

Jason McSparren: Good afternoon, good evening, depending on where you are, greetings. My name is Dr. Jason McSparren and I am the host today at the Green Room sponsored by the Green Institute. And today, you have the privilege to listen to and ask questions of a really fantastic individual. We're going to be talking with Ami Vitale. Ami is a Photojournalist currently working for National Geographic. A warm welcome Ami with clapping if you are hearing and seeing the video.

Let me just introduce Ami. I'd like to share with you her bio. Well, let me begin first with a quote from Ami and it states that "in the beginning photography was her passport to meeting people, learning and experiencing new cultures. Now, it's more than just a passport. It's a tool for creating awareness and understanding across cultures communities and countries. It's a tool to make sense of the commonalities in the world that humans share".

So Ami Vitale is a Nixon Ambassador working with National Geographic magazine. She is at a Photojournalist. Ami has traveled to more than 100 countries bearing witness not only to the violence and conflict but also the surreal beauty in the enduring power of the human spirit. Throughout the years Ami has lived in huts, in war zones, she's contracted malaria in donned a panda suit. Keeping to her beliefs that it's important to live the story. In 2009 however, after shooting a powerful story about the transport in the release of the world's last white rhinos, Ami shifted her focus away from conflict and way to what she believes are today's most compelling Wildlife and environmental stories a little bit more about Ami.

She has numerous awards and recognitions for her work, Instyle magazine named Ami, one of the 50 Badass Women of a series celebrating women who show up, speak out, and get things done. She's appeared alongside a group of incredible women including Jane Goodall, Christian Amanpour and the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She has been named Magazine Photographer of the year in the International Photographer of the year. She has received the Daniel Pearl Award for outstanding reporting and named Magazine Photographer of the year by the National Press Photographers Association. She's a five-time recipient of the World Press photos including the first prize for a 2018 National Geographic magazine story about a community in Kenya protecting elephants. She recently published a best-selling book titled Panda love, it's about the secret lives of pandas and Vitale was the subject of the Mission Cover Shot series in National Geographic Channel as well as other documentary series featuring Madagascar titled, Over the Islands of Africa. Lastly Ami also lectures for National Geographic Live series, and she frequently gives workshops throughout the Americas, Europe and Asia.

Again, once again, ladies and gentlemen, Ami is also on the Photojournalism Advisory Council for the Alexia Foundation. Please give Ami Vitale a warm Green Room welcome. Thanks so much. Hello.

Ami Vitale: Hi, Jason. Thank you. That was like the most extensive introduction of my bio. Thank you for that.

Jason McSparren: Yes. No, I really appreciate that. But I really do want to let the audience know what a really remarkable career you've had, in what an outstanding individual you are. So I think it's well worth getting deep into your bio.

Ami Vitale: Thank you, that was super kind and I just want to say hello to everybody. Thank you for tuning in on this Friday afternoon or perhaps you're on Saturday in some parts of the globe already, but I hope that it can be interactive and I really you know, I really actually believe when it comes to

issues of the environment, the natural world, Wildlife, now more than ever, we all have a role to play and so this is so much more than about me. It's about all of you and I feel like if I can give tips and an inspiration of even by sharing some of my own story for all of you to find your own way, to get more engaged, that is the ultimate goal. And so thank you and I wonder, how should we do this? Do you want me to share some stories in the beginning and then we can do a little bit of Q&A after

Jason McSparren: Sure that would be great. Absolutely.

Ami Vitale: And I kind of keep it to 30 minutes, is that okay?

Jason McSparren: 30 minutes would work as well? Certainly. Yes. Okay. We have specific stories where you'd like to start or would you like me to open up your web page?

Ami Vitale: If you can just give me sharing privileges. I've got a little presentation I can

Jason McSparren: Certainly that would work out well, excellent. Hey, okay.

Ami Vitale: Let me just share. Yeah, okay, here we go. Let's see here. Let me hit play. Okay, so I'm I you know, I'm going to repeat some of this if you've heard me before but basically my own introduction into photography was that the camera was just a really beautiful tool for me to get over my own, you know, very painfully shy, introverted place in the world. I didn't really believe that I had a voice. I was scared of people and then I picked up the camera and I realized it was just this wonderful tool for me to go out and engage with the world around me and as I started getting more and more into it.

