



All photos by Cohan Zarnoch



The incredible photos of remote African tribes captured by a COVID frontline nurse

By Regan Stephens

Cohan Zarnoch remembers seeing the lip plates worn by the women of the Ethiopia's Mursi tribe in a photograph in National Geographic. She was seven years old, growing up in Ohio where her only exposure to the wider

world was the magazine and World Book Encyclopedias. "I said, one day I'm going to see that," she recalls. "When we arrived, I stood there and cried. Who would have thought when I was seven that I would have actually seen this?" Zarnoch, now 54, has spent the last 12 years traveling with non-profit organizations, photographing remote African tribes along the way.

Based in Colorado, Zarnoch is also a surgical nurse currently working on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic. She spent three weeks in April stationed in New York City, and is now in East Texas, where she's nearing the end of a continuous 30-day stretch of 12 hour days, caring for COVID patients. Before being deployed to pandemic hot spots in the US, Zarnoch traveled with organizations such as Operation Walk, facilitating joint replacement to those in need, and Primo Filters International, a non-profit she runs with her family, bringing clean water to developing countries - usually with her camera.

The mother of four loved photography growing up, and spent decades capturing her own children, but never entertained the idea of pursuing the hobby professionally. "I thought I could only be one thing, and maybe in my next lifetime I would be a photographer, because in this lifetime, I'm a nurse," she remembers. But after a breast cancer diagnosis, she changed her mind.

"I decided life was too short." She also remembered the dream she had as a seven-year-old growing up in Ohio. "Once I was diagnosed, I said 'Oh my god, I haven't been to Africa yet!'"

So Zarnoch reached out to a non-profit, and 30 minutes later she heard back - they needed a photographer to cover their mission to Tanzania. Over a decade later, the photographer has

