

# PHILANTHROPY SUPPORTING THE *Arts*



Potter's Garden  
Hagi, Japan

## *A Photographer's Gift*

**F**or more than 100 years, National Geographic magazine has set the standard for photojournalism throughout the world. Its photography is renowned for its artistic value and intimate involvement with true-to-life experiences of people near and far, presenting with pictorial familiarity images that capture a sense of history, culture, and physical and human geography.

Beginning in 1970, Sam Abell, a photographer for the publication, established an impressive reputation for the artistic and transcendent quality of his photographs, utilizing natural light to illuminate his captivating images. Until his retirement from National Geographic in 2001, Abell lived “the photographic life,” travelling around the world on assignment, immersing himself fully in intense and often dangerous



**Lougheed's Flowers**  
Sudbury, Ontario, Canada



**After the Hailstorm**  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

experiences in which he was both witness and participant. As Abell himself put it, his work often focused on “striking the intoxicating balance where beauty and danger coexist.”

A son, brother and grandson of teachers, Abell has been shaped by the culture of education and the pursuit of learning, and from an early age, education and books have figured prominently in his life. Describing photography as “writing in action,” Abell considers his love and appreciation of photography, shared with him at a young age by his father, as a way of life — far more than simply a profession. Through his own inspired and inspiring photographs, over the years he has educated audiences around the world about other cultures, landscapes and life, creating teachable moments with each decisive click of his camera shutter.

In the summer of 1974, while working on a book about the Pacific Coast Trail, Abell’s life journey changed unexpectedly. It was on that trail, which extends 2,600 miles from Mexico to Canada, that Abell met and fell in love with Denise, the woman who would later become his wife, as well as his life and travel partner.

Since 1977, Sam and Denise have traveled the world together, dedicating months on end to his demanding photographic assignments and sharing countless unforgettable experiences. When not out on assignment, however, the Abells make their home in Albemarle County, a home Sam describes as “highly composed and dimensional,” an environment that affords them a quiet, contemplative space.

When Denise was diagnosed with cancer in 1998, the couple chose Martha Jefferson Hospital

for her care and treatment. During the process, Sam was as active and supportive a witness and participant as he was on any photographic assignment. Deeply involved and keenly observant, he noted quickly the competence and kindness with which care was delivered by oncologist Dr. Stefan Gorsch; Kathleen Haden, the nurse practitioner with whom Dr. Gorsch worked closely; and Chaplain Suzanne Hilton Smith, whose manner and presence, according to Sam, “was significant and memorable for its depth of sincerity and spiritual authenticity.”

In addition to their gratitude for a positive outcome, the experiences, people and heightened awareness of the environment around them at Martha Jefferson during that time remain vivid in their memories today. Sam also recalls how personally meaningful he and Denise found the artwork on display at the downtown hospital.

“The art was so much more to us than mere decor,” he said. “It was substantive, and inspired a sense of spiritual solace for us at a time when that was especially valuable.”

When approached to have Sam’s photographs become part of the permanent Martha Jefferson art collection, Sam and Denise saw an opportunity to express tangibly their gratitude to Dr. Gorsch and the others who helped them through a difficult time — and to share with others the soothing and nurturing powers of art.

Represented locally by Lyn Bolen Warren, owner and curator of Les Yeux du Monde (Eyes of the World) Gallery, Sam decided to make a substantial gift of his work, 13 photographs from his Seeing Gardens series, for addition to the hospital’s permanent collection.

### **The Sam Abell Library**

Combining his love of books with his love of photography, Sam Abell’s newest project is a 16-volume retrospective entitled the Sam Abell Library. Sam describes the library, the first volume of which is due to be published in late fall 2012, as having an “aesthetically handsome and strong graphic presence,” with four themed sets of four slender volumes to be published over a period of four years.



**Plane Trees**  
*Villa Melzi, Lake Como, Italy*

“Sam sees gardens in unexpected places,” noted Warren, “and it is our hope that the placement of these unique and powerful works in the context of this beautiful new hospital will have a positive impact on all who experience them — Martha Jefferson patients, family members, staff and visitors alike.”



**Photographer Sam Abell**  
with Lyn Bolen Warren, owner  
of Les Yeux du Monde Gallery

To see more of Sam Abell's photographs and find information on the Sam Abell Library, visit [www.lesyeuxdumonde.com](http://www.lesyeuxdumonde.com) or call Martha Jefferson Health Connection at (434) 654-7009 to arrange for a docent-led tour of the hospital's permanent collection of original works of art.