And I made this jump where I really kind of first started telling stories about people and then gravitated to wanting to understand why conflicts happen all over the world and became a conflict photographer for the first 10 years of my career and I was always asked to jump into these very dramatic situations and the thing I learned about covering these stories was that, I was always asked by my editors and I thought that's what my audience wanted was the most dramatic, you know, kind of parachuting places, taking dramatic images and I had to say like I started to feel like we were leaving so much of the story out, you know, the human story and we weren't often offering solutions. It was like, this is what's happening in the world, isn't the world a terrible place and then we would leave and I was really troubled by that and I started to ask myself like, you know, what would happen if we started to highlight the other parts of this story, the stories that allow us to relate to one another as simply human beings and then as I started covering these stories about conflict I realized that we were actually leaving a huge piece of this story out because all stories of humanity are always related to stories of the natural world, our environment. And in fact, many of these conflicts are absolutely connected to you know, the degradation of our natural world and I started having this, really making the connections that no matter where I was in the world, every story about humanity was always deeply connected to the story of the natural world and that big Epiphany also started to happen in about 2009 and 2008, 2009 I was starting to make these connections and it was around this time I heard about this story to move the last four well there at the time there were eight Northern white rhinos alive on the planet. That was it. They were all in zoos and I heard about this kind of dramatic plan to fly these rhinos back to Africa in this last-ditch effort to save the whole species. And I tell this

story because I pitched it to so many newspapers, magazines, all this different media and at the time all of the editors I pitched it to rejected this story. They said, you know, it's a great story, but it's not visual enough because this the images they were imagining more like, oh, maybe I'm going to take a picture of the snowy zoo in the Czech Republic to wall cover zoo or maybe you know a picture of them being put on an airplane, but that they would be in crates, you would never see them and they all I wrote them all back and they said yeah great story, but maybe a good story for radio and I say this because it's like if you have a story, often the stories are right in front of us in our backyard right there and we get rejected and I get rejected almost all the time, even today on most stories and I just want to say don't let that deter you, if you want to tell these stories, it's important to keep going with it. And I did, I went ahead and I actually rewrote the pitch and told them how I envisioned the story. I mean, that's one really important lesson.

I think when you're writing pitches, it's very important to talk about the sense of urgency, Why do you need to tell the story right now?, secondly, visualize it for your editors because they don't know what you're going to see, they can't imagine what you're imagining and often I'll start a story before I even get it published because I need to show images to let them see what I'm imagining. And this is how we imagine Rhinos roaming the open plains of Africa, but this is what it actually looks like today because the value of their horn is worth more than gold and I'm so sorry to show you this image. But this is what poaching looks like and it's not just for Rhinos, It's for Elephants, for a whole host of species that we haven't even seen or talked about.

There's so many animals that you know, don't even get the same coverage as the charismatic species, the keystone species, but you know, I started to investigate the story and I wanted to this was 11, 12 years ago. I started this and I remember at the time all the emphasis was focused on the war, the poachers and this war and kind of the militarization but I noticed that the people the indigenous people living with Wildlife. We're pretty much across the board left out of the story and it was just sort of this missing piece to the story that I started to ask the question. What did the people living with the wildlife think, and honestly, they hold the key to saving what's left. You know, they are the greatest protectors of the Wildlife there and I tell this story because a couple of reasons like hey, just because you get rejected on the first time don't give up. You have to keep going very often, you just have to keep showing and proving yourself and show what you are going to do and then secondly, look for the piece of the story that has not been told already. Meaning almost every story has been told in a variety of different ways. But only you can bring back your unique vision and your unique way and frankly your unique access. So figure out what hasn't been told at the time and keep going with that and I started to just explore this and the other piece of what I think powerful storytelling takes is, to spend time with a story, take years if you need to, to tell one story because they will evolve and I think that really great story take telling does take time and developing the relationships, developing that trust so that people will let you in and so I just kind of travel down this path with this is all in Northern Kenya. And so now, you know the bulk of my work is really focused on this landscape in Northern Kenya where I see these great stories of hope and I think it's really important to just keep going with it. And now I want to flashback and circle back to the story about the Northern White Rhino and today, there's only two of them left two and you know, a lot of now the media is completely focused on the story of the Northern White Rhino. Everybody's telling the story which is wonderful, but you know, I just want to emphasize that there's so many stories to tell and the one thing I realized though that people have latched onto with the northern White Rhino. It's like it was this heartbreaking moment when Sudan died and I'm going to get into that but I think that we leave out the solutions and like answers for people. What do we latch onto now? Because I think it's really important to also not just talked about the challenges and the heartbreak of this story or any story but really focus on what do we do? What do we do? Because there's always solutions and I find that very often, they're left out of

