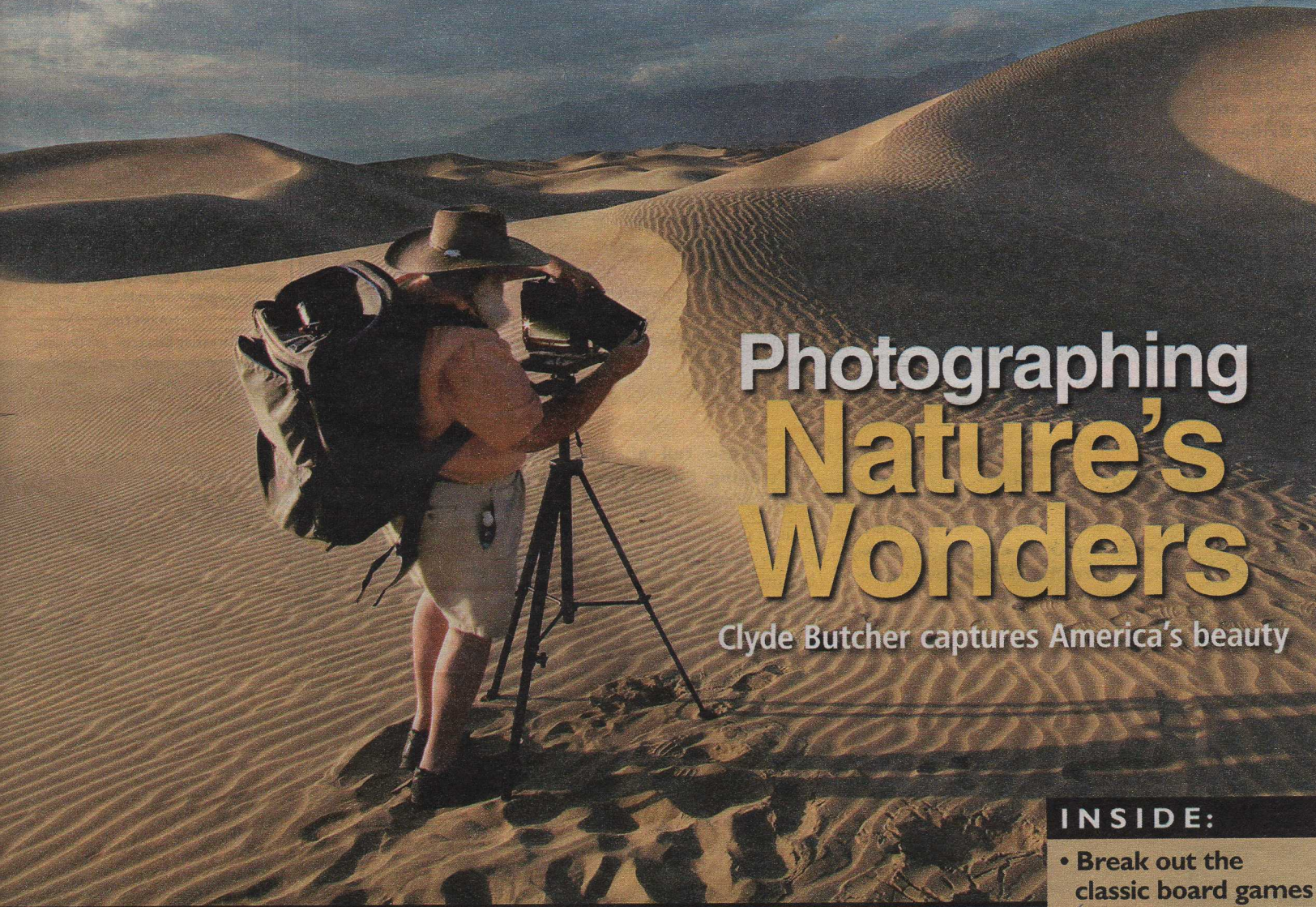


American Profile

MIDWEST EDITION



Photographing Nature's Wonders

Clyde Butcher captures America's beauty

