



# The innocent eye: A remembrance of Adrina Knutson

By Leonard Kamerling

I'm looking at a portrait of an African man. His eyes blaze through the photograph, transfixing my stare. The moment of the photograph is perishable in time but decisive in its effect on the viewer. The man looks out from the photograph, questioning us and at the same time revealing secrets about himself. It's hard to look away. The more I look at this image the more I sense something of myself in him and something of him in me.

The photograph is one of dozens of extraordinary images from Africa taken by Adrina Knutson. Adrina was a senior in the UAF film program when she was killed in a car accident while working on the Maasai Migrants Film Project in rural Tanzania in August 2012. (The project is run by San Francisco State University.)

Adrina had what photographers and filmmakers call "an innocent eye," an ability to see beyond the obvious, to see deeply into the humanity of her subjects and translate what she saw into powerful, evocative images. If you asked her about the origin of one of her photographs she'd say something like, "I met these two guys fixing a bicycle," or, "I played with a bunch of kids coming home from school." For Adrina, photographs were not just images but indelible records of relationships and trust.

Adrina had an enormous natural talent that was encouraged, honed and disciplined through her studies at UAF. She was fully engaged in her education and all it had to offer. She was the kind of student who brought out the best in teachers, who made them excited about teaching.

In Tanzania I watched her as we began our work in remote Maasai villages and was so taken with how at home she seemed. Although it was her first experience with fieldwork, she was able to forge friendships with



Maasai people and transcend the huge gulf of culture and language. She gave her trust freely and openly and received trust in return. You can see this in every photograph and video image she created.

Adrina and her filmmaking partner, Daniel Chien, were working on a film, *Darkness to Light*, about a Maasai family and the coming-of-age journey of their young son. They spent a great deal of time at the family's rural homestead, learning their way in the Maasai world and discovering the film that lay before them.

As the potential for their story opened, Dan asked Adrina to consider being the cinematographer for their film. She was moved by his confidence in her but worried that her production and camera skills might not be adequate. She turned to her journal to work it out. She wrote, "Just make it beautiful, Adrina. You know how to do that." 🎬

*Adrina Knutson will receive a posthumous film degree in May 2013. A scholarship for film students is being established in her name. To find out more, email [naomi.horne@alaska.edu](mailto:naomi.horne@alaska.edu) or call 907-474-6464.*

**"Adrina trusted her place in the world, and in turn was trusted by others," wrote Maya Salganek, assistant professor of film. "She approached life with wonder, and wonder surrounded her; the mundane seemed magnificent."**



Leonard Kamerling, '99, is curator of film at the UA Museum of the North and a professor of English at UAF. He has produced numerous award-winning documentary films on northern and indigenous cultures.