the story. And this was that heartbreaking image that literally took me eight years to make because if I hadn't invested the time into building those relationships and gotten the trust to be there at this moment. You know, I wouldn't have been there.

And this is just a really heartbreaking moment of Jojo saying goodbye to Sudan, who was the last male Northern White Rhino alive and when he passed away, it was just such I mean, it's hard to even. Yes. Yeah, you know when you realize when you look at this image, I think why it resonates is because it's almost illustrates both the beauty and the horror of what humanity can be, you know, JoJo kind of represents the best of humanity and the fact that we're down to two Rhinos really represents the worst of humanity. And this image to me, just expresses like the future is in our hands, It's up to us now. What are we going to do about it? And that's why I think you're all tuned in today. It's like yes, we do all have a voice and a role and whether you know, whatever it is that you decide to do, whether it's through photography or becoming a donor or volunteering or writing. I mean, there's just so much that we can all be doing and I think that there are stories everywhere and often the stories are right in front of us in our backyard. So I want to you know, just talk about that and I do have this privilege of working for National Geographic which is an extraordinary, organization with a huge platform and it is this, responsibility to try to tell their stories, but I also want to say that social media is so powerful that, all of us, you don't have to just be relying on National Geographic and I want to talk about later about different ways we can all be engaged but this story has had this beautiful twist of fate.

I actually have been during the pandemic going back to Ol Pejeta where these rhinos now Najin and Fatu are. As you know in this twist of fate, the story about extinction has turned into a story about maybe resurrecting the species using science and there's a team called the Bio Rescue Team who's been going over the last two years. They made four trips to extract the immature eggs, they are called oocytes and then they fly these immature eggs, you can't freeze them. So they only have 24 hours to get them. From Kenya to a lab in Italy, the Avanti lab where they take the frozen semen of the males who have passed away and they've created these embryos and just today they announced that two more embryos have been created which they get frozen and then now they've identified southern white rhinos who will be the mothers and are going to use IVF and you know and people ask how do you save a species with embryos? But they're also going to be using stem cell so they have enough genetic diversity from the male's it's not just one male that they're using.

They've got whole frozen lab of different male Northern white rhinos, but there is this sense of urgency and I really want to encourage everybody to get involved and support the Bio Rescue Project. If you're interested in this because, this science is important not just for the Northern White Rhinos, but actually a whole host of other species. It's really incredible that they're able to do this and the other sense of urgency about it is, they want those babies to be raised by Najin and Fatu so that they learn how to be another White Rhino. Northern White Rhinos are very different from Southern White Rhinos. They have different behavior. And it's important that they learn that behavior before these two last females, while they're still here on the planet. This is the team Thomas Hildebrandt is the man in the center and this is his work that he's been developing for the last decade and then I was so honored that National Geographic chose to put the story on the cover and let me write a piece about the importance of protecting what is left and I think really what we all need to be doing is protecting habitat.

To me, that is the biggest question right now. And I'm sorry. I'm just going to roll through these stories or should I take a break and let people ask questions before I move on to the next story. Would you like to do it that way?

Jason McSparren: Certainly and what I like to do, I just want to ask you to clarify this but I believe that photo right there is a photo of Joseph Wachira? So, this is Joseph Wachira saying goodbye to the White Rhino named Sudan and this is chosen as a National Geographic best photo of the decade by the people on Instagram. So that's again another accomplishment by Ami. But again your eye, you know, as you said earlier, in this photo you can see the best of humanity in the worst of humanity in this photo. It's a very powerful photo and I can see why it could got that awarded that's fantastic.