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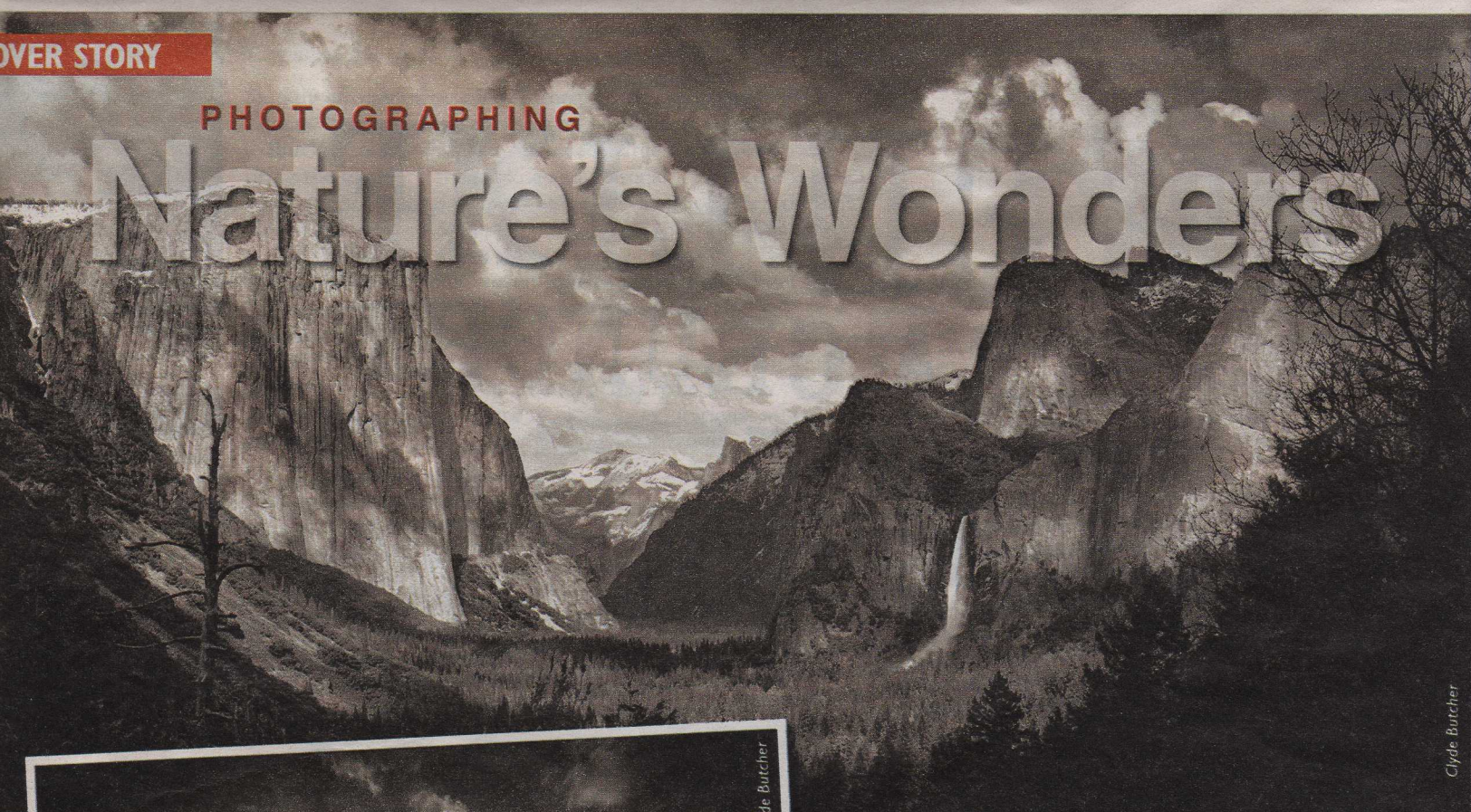
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PHOTOGRAPHING

