown when I noticed a business at basement level called Pete's Place—better known as the "the hole." It was a bowling alley/pool room combination. I went in, and while watching the kids shoot pool, the owner asked, "Does anyone want a job setting up pins?" I didn't mind taking on a job since working was very common in the orphanage, although we were certainly never overworked. So I went to the end of the bowling lane to set up pins and there was a kid by the name of Terry Tomer working the adjacent lane. During the next few weeks, we became best friends. Terry was a terrific roller skater and over a period of time taught me the basic techniques of skating. (Later I would teach him the basics of fluorescein angiography.) In those days, I spent more time with his family than I did with mine.



Figure 1: Johnny Justice and Terry Tomer (1956) High School buddies.

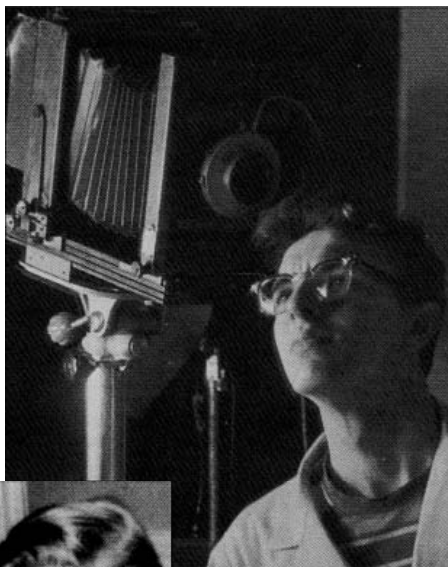


Figure 2: Johnny Justice (1957) Medical photographer trainee at Duke University Medical School.

In 1957, I managed to graduate from high school primarily because Terry's mother convinced me to stay in school. I left town on a Greyhound bus the same day I graduated and headed to Durham, North Carolina to see Carol Jean Parker, a young lady friend that I had been writing to. I had planned to join the U.S. Air Force later in the year.

To finance dating Carol, I went to the N.C. State Employment Agency in Durham seeking any kind of

work for the summer. That is when the "fickle finger of fate" struck again. The lady at the agency told me about a full-time **darkroom** technician position at Duke University Medical School and she recommended that I apply for it. Professor Elon H. Clark interviewed me along with 12 other applicants. He asked each applicant if he or she would work for one month without pay so that he could determine who wanted the job most. I was hired because I was the only one who would agree to take the job under those circumstances. Six months later, Carol and I decided it was time to get

married, and we did. (Years later, Carol became a Certified Retinal Angiographer.)

Although I had never been interested in photography, in no time at all I found it fascinating. In those days we were still using 5x7 cameras for patient and surgical photography, and for copying. We even had to mix our own developers and fixing baths from raw stock.



Figure 3: Johnny Justice (1962) VA Hospital, Durham, N.C.

had brought with him the Bausch & Lomb fundus camera that he had modified at the Chicago VA Hospital. Dr. Noble J. David had interested Leonard in attempting to duplicate Novotny and Alvis' success in retinal angiography and after placing the Kodak Wratten filters into the modified instrument, their first attempt was a success. To my knowledge, that angiogram was the second successful fluorescein study.

After a few more of these studies, Leonard tired of doing this work, and taught me how to do them. I did angiograms until I left North Carolina for Miami, Florida in December 1962. Leonard Hart and Raymond Howard of the Duke Photography Department had both turned down Dr. Norton's offer to work at the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute (BPEI). I was his third choice. I was 23 at the time, and delighted to have the opportunity to help establish fluorescein angiography at Bascom Palmer. On January 3, 1963, I officially became a full-time eye photographer. Drs. Edward W.D. Norton, J. Lawton Smith and Victor T. Curtin began referring essentially every case that had some retinal or choroidal pathology for angiography. Approximately six months later, Dr. J. Donald M. Gass arrived and became immediately interested in fluorescein angiography as his record clearly shows. Later, he and I set up the still on-going weekly Tuesday night fluorescein conference.