Ami Vitale: Thank you, you know it's not even honestly, I think it's great that it raises awareness. And I think that's the only reason to have these Awards in a way, you know, that it hopefully amplifies these messages and I was just going to actually say that if anybody's interested, Natural History Museum The People's Choice Award right now. It's up for voting and my hope is truly that, you get to a certain point in your career wherein the beginning the awards meant so much but it's actually like anything we can do to reflect that attention back to the people the real heroes like Jojo, like the team on the ground, they are doing sometimes heartbreaking some you have small successes and often big setbacks and they are out there doing the grueling work and I think I always get slightly embarrassed to be getting Awards. Actually, the award should be going to them but you know anything we can do to kind of shine that light on them is really important, but I wondered is this a good moment to take questions or should I keep going? I can answer some questions.

Jason McSparren: Let's see if we can take two or three questions from our audience this way we can kind of stay focused on this story as we progress through. Do one or two more stories?

Ami Vitale: Yeah, that would be great.

Jason McSparren: Okay, so let me see.

Ami Vitale: Don't be shy everybody please.

Jason McSparren: Yes, please ask questions. We know that we've got a really interesting audience on this fantastic topic. Okay. So, let's see. We have a question here. Okay. This is actually a statement right here. We have a question from Paulina Ondarza. And she asks, this is she says this is so powerful and inspiring. Loved that you pointed out that often, the solutions or a second half of the story is left out. How do you interact? How do you turn a tragic story into one of hope doing it justice on both sides? So how would you approach that as a Storyteller as a Photojournalist?

Ami Vitale: Thank you. That's such a great question. I mean, I think that the immediate thing is to like feel the sense of despair when you, there are days I mean to be totally honest, there are days it's hard to get out of bed. Truly, you just look at the world like, oh my God, I don't even know, it's like one thing and the next thing and you just think it can't get any worse and then it does right? I literally sometimes just have to channel that despair into and I remember I mean, I have the privilege of meeting the people on the ground and I realized when you actually think about it, there is no other answer than having hope and then looking at the people the real heroes on the ground and I think you know there are answers and we have all the capacity to turn this around. If you think about the amount of money and things that we spend our money on and the things that we put our importance on. I mean if you channeled just a percentage of what we value in today's world and channeled it back into

these causes and people in organizations and institutions, we got this and I think people are incredibly smart.

It's really about what we choose to prioritize and I think as storytellers, it's up to us to not just get overwhelmed by the despair and give up. We have to actively seek out the solution and I see this happening all the time, where journalists and writers will write these beautiful stories, but then we don't give people, we don't point them in the right direction, and I know that there was always this question when I was growing up and studying journalism. It was like don't cross that ethical line like you're not an activist and I'm I agree, you know, my role is not to be the activist. I'm the Storyteller, but I also think that it's not enough to just point out the challenges and leave it there. What next, like you got to point people to the institutions, give the viewpoint from all sides, a multitude of viewpoints is very important, but then you know, definitely it's okay to point out who's doing this work and give you know, give the credit where the credit's due.

I think often journalists kind of insert themselves inside the story and that's okay. But remember to make it about the people that, you're writing about does that does that kind of answer it

Jason McSparren: I would think so and actually just want to say that the way that you approach that answer kind of touched on a question that I was going to ask earlier and I just want to ask the question at respectively and make a comment because on your website, which is a really interesting website to take a look at amivitale.com. In one of the stories toward the end, Ami mentions that she uses her photography to amplify the voices of others and I think you just explain that whole sentiment in that motivation in your previous comment, but I just think that it's really important that because I saw in the comment, somebody's asking what is your motivation? And I think that is an element of your motivation. It's really you as you said early like to be behind the camera out of the spotlight and really amplifying and elevate the actions and the motivations in the voices of other people doing really interesting and important work.

Ami Vitale: Yeah, I think you get to a certain point the motivations is you start to really I've been really blessed to see all these different things in life and you get to a certain point where you just start to see the connections between all of humanity, all of the natural world and that it isn't just about you know, there's a sense of humility that I think comes after a certain time where you just filled with gratitude and wanting to make the connections, realizing that we're a blip on this planet, we are blip in time. What we do right now matters not just for us but truly like you just get the sense of the internal nests of this planet, and I know that sounds lofty, but it's really true and I think nature reminds us of that. I mean you get out in nature and it's humbling. It's deeply humbling.