Nature's Wonders

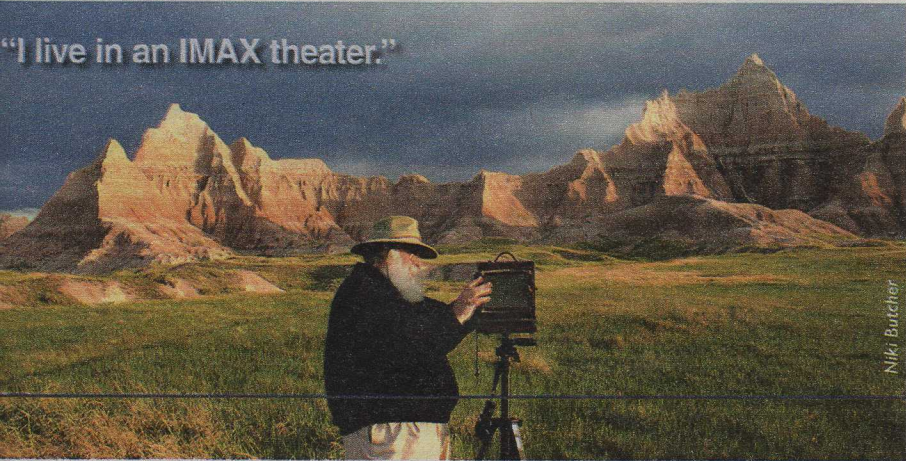


Clyde Butcher



Clyde Butcher

de Butcher turned personal tragedy into a nationwide mission to preserve America's beauty.



Niki Butcher

"I live in an IMAX theater."

Dangling orchids frame an animated

panorama as photographer Clyde Butcher watches from his front window on a bright morning in Ochopee, Fla. (pop. 128). "Look—there's a wood stork and a great blue heron, and a stream of baby alligators heading toward the pond," Butcher, 65, says excitedly. "I live in an IMAX theater."

A professional photographer who turned personal tragedy into a nationwide mission, the bearish man with a Santa Claus beard lives in a home that overlooks the splendor of Big Cypress National Preserve, bordering Everglades National Park. A yawning prairie of cypress, limestone outcrops and grass-like sedge, the habitat for snakes, bobcats and the occasional panther, holds some of America's last undisturbed wilderness. A person could easily get lost in the knee-deep swamp water filled with muck and weeds.

Or he could find himself, as Butcher did.

California transplants, Butcher and wife Niki, along with young children Jackie and Ted, arrived in Florida in 1980. Four years later, traversing the state to sell his scenic photographs at art and craft shows, Butcher discovered the great expanses of primeval Everglades swampland off the beaten, tourist track.

But in 1986, life was turned upside down when son Ted, then 17, was killed by a drunken driver in a traffic incident. The grief was crushing, and Butcher turned to the solitude of the Everglades for solace, making frequent trips to soak in the silence and peacefulness.

"It was to the wilderness I fled in hopes of regaining my serenity and equilibrium," he says. "The experience of being close to nature helped restore my soul."

Returning home transformed from one of his excursions, Butcher vowed to document the wonders of the Everglades that had so pro-

(Continued on page 14)

Niki Butcher

(Continued from page 4)

foundly affected him. He returned to the wilderness with his camera, and he's been capturing its beauty ever since.

Butcher shoots with old-fashioned, large-format cameras to bring the scenery "up and close and personal." The cameras use large, oversized negatives, and he frequently prints the striking, black-and-white photos as enormous, high-resolution 5-foot-by-8-foot murals.

"I shoot large photos so you have to get involved, to experience them," Butcher says. "You see details, like the veins in a leaf. You feel you are there."

Over the years, his camera has captured spectacular landscape scenes from not just Florida, but all across America. In original prints, in books and calendars and in exhibitions—such as the current *America the Beautiful*, which illustrates the nation's

Butcher inspects a negative.



