**Introduction from Chim’s Family** Sara Shneiderman (sara.shneiderman@ubc.ca)

It’s a pleasure to be here with you today – I always enjoy visiting friends in Portland and it feels like a home away from home in many ways. As a fellow Pacific Northwest resident in Vancouver, Canada, I am delighted to be welcoming you to the first exhibition of my great-uncle’s photography in our part of the world. Those of us who represent Chim’s family are thrilled to see this extensive exhibit opening here at the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education. This exhibit is on loan from the Illinois Holocaust Museum, and was originally excerpted from the 2013 retrospective “We Went Back: Photographs from Europe 1933-1956” curated by Cynthia Young at the International Center of Photography in New York. We are deeply grateful to Cynthia, as well as to former director of your museum Judy Margles, who initiated the process of bringing the exhibition here. I’d also like to extend gratitude to current director Rebekah Sobel, curator Alisha Babbstein and her team - and everyone here who has put in the hard work to make this happen.

My grandmother, Eileen Shneiderman, was devoted to her younger brother David Seymour, who went by the name “Chim” – a nickname derived from their original family name Szymin. She worked hard to preserve her brother’s work and tell his story, while donating prints and negatives to the International Center of Photography in NYC. As my grandmother aged, my aunt Helen Sarid and my father Ben Shneiderman took on the responsibility to preserve and promote Chim’s work. Today they work together as joint executors of Chim’s estate and maintainers of the https://davidseymour.com/ website which hosts current and historical materials about Chim. Magnum Photos, which was founded by Chim along with Robert Capa, Henri-Cartier Bresson, and George Rodger 75 years ago in 1947, remains active in preserving, licensing, and making Chim’s work available for exhibits and publications.

Today I have the pleasure of representing our entire family. I’d like to tell you a bit about how my own lifelong connection with Chim’s photography, inspired by [my work as a sociocultural anthropologist](https://shneiderman.arts.ubc.ca/), and give you a brief glimpse into the more intimate family context that surrounds his well-known historical legacy.

From the time I was a small child, Chim’s photos shaped my way of seeing the world. A copy of his [1948 Children of Europe](https://www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/society/david-seymour-children-of-europe/) book sat on the shelf behind my bed. This was the first photographic endeavour by the then newly-founded UN agencies of UNICEF and UNESCO. I spent many evenings looking through this book, haunted by the eyes of the children just like me – and yet so different. A blind boy with no arms used his lips to read Braille; a young girl, Tereszka, scrawled disturbed streaks on a blackboard when asked to draw a picture of her home. These photographs made me want to understand the experiences behind their eyes, to somehow close the gap between self and other.

It was in large part that desire which compelled me to pursue ethnographic work with rural Indigenous communities in a very different part of the world. Although Chim never visited the Himalayan regions of Nepal, India and Tibet where I have conducted research about belonging, migration, conflict, disaster, and social transformation for nearly 30 years, his empathic, humanistic approach to photography somehow managed to communicate both the universality and particularity of the human experience that motivated my own professional life as an anthropologist.

Photography has also evolved as a collaborative method in my own work over time, as I, along with the community members with whom I work—like most of us here—have made the shift from black and white Kodak film and slides to fully digital, on-demand documentation of our lives. I often wonder what would Chim would think of the visual world in which we live today? How would the immediacy of the smartphones in all of our pockets bring him into new kinds of relation with the people whom he sought to understand and represent?

Chim was known as a humanist, who produced images not only for their aesthetic value, but for their power to tell intimate stories of others’ lives. His work has stood the test of time in communicating something universal about the human condition, particularly in the face of suffering. Some years ago, I was startled to find Tereszka’s familiar eyes staring at me from the cover of a book I had retrieved from the library: a Cambridge University Press volume edited by anthropologists Antonius Robben and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco titled [*Cultures Under Siege: Collective Violence and Trauma*](https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Cultures_Under_Siege/BR2afEqsy_0C?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover). That collection tells the stories of persecuted people all over the world, and Chim’s image on the cover speaks volumes about their shared humanity in the search for “home” amidst displacement. This is just one example of how scholars, writers, artists, and journalists continue to draw upon Chim’s legacy today.

