

Royal Exposure

After setting the correct ISO, shutter speed and aperture, I take a moment to look through the viewfinder of the camera to frame the photo perfectly. Aside from the composition, the subject makes or breaks the photograph. I have had amazing backdrops and famous faces to photograph. My main subject for many years was the beautiful and intelligent Queen Noor Al Hussein of Jordan.

Interview **Ani Garibyan** | Photo **Tigran Tovmasyan**



In 1978, our beloved King Hussein began courting Princeton graduate, American architect, Lisa Halaby. By May 1978, the King was engaged to Lisa and by the time summer came along, Lisa Halaby became Queen Noor as they married in a traditional ceremony which she described in her memoirs *Leap of Faith*. Her “father and brother and other male members of the royal family were all obscured by the frenzy of flashing camera bulbs and blinding television lights of the international and Arab media, which, I realized with shock, filled the far end of the long narrow room.” One of those cameras with a flashing bulb was mine. I was honored to be one of the official photographers at the royal wedding. Little did I know, but Queen Noor would soon become my main subject.

In 1985, I began my biggest and most important role when I officially became Queen Noor’s personal photographer. Wherever the queen traveled, so did I. We traveled throughout Jordan, the Middle East, Asia, Europe and America. While the queen was shaking hands and exchanging words with people like Pope John Paul II, Queen Elizabeth of England, Fidel Castro, U.S. Presidents George Bush Sr. and Bill Clinton, while she walked the Great Wall of China and visited the monuments in Washington D.C., I was there with her, behind the scenes, taking photos to document these events. One of my most fond memories with Queen

Noor was when we visited Petra - one of the World’s Wonders. Petra is a few hours from Amman, but half of the trip must be taken on camel back. As you get closer to the ancient wonder, you stand there in amazement at its enormous size, color and beauty.

On one occasion, when Queen Noor had traveled to South Africa to meet with President Nelson Mandela, the security warned the photographers present, that no flash photography was allowed. They explained that the flashes of light bothered the president’s eyes. That day I had two cameras, one with flash and one without. Although I had set the camera without flash to the right settings, I somehow grabbed the one with the flash and took a shot. All of a sudden I see a group of Mandela’s security rushing towards me threatening to take my camera away but luckily they understood that it was by accident.

When travel required flying, the Queen flew in her private jet. I would at times accompany her in the jet, but would mostly travel in commercial planes. Though the queen lived a very luxurious life, she was humble, honest and a great humanitarian. She would always treat me and her other staff with great respect. She would speak to me mainly in English but as her Arabic began to improve through the years, our conversations were in Arabic.

For over 20 years, I followed Queen Noor, documenting her journey as the Queen

George Lepejian

For close to half a century, George Lepejian has had a camera hanging around his neck, traveling the world. His professional career began at the age of 17 as he started working for Photo Crystal, located in the historically strategic, First Circle in Amman, Jordan. He was one of the main photographers for the Jordanian military. As his reputation grew, Santiago Lopez, his patron and horse caretaker to Princess Alia’s horses, introduced George to the princess. Soon later, he was hired to take photos of the princess and her prized horses, as well as photos of royal family portraits, birthdays and weddings.

of Jordan. I witnessed her going from an American girl-next-door to the Queen of Jordan. I was there to capture her story on film. When King Hussein fell ill and passed away on February 7, 1999, Abdullah II (King Hussein’s son from his first marriage) took the throne. King Abdullah II’s wife, Queen Rania took on the position of Queen of Jordan. I continued to be the Queen’s photographer – this time, Queen Rania’s. Some time after the transition between queens, I decided that it was time to allow another photographer to take my position as the queen’s photographer, so that they could create their own adventures and stories.