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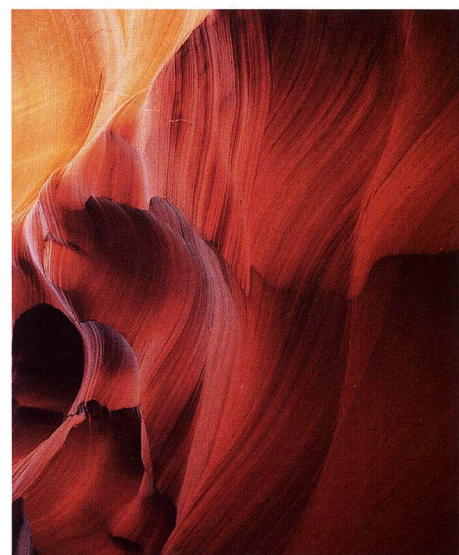
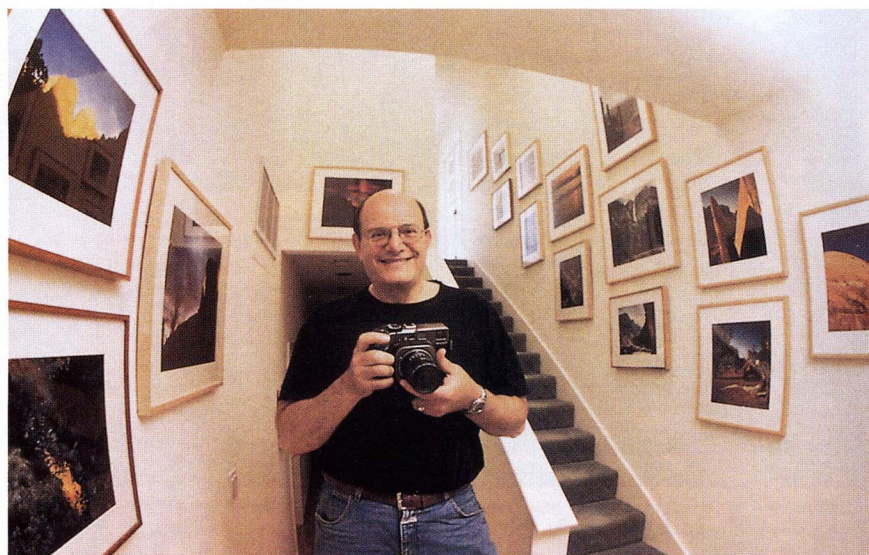


UNITED WE STAND



HEALING NATURE

DR. BERNARD LEWINSKY SAYS PHOTOGRAPHY HELPED HIM GET THROUGH THE BIZARRE NATIONAL CRISIS THAT STARRED HIS DAUGHTER MONICA. HE BELIEVES HIS ART CAN HELP HIS STRICKEN PATIENTS HEAL AS WELL.
BY NATALIE NODECKER



ANTHONY NELSON/ART COLLECTOR INTERNATIONAL

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As a practicing radiation oncologist, Bernard Lewinsky has seen and counseled many families in crisis. But treating cancer patients could not have prepared him for the crisis that beset his own family—a crisis that had news photographers staking out his loved ones, sent his quiet private life spiraling, and nearly brought down Bill Clinton’s presidency.

For Lewinsky—better known to millions as Monica’s dad—solace came from his avid pursuit of nature photography. Amid all the media clamor and political brinkmanship of what is now known as Monicagate, Lewinsky headed to his darkroom when he needed to find the light at the end of the tunnel. “I think that if it hadn’t been for my darkroom, I would have gone totally wacky,” he says. “I mean, I can’t say that it drummed out the reality of what was happening, but it did give me a place where I could go—where I could close the doors and get involved in my work.”

That experience only confirmed his belief that photography and photographs can have a therapeutic effect on people under stress, including the people he treats for cancer. Lewinsky has put that belief into effect at his Los Angeles-area medical office; there, instead of the dismal, cold environment patients may expect to find, the walls and even some of the ceilings are lined with Lewinsky’s own landscapes, as well as landscape work by other photographers.

“Radiation therapy is a very threatening procedure,” Lewinsky explains. “The patient is in a vault, a treatment room with big machinery, and they’re all by themselves. The majority of institutions that give radiation are stark and sterile and intimidating. By putting photographs of nature in there, you can calm and relax patients while they go through the treatment.”

Lewinsky started using his art to create a beneficial environment for cancer patients when he went into pri-

Above,
left: Doctor and
photographer
Bernard
Lewinsky.
Right: Upper
Antelope
Canyon, Page,
Arizona, 1997.

