



AARON HUEY

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photographs by hawkeye huey



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HAWKEYE HUEY
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At age 5, Hawkeye Huey has more Instagram followers than the entire staff of *Arizona Highways* combined. It's no surprise, either. As the son of *National Geographic* photographer Aaron Huey and a *National Geographic* Creative contributor himself, Hawkeye travels the country with his parents, shooting photos of the people and places he encounters with his Fujifilm Instax Wide 300 camera. Here, we talk to his dad about what it's like to take family road trips — one of which included Northern Arizona — with his tiny protégé.



“Hawkeye” seems a fitting name for a child with a passion for photography. How did it come to be?

I’ve always known I’d have a son named Hawkeye. It likely planted itself in my subconscious when I watched *M.A.S.H.* every day in high school, but I don’t think of Alan Alda when I hear his name. I think I gave him the name because you can’t be a half-assed Hawkeye. You kind of have to own the name.

Did Hawkeye come to you with an interest in photography first, or did you have an “I’m going to put a camera in his

hands and see what happens” moment?

It definitely came from me. He was 4 and did not differentiate between crayons, mud or photos. He gravitates toward anything and everything you put in front of him. He also likes rock-climbing and painting. He’s now old enough, at 5 and a half, to tell me what he wants. [His interests are] way more engineering- and builder-based, so we’ll likely retire him at 6 from his photo career. Maybe he’ll pick it up again someday.

How would you describe Hawkeye’s eye or photographic style?

A bit crooked; centered. I think he’s just trying to get the subject in the box he’s looking through!

Other than his extraordinary hobby, is he a typical 5-year-old?

Definitely. He likes to draw, have tantrums and demand dessert every night.

During your adventure across the American West, were there any subjects that seemed particularly interesting to Hawkeye?

He likes landscapes, stone towers and animals (coyotes, eagles, etc.).

How long were you on the road for that trip?
Nineteen days.

How does he stay occupied in the car while you’re on the road?

Just watching scenery out the window, drawing, watching a movie on an iPad and asking how much longer.

What type of camera does Hawkeye use, and why?
Fujifilm Instax Wide 300 now. His backup is the Instax 210. It’s the most reliable and affordable instant film. I wanted him to shoot real, physical images that come out



of the camera and develop, not to hand him an iPhone to make more digital images that never leave a hard drive.

Talk a little bit about your experiences in Arizona. Where did you travel? Was there one destination or person or experience that stood out?

We traveled through twice. Once on our 19-day trip, we went briefly through the Four Corners area, but then we came back specifically to go to the Grand Canyon, the Navajo Nation and the Page area. The Tuba City Friday market was a big standout — great people and great photos — and the

drive from there to Page was filled with great stops.

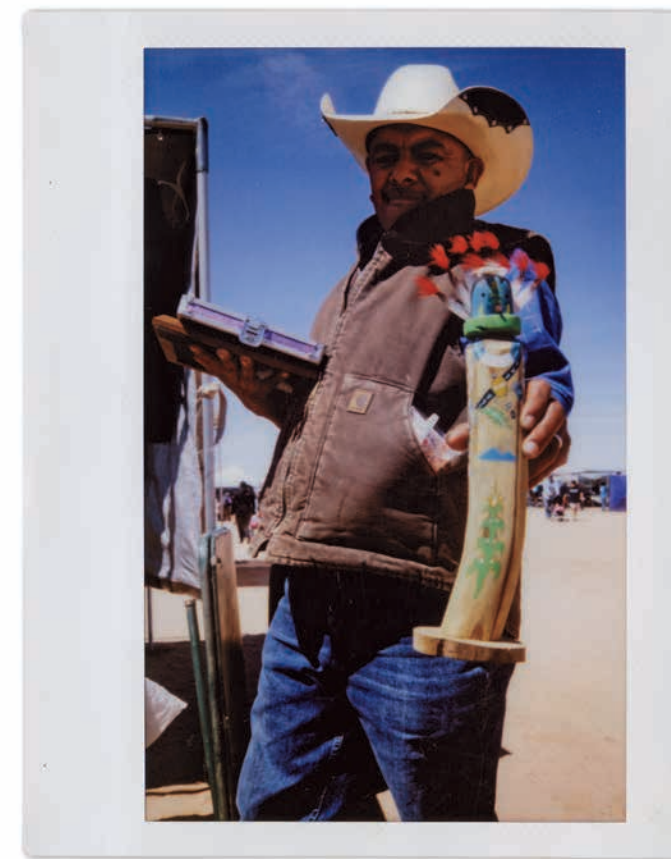
Do you find that people come up to you to ask questions about Hawkeye and his camera?