Butcher's photos show the detail of uninhabited natural land.

grandeur from Washington state to Maine—Butcher's photographs spotlight the beauty of our country and underline the need to preserve it.

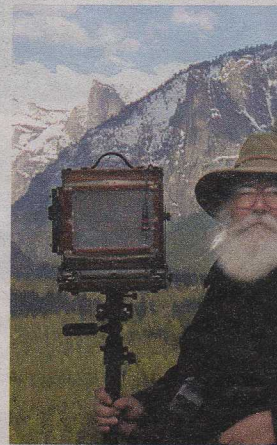
"They evoke a pride in the natural landscape of America, a pride so strong that we should want to keep it, as safe and as best as possible," says Aaron De Groft, director of the Muscarelle Museum at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va., where *America the Beautiful* began a nationwide tour last September.

Butcher's photos have "won over many people to protect land and water, even though they have no direct experience" with conservation, says Robert Bendick of The Nature Conservancy. His mission is to protect America's endangered species and ecosystems.

Butcher's work today is a family affair, with Niki writing and designing for Butcher's various projects, and daughter Jackie involved in finances. Though he has received numerous accolades for both his photography and his advocacy for the environment, including the Sierra Club's Ansel Adams Conservation Award and Florida's Heartland Community Service Award, recognition is not what drives him.

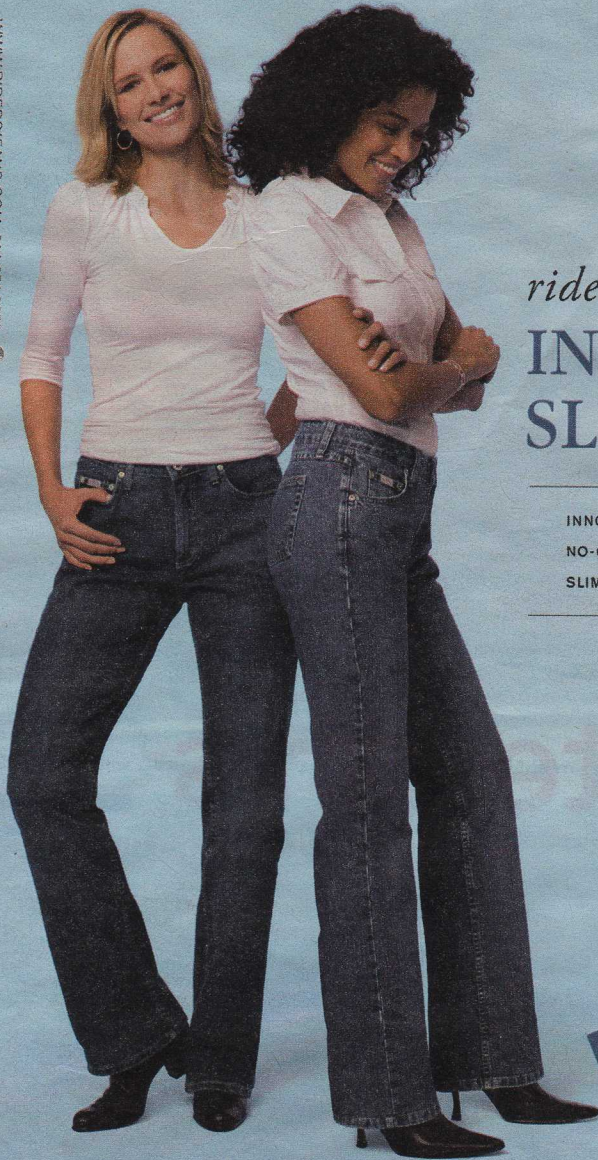
"I consider myself a teacher more than a photographer or photographer," Butcher says. "My hope is that by sharing nature's beauty, it is a natural condition for future generations." ★

Story by Cynthia Elyce Rubin of Orlando, Fla.



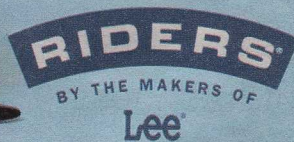
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