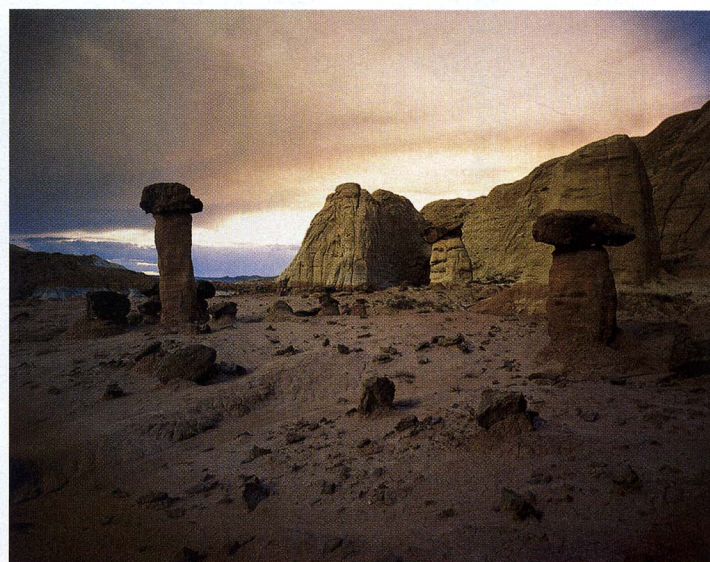
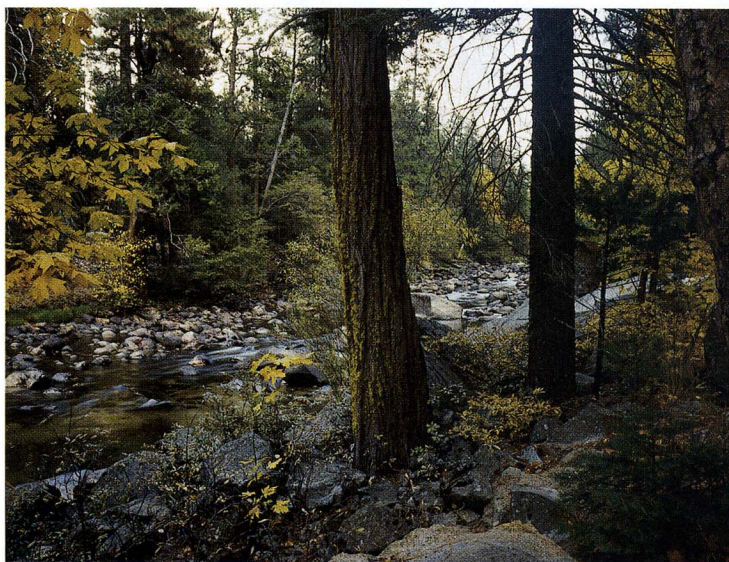
vate practice. Patients commented that they enjoyed coming to his facility for that reason. Since then, he's been emboldened by other findings, including a medical study suggesting that patients in recovery rooms decorated with nature imagery required less pain medication. "The facility felt comfortable, and patients were less fearful," says Lewinsky. "Photographs are certainly not going to replace any cancer-treatment drugs, but if a patient can feel more relaxed in a place where he or she is getting this horrible treatment, there is a benefit."

Though Lewinsky has put his art to work in aiding his medicine, until recently he never considered showing it strictly as art. That is about to change: In January, the G. Ray Hawkins Gallery in Santa Monica, California, will

old with a Kodak Brownie. Even then, he says, he was interested in "photographing pretty scenes." After moving to the United States from El Salvador when he was 14, he drifted away from photography and into medicine; it wasn't until 1987 that he began to take up his avocation again more seriously. "My main thrust began when I got divorced from my ex-wife," Lewinsky says. "That's when I really began to look at photography as a way of healing my own psyche."

Today Lewinsky shoots in color (with a Mamiya 7II medium-format rangefinder or a Wisner 4x5 field camera), but for years he worked mainly in black and white and in the style of his hero, Ansel Adams. By a stroke of luck, he had the opportunity to work with Adams—not, unfor-

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launch a two-part exhibition titled "The Healing Arts," the first part of which will focus entirely on work that Lewinsky has done for his treatment center. The second half of the exhibition features work borrowed from hospitals across the country.

Hawkins, a friend of Lewinsky's for about 20 years, says the show demonstrates how imagery is being used for medical purposes. But he notes that the key to Lewinsky's success is the personal nature of the pictures he makes. There is a direct connection between Lewinsky's photographs and the people who see them in his office—a connection the patients instinctively embrace. "Bernie is constantly looking at people who are suffering and dying," Hawkins says. "In order to help himself heal [in times of crisis], he's found ways of expressing his need for sanctuary through his photography. The most personal of his work is actually the most beneficial."

Lewinsky, 58, first took up photography as an 8-year-

fortunately, as a photographer, but as a doctor. Lewinsky was doing his residency in nuclear medicine in 1970 when Adams (who died in 1984 from heart failure connected with cancer) came in for a test. "So I met him, and we had a 30-second conversation: 'Hello Mr. Adams, how are you? Still taking pictures?'" Lewinsky recalls. "I regret having been so innocent and so naive."

Lewinsky's belief in the healing power of art has made him something of an evangelist on the subject. He lectures at medical conferences—most recently at a gathering of surgeons and radiation oncologists in Venezuela—and hopes to produce a book in which his own photography will be juxtaposed with photographs of the human body. "The resemblances are often very striking," he says. "Nature does replicate certain forms of the body. That may help to explain why patients get so much from looking at nature photography. There's a powerful mind-body connection at work." ■

Above, left: Merced River, Fall, Yosemite National Park, 1997. Right: Rock formations near Page, Arizona, 1997.