People are always surprised to see such a small child with such a huge camera, but they usually end up asking if it’s “a real Polaroid” when they see the picture come out. People aren’t used to seeing real, physical photos anymore.

What are his subjects’ reactions to him?
Highly varied. Most people are really happy to have their



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pictures made, but, like in the adult world, some people say no. But I tell him that’s OK — it’s good to meet new people.

What’s it like for you to see the world through your son’s eyes and lens?

I find it much more interesting than the “perfect” photos we see everywhere. I think there

are too many polished images — too predictable, too shiny, too perfectly balanced. I think we all like seeing the imperfection in his images — the little tilt sometimes, the fact that you can’t see everything you want sometimes. Analog, and analog in the hands of a 4- or 5-year-old, is very powerful because it’s beyond influence.



I can get him to beautiful places, so that's an influence he doesn't know about. But how he frames those subjects has no creative influence, and that's a rare thing for us to see. I love the perfect imperfection of his images.

Hawkeye is the youngest National Geographic Creative contributor. How do you explain to him the significance of that? And what was it like for you to watch him sign his contract?

It was hilarious! He has no idea what it means.

Talk about the book project you're working on.

Even though Hawkeye may retire for a while at 6, we really want to share what has been made over the past year. I mean, we share through his Instagram account, but the whole idea is that we're making physical things you can hold. We want to share that part of it, to collect our favorites into a book. We'll be preselling the book through a Kickstarter campaign, with the book coming out in November. We want to make it really affordable, and after

paying for costs, we'll put all the rest into an account for Hawkeye's future education and adventures.

What led to this project?

It started because I thought it would be fun to see if we could both do something on a road trip that I would also enjoy. I wanted it to be art-based, and since I'm looking through a camera so often, that seemed a good vehicle for collaborative exploration. Our trip into the desert with cameras was not about photography; it was about con-

necting as a father and son.

What do you hope to achieve with it?

Hawkeye is already a very social little dude, but I think photographing people in this way opens him up to a lifetime of communicating with people who are very different than him and different than our local community. I think so many people get locked into a comfort zone with how we see the world and whom we interact with, and we do that by limiting our exposure. Photography is one way for



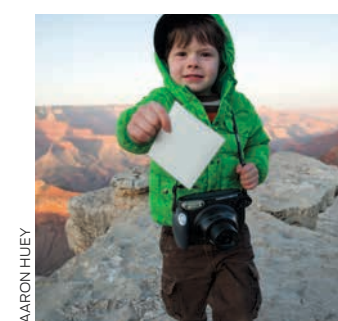
me to shatter that comfort zone, to be reminded every day I venture out with my camera that there are infinite worlds to explore — that I am not the center of the universe, and that my ideas are among the many perspectives and manifestations of life that make up this world. I hope for nothing less for my son, whether it's through photography or another medium of communication. It's all really about a way of seeing and experiencing the world, and the camera is just one exercise.

How has having him with you changed how you shoot?

When Hawkeye is with me, it's about Hawkeye, not about my photos. I have to keep a very close eye on him, so I'm not as focused on my own images. We sometimes start to photograph the same people and environments, but I'll let him take the lead.

Is there a story from your travels with him that really sticks in your memory?

The first time he shot, I told Hawkeye that he needed to flap the Polaroid back and



forth for it to develop, so now he does it with every shot right before he hands it to the person to see. I love to watch him run around showing people his photographs, and

I love that they're physical objects, not just digital files in an iPhone. That part is important for me, and worth spending the money on real film. It turns each photo into a genuine interaction, into a conversation. Everyone is smiling when Hawkeye walks away. When we were at the open-mic night at Slab City [a campsite in the Colorado Desert in California], I sat on the ground and watched Hawkeye go around meeting people and making pictures, and by the end of the night, everyone knew his name. **AH**