

Annie Griffiths Belt
By Joanne Trahanas

If you have not had the time to read and view Photographer Annie Griffiths Belt's two books, you need to treat yourself to the experience. ***A Camera, Two Kids, and a Camel: My Journey in Photographs*** and ***Last Stand: America's Virgin Lands*** are two books that provide us with unique views of our world.

A Camera, Two Kids, and a Camel: My Journey in Photographs is a delightful account of one of National Geographic's first female photographer's journeys around the world. For thirty years, Annie Griffiths Belt packed her family and equipment and did everything possible to maintain a "normal" life while traveling on assignments to various places. This book documents, through her beautiful images and narratives, her experiences with people from all over the world and, in turn, their experiences with Annie and her family. Annie Griffiths Belt took the time to become part of the places to which she traveled. The result is this book in which Annie shares her understanding and love for the people, their cultures, their beliefs, and their worlds. Throughout the book, her photographs and words reach out to us and bring the peoples and countries closer to us. Also engaging were the stories of her children and the many connections they made to so many people in the world and the impact of their travels on their current adult lives. The most influential thing I took away from my interaction with this book and the art of Annie Griffiths Belt, was to not just go somewhere and shoot pictures, but rather go somewhere and immerse yourself into the worlds that you visit and the culture of the people you encounter, so that the pictures are extensions of those intimate connections.

Annie's second book, ***Last Stand: America's Virgin Lands*** is a joint effort with author Barbara Kingsolver. Once again, eloquent words, photographs and hand-tinted infrared pictures tell a remarkable story. In this case, the story is about what used to be vast and is now remnants of our wetlands, woodlands, coasts, grasslands, and drylands. This joint effort is one that calls to us to become conservationists with the likes of Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, John Muir and more. It is a reminder that long ago, days and seasons were not measured by how many traveling sports games one may have to attend, or the announcement of the latest Apple technology, or the opening of yet another strip mall. Rather, the days and seasons were marked by natural happenings such as the first day when maple sap runs, or jumping into icy pond water just after winter's end, or running through open fields only to find a baby animal's nest. Somewhere, somehow, between then and now, we decided that everything on earth was ours to use and abuse, so we now have to travel long and far to capture open spaces and the natural order it might supply. This book takes us on a different kind of journey - one that reminds us that we do not have much left of our "virgin lands" and that we need to be defenders of what is left. As one of our great conservations, John Muir stated: "*As soon as we take one thing by itself, we find it hitched to everything in the universe.*" So we need to honor what is left of those "one things" and maybe some of our natural order will be restored. What I also took away from this book experience, was the importance that a photographer and author can play in bringing attention to issues such as our virgin lands, global warming, and animal endangerment. Through the art of photography we can remind people that we are part of a much bigger, interconnected world that needs us to defend it from those who see it only in terms of greed and profit.

So make yourself comfortable and take the journeys with Annie Griffiths Belt.