
CHAPTER VI CASES

CASE VI-A

Public Grief and the Right to Be Left Alone

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One early spring morning, *Riverside Press–Enterprise* photographer Fred Bauman rushed to the scene of an accident. A twenty-two-month-old boy had been hit by a car in front of his home. The driver of the vehicle was entering the driveway to drop off another child with the babysitter.

The mother of the boy, Dawna Read, rushed to the site and sank to her knees in prayer, covered by the blood of her son, as paramedics attempted to save him. It was at this moment that Bauman shot the photo.

According to Bauman, who was also the photo editor at the time the photograph ran, a lengthy discussion was held in the newsroom before the decision to publish was made. Bauman said the determining factor in the decision was the possibility that the stark reality of the picture might prevent future accidents through safer drivers or more watchful parents.

“We decided that even if one life was saved, it was worth it,” Bauman said.

In the days to follow, reader response poured in, largely against running the picture. Bauman said that no other picture in his three decades with the *Press–Enterprise* created the outpouring of emotion that this one did. Among the callers were some who threatened Bauman.

Micro Issues:

1. If you had been dispatched to the scene of the accident, would you have photographed the grieving mother? With a telephoto lens?
2. If other media (e.g., a competing newspaper, the television stations) were photographing the woman, would that fact enter into your decision?
3. Could the drama of the moment have been told equally well in some other manner?

Mid-range Issues:

1. Is the decision to take the photo a different ethical decision than the decision to run the photo? In other words, what do you think about a shoot first, decide later policy?
2. If a local television station obtained videotape of the incident, would you run it? Is there a distinction between a still photograph and a video? Would a color photograph be more objectionable?

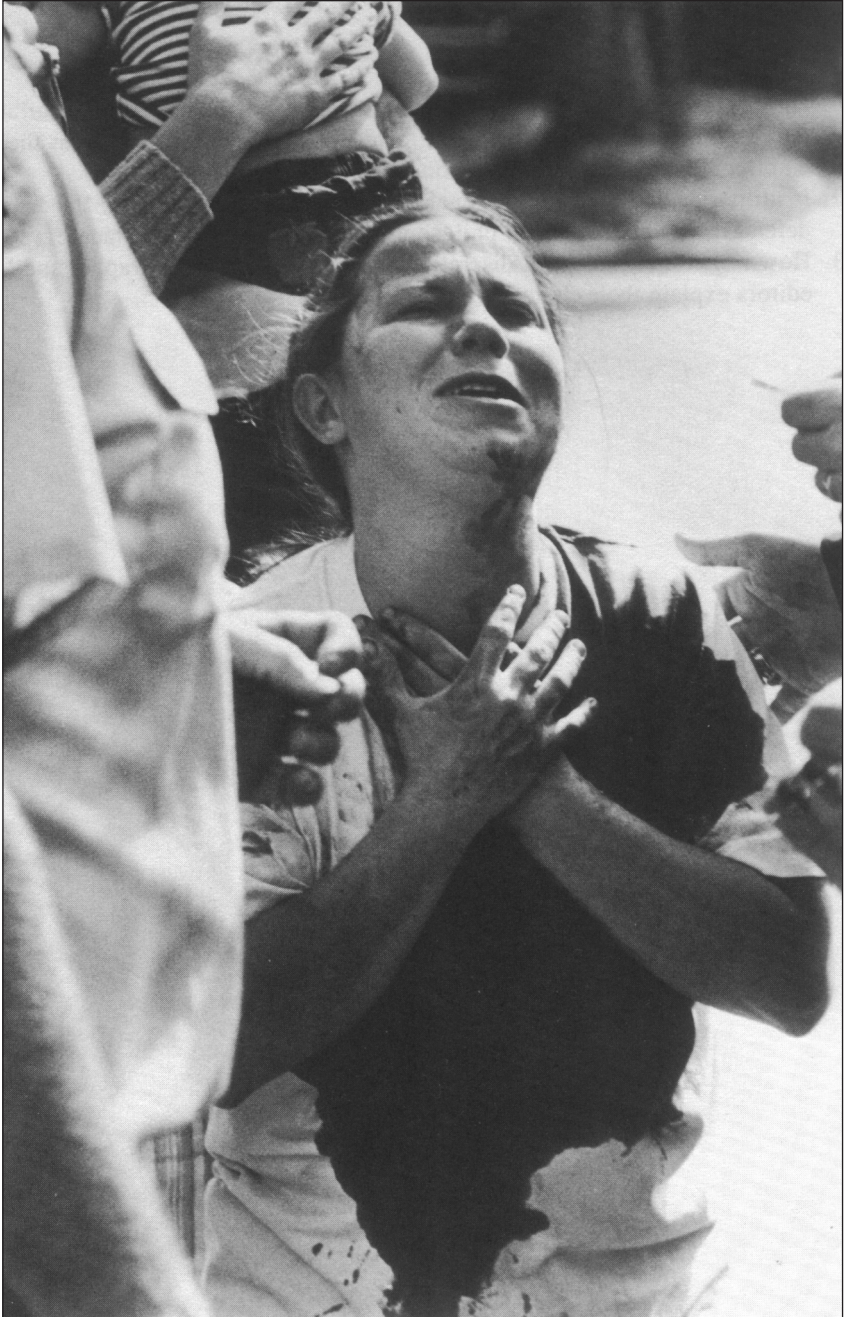


Photo by Fred Bauman. Riverside Press-Enterprise. Used by permission.

Macro Issues:

1. The rationale used by the editors of the *Press-Enterprise* to run the controversial photo in hopes of preventing future accidents is a utilitarian one. In this case do you think the greatest good to society outweighs the emotional damage done to the woman by running the photo?
2. Is utilitarian ethics a good rationale to apply to these situations? If yes, defend it; if no, what moral philosophy would you put in its place?
3. How might the concept of discretion have helped the photographer and his editors explain their choices?