On several occasions, Dr. Norton spoke of Lee Allen, an artist-ocularist who also enjoyed a wonderful reputation for his eye photography. I contacted him and informed him of our work, and I asked him about stereo fundus photography. He then sent me a copy of his not yet published manuscript, but now classic article, "Ocular Fundus Photography" which included his technique of stereo photography. Surely, there were others who specialized in eye photography. Years later, I found out that John Goeller and Don Wong of New York, not

About a year later I had the opportunity to transfer to the Pathology Department at Duke where I learned underwater gross specimen photography (no reflections) and photomicrography from Carl Bishop. Two years later, Leonard Hart had taken over as chief of photography at the Durham VA Hospital across the street from Duke Hospital. He offered me a job as assistant chief, and I accepted. Leonard

yet involved in fluorescein angiography, had been taking fundus photos and external photos for academic eye departments for quite some time.

As time went by, more and more talented photographers began to come out of the woodwork. Sgt. Terry Tomer, fresh out of photography in the U.S. Army, came to Miami to train in this field. He had a pre-arranged job at the University of Indiana. At that time, the Biological Photographic Association (BPA) was the only society that was oriented toward medical photography. Dr. Norton sent me to their meetings, but unfortunately there was little, if any, information on eye photography. Although I did not realize it at the time, the idea of an alternative was beginning to germinate.

In the meantime, I was totally enthralled with fluorescein angiography and what I was learning about intraocular diseases at our weekly fluorescein conferences. Then in 1966, I became friends with a wealthy entrepreneur from Philadelphia, and as a result of his offer to become my benefactor, I decided to leave Miami to attend pre-medical school near Philadelphia. I dreamed of becoming a retina specialist like my heroes at BPEI. Before leaving for school, I trained my secretary, Dixie Sparks, to do fluorescein angiography, and Joseph Goren to do movies and to take over copy and darkroom work. Three months after I began school, my benefactor was killed in a tragic automobile accident and the financial support ended. Frankly, I was not enjoying college, and without the necessary financial support, I dropped out of college and sought employment again as a medical photographer. The term ophthalmic photographer still did not exist.

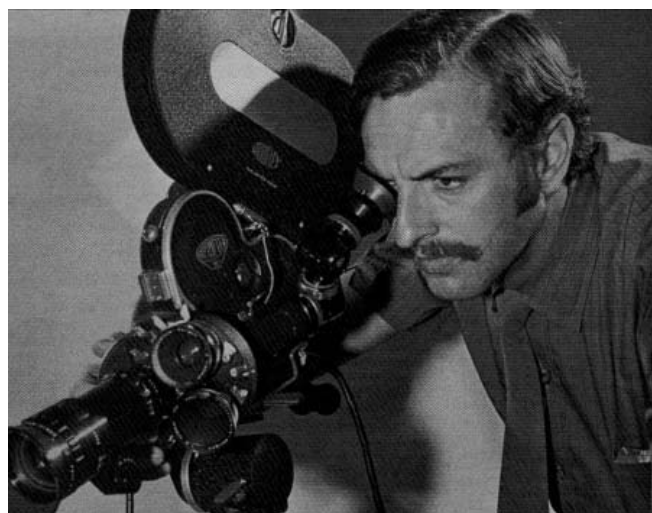


Figure 4: Johnny Justice (1969) Director, Ophthalmic Photography, Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, Miami, Florida.

At the time, fluorescein angiography had never been attempted at Wills Eye Hospital in Philadelphia, so I went to visit Dr. Arthur Keeney, then Ophthalmologist-in-Chief, to see if I could interest him in establishing angiography at "the Wills." After approval by Dr. P. Robb McDonald and other members of the retina service I was hired. It was great to be back doing fluorescein angiography. Yet two years later when Dixie Sparks married Dr. Walter Gilbert, Dr. Norton came to Philadelphia to ask if I would be interested in returning to Miami. I happily agreed because I really missed the BPEI and I definitely prefer a warmer climate.

Shortly after my return to Miami in 1968, I met Earl Choromokos, a research photographer with Dr. Noble J. David, who had been trained by Dixie. About that time, Don Wong called from New York to introduce himself. His professor, Dr. Irving Leopold, was really upset that he was going to the annual BPA meeting. He told me that Dr. Leopold said, "Go to Miami to learn from Johnny Justice, and then attend the annual American Academy of Ophthalmology meetings instead of wasting your time and our money at the BPA." (I now understand that the BPA does provide much more ophthalmic photography oriented programs, and I know that several of our members are certified by this excellent organization.)