I myself have often turned to Chim when struggling to understand the challenges of belonging for marginalized people around the world, particularly refugees and migrants. In 2017, I wrote an essay illustrated by Chim’s photos, titled, “[Home does not equal citizenship: belonging in the age of the travel ban](https://politicalandlegalanthro.org/2017/02/22/home-does-not-equal-citizenship/)”. In it, I raised these questions: “Where is home? For any of us? What does it mean to belong?” and asked readers to see in Tereszka’s eyes the trauma of displacement as it was 75 years ago, and as it remains today. Recently German philanthropist Gregor Siebenkotten chose to name his foundation in support of war orphans “[The Tereszka Children’s Foundation](https://www.tereska.de/en/about/about-the-foundation/)”, and has supported a team of Polish investigative journalists to research the original Tereszka’s story. A [Polish documentary](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8257574/) about her life and encounter with Chim was recently released, revealing the interesting fact that Tereszka was not a Jewish Holocaust survivor as often assumed (and sometimes mislabeled), but rather a Catholic child whose parents fought in the Polish resistance—and who sadly experienced brain damage after being hit by shrapnel during the bombing of Warsaw. For me, this truth highlights a critical element of Chim’s practice worth remembering today: while he was certainly a Jewish photographer with a deep interest in Jewish stories, his was an inclusive humanism. His post-war work featured here in Portland shines a light on the suffering of war in all of its diversity. Similarly, his famous photograph of a wedding soon after the founding of the state of Israel somehow manages to capture in a single image both utopian hopes for a new future, and their dystopian scaffolding, in a home-made wedding chuppah held up with a pitchfork and a gun.

In such ways, Chim’s work remains very contemporary. It has been heartening to our family to see a sustained and increasing interest in his work over the last few decades. In addition to the series of exhibitions of which this one is part, a major retrospective exhibition was on display in Venice in spring 2024, and an upcoming exhibit about the 1948 Children of Europe project is being prepared by Toronto Metropolitan University’s Image Centre for 2025. His work is also featured in a new online exhibition hosted by the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History, “[From Telegram to Hyperlink: A Legacy of Connecting](https://theweitzman.org/exhibitions/from-telegram-to-hyperlink/)”, which tells Chim’s story along with that of my grandparents Eileen and SL Shneiderman, Yiddish journalists who worked alongside Chim, as well as my father Ben Shneiderman as a pioneering computer scientist. In 2022 Carole Naggar published a meticulously researched and poetic biography of Chim titled [*Searching for the Light*](https://www.magnumphotos.com/events/book-launch/david-chim-seymour-biography/), and a 2020 book by Nadya Bair, [*The Decisive Network*](https://www.ucpress.edu/books/the-decisive-network/hardcover), profiles Magnum photographers including Chim. Bair describes how the 1967 Concerned Photographer exhibit, “…singled out Seymour’s UNESCO pictures as an exemplary accomplishment in the history of photography… Seymour had shown how the camera could reveal the human condition. These ideas - about Seymour’s empathy and the humanism of his pictures - continued to circulate with every new installation.” I hope that they will continue to do so here in Portland over the next several months.

I never met Chim in person. Indeed, my father was only 10 years old when he was tragically killed in 1956 by sniper fire while covering the Suez crisis. My aunt Helen, who is 10 years older than my father, was lucky enough to travel with Chim during his lifetime, and offered some personal reflections of her experiences with him for me to share with you:

“Chim was the uncle I always waited for – anticipating his visits to New York from Paris and later from Rome where he lived in the fifties. He would come laden with toys and sit on the floor building paper villages and telling his wonderful stories. He had a quick sense of humor – with an impish smile - always stopping a conversation to tell a joke “a propos”…. And whenever he arrived – he sat at the piano and played Chopin. I see my childhood reflected in the series of photos he took at every visit.

When I was 16 my mother took me to Rome to spend a week with Chim - this remains one of the most memorable weeks of my life. He said – “Helen – finish your studies – then come to Rome and together we will plan your future”. But in 1956 this sensitive man of peace was killed in Sinai by sniper fire, after the cease fire, while on a photographic assignment for Newsweek – and I felt I had lost – not only a beloved uncle – but a future I had dreamt of.

People loved him – and he loved people – he loved the world – he loved living well – eating well –– and playing with the children of his many friends. Just go into the Chim archive and see the condolence letters from his friends – and the letters to my mother, to understand Chim’s humanity and sensitivity – reflected in all the photos he took.

His work endures to remind us of the cruelty of war – the suffering of children, the strength of the life force – and compassion. Chim’s work in photojournalism has become an art form which has influenced generations of photographers and has earned its place in museums and exhibition sites world-wide. Every picture in this retrospective is a slice of life from the 20th century: its tragedy and its life force. And as we look carefully – we better understand the past and perhaps the present that has evolved.”

And that is the end of the quote from Helen. With that, I’d like to offer thanks to all of you for being here today, and congratulations on the opening of this wonderful exhibition. Thank you.