

Missions photographer Don Rutledge dies

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MIDLOTHIAN, Va. (BP)—Renowned photographer Don Rutledge, who told the global story of missions through his camera lens for several generations of Southern Baptists, died at his home near Richmond, Va., early Feb. 19. He was 82 and had been in declining health for some time.

Traveling throughout the United States and to more than 140 countries over more than 40 years, Rutledge captured quiet moments of humanity and missions ministry in hundreds of classic photographs taken for the Home Mission Board and later for the Foreign Mission Board of the [Southern Baptist Convention](#). He called his best photos “windows on the soul.” His images helped millions of inspired viewers to understand, pray for and participate in missions.

Don Rutledge

Born on a farm in Depression-era Tennessee, Rutledge originally intended to be a pastor. He tried preaching for a time after studying theology in college and seminary. But he discovered an old box camera that belonged to his uncle, and the call of photographing the world and the people in it proved far stronger.

He began to shoot photo stories as a freelancer and eventually joined Black Star—then the nation’s top photojournalism agency—covering stories for the next 10 years in numerous countries for magazines such as *LIFE*, *LOOK* and *Paris Match*.

His reputation quickly grew, and he became internationally known when he shot the pictures for *Black Like Me*, John Howard Griffin's 1961 book about his experiences of racism in the last days of the Jim Crow-era South when Griffin darkened his skin to appear black. The book became one of the most famous chronicles of the struggle for change during the civil rights era.

Rutledge left Black Star in 1966 to shoot pictures for the Home Mission Board. Over the next decade and more, he traveled to all 50 states, capturing the compassion of missionaries and the needs of the people they served in the pages of *Home Missions* magazine and three full-length books.

In 1980, he joined the Foreign Mission Board as a special assignment photographer, continuing his photographic ministry worldwide for another 15 years, primarily for *The Commission* magazine. He formally retired in 1996 but continued doing freelance assignments in the United States and overseas until he suffered a debilitating stroke in 2001.

"I love photojournalism and enjoy using it as a worldwide Christian ministry," Rutledge once wrote. "It forces me to see, to look beyond what the average person observes, to search where few people care even to look, to glance over and beyond my backyard fence...."

"It gives my 'seeing' a newness and a freshness as I work to communicate the Christian messages I want to convey. It helps me translate the national and international ministries into human terms by telling the story through people rather than through statistics."

Rutledge's survivors include his wife of 61 years, Lucy, of Midlothian, Va.; two sons, Mark, an International Mission Board missionary in Haiti, and Craig, of Albany, Ga.; and several grandchildren.