Don Wong came to Miami to observe our techniques. His visit to Miami began a long and competitive friendship that set the stage for my discussions with Earl, Don and Terry about starting our own society since the BPA did not offer a forum for our specialty.

In April of 1969, we met with Lee Allen at the ARVO meeting in Sarasota, Florida and we agreed to have our first meeting at the Palmer House in Chicago on October 15, 1969. In attendance at this meeting were Lee Allen, Earl Choromokos, Ogden Frazier, Johnny Justice, Yvonne Magli, Mary Manella, Terry Tomer, Anna Wiley, Don Wong, and Roger Lancaster who is now deceased. (It was later determined that this group should be designated as Fellows of the OPS.)

Following input from others in attendance, I nominated Lee Allen and he was unanimously elected Interim-President of the OPS. Lee then appointed me to act as Interim-Secretary-Treasurer and Program Chairman until the society had its first formal election of officers. If my memory serves me correctly, it was at this meeting we decided that we would refer to ourselves as ophthalmic photographers, and that the organization would be called the Ophthalmic Photographers' Society. At a later meeting in Miami on March 6, 1969, Don Wong was appointed Interim-Vice President.

On July 13, 1970, the OPS became a formal reality. Without the extraordinary help and enthusiasm of my secretary, Jessica (Pixie) Eichrodt, the understanding and support of Dr. Edward W.D. Norton, and especially without the constant prodding of Don Wong, this society may never have become a reality. (Later, Pixie was elected an Honorary Life Member for her her-

culean efforts. Unfortunately, I have lost track of her. If anyone knows of her whereabouts, please contact me.)

In 1971, I accepted a faculty appointment at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas to establish a fluorescein angiography and ultrasonography laboratory in the Department of Ophthalmology. My proudest achievement during my ten years at Baylor was that the original and revised issues of *Ophthalmic Photography* were published by Little, Brown, and Company.

In 1981, I resigned my professorship at Baylor College of Medicine to establish Justice Angiographics and The Angiogram Reading Center. I must admit that I have not been as active in the OPS as I would have been if I had remained in academia. I am particularly pleased and proud of the many photographers, too numerous to mention individually, who have come to the forefront to take over the reins and keep the society moving upward. I am happy to say they are succeeding! If we continue in this pattern of quality growth and expansion in education and certification, I foresee nothing but continuing improvement of the professional image of our members and for the Society.

I am sure you will agree that for the most part, fate has been kind to Johnny Justice, Jr. and to the Ophthalmic Photographers' Society. I would like to express my appreciation to Richard Hackel, current Editor of the OPS Journal for suggesting this interview.

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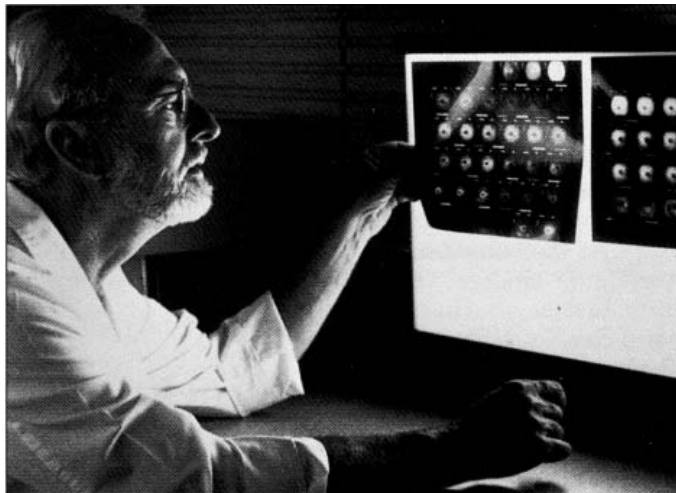


Figure 5: Johnny Justice (1992) The Angiogram Reading Center, Memphis, Tennessee.