Jason McSparren: Okay so up we have Yasmin Atasoy asking, can you tell what was the difficulty you had during taking such picture right? So can you talk about you know, the challenges that you face as a photographer, again you started in your mid-20s and also relatively young and I want to say inexperience, you know, but you've rear as you said around the world from Kosovo to Kenya to Afghanistan, places all around the worldwide when you were looking at the conflicts and then into the environmental sustainability, please answer the question and let us have a little bit of insight into the challenges that you face in this work, please.

Ami Vitale: You know, there's always challenges and from sometimes being from physical challenges to being threatened by people that don't want you there too you know, there's always those

challenges and I guess that's almost like a separate conversation. I could do a whole. Yeah we could do I've actually done a podcast with a friend of mine, we both covered conflicts and we talked about how to stay safe in certain situations, but I would just say about the challenges. It's like, you know, if there weren't challenges everybody would be doing this work. There's always going to be challenges, but I think you just have to find your way around them and just stay keep yourself healthy and safe and remember that no one picture is worth your own safety or your you know sense of well-being, that it's really important also to develop a sense of community with friends that you can talk about some of these issues. You're welcome to write me later because there are wonderful communities. I mean that is one silver lining of this pandemic is that really incredible communities have kind of emerged in this moment. We're all in our homes and the zoom world and kind of having people to bounce your issues off with, that you can talk to you about what are your obstacles because we gotta find ways to personally allow you to keep getting out there and telling the stories that matter and yeah, I don't want to go down, you know and give the litany of challenges like God there have been so many, over twenty years of working and at the end of the day, I don't even remember them all. I don't remember the challenges. I just remember the absolute joy and being grateful for those challenges at the end of it. Because guess what, every single one of them made me better at what I do and made me realize that, we all are unbelievably adaptable. We all have that strong voices. I saw somebody wrote in here like that, you're incredibly shy guess why I was too. I mean, I know it's hard to believe because now I really feel like I have a voice but there was a time that I didn't feel welcomed. I didn't feel like I had anything to say, I would literally start crying if you ask me to go and speak in front of anybody. It was too painful. So just know that it's normal and that it takes baby steps like you're not going to just one day become this, it just takes time and patience and kind of chipping away at it story by story.

Jason McSparren: Okay. I think we have a question. Give me one second. Can we see Rebecca Samuel? Would you please like to ask a question to Ami? I think if you take yourself off of mute, I think you can ask your question.

Rebecca (Audience): Hi, Ami. Hi Jason.

Ami Vitale: Hello.

Jason McSparren: Thanks for asking.

Rebecca (Audience): So nice to talk to both of you. I am a beginner photographer, and I'm really passionate about my life. And I really want to tell stories that I'm passionate about, and I just wanted to ask, so you told us that it takes baby steps and you know a lot of patience and a lot of time but with so many photographers, so many videographers out there right now, conservationist, how do you really get your story out? How do you support Wildlife? How do you amplify voices in this sort of current thing with so many people telling stories? How do you do that?

Jason McSparren: How do you stand out?

Ami Vitale: Yeah, that's a really good question, and I would say find something that not everybody is working on, find organizations that are doing work on something and partner with them, I usually find that the smaller kind of younger ones that don't already have a million photographers reaching out to them that we really need your help right now telling their story. It's such a great way to establish that relationship where you're really helping them, and they're helping you by giving you that access. And there's so many young organizations and nonprofits doing really great work that really could use

media help with a partnership like that and then work on it, just keep working on it. I have a whole resource page on my website that lists like a ton of different grants and then once you feel like your work, you have a body of work that you can share, start entering contests. And again I said, it's not about winning awards at all. What that does is get your work in front of the audience that you want to be seen with. Because really, great editors from all the magazines that you want to be publishing in are usually the judges at these things and that's why I do that. I want them to see the work because you may not win the award, but you're getting your work in front of somebody who you can then pitch the story to and so that's happened for me where an editor saw the work and reached out to me after the contest. I didn't even win an award, but they reached out.

And they were like, hey, I'm interested in this work that happened pretty early on and so that's when I learned the value of those contests. I also think social media is valuable, curate. Instagram is the place right now for photography, tuning your Instagram account to the topics that you're really passionate about, a project that you're working on, and captions matter. So, you know write those captions figure out interesting ways to partner with the organization like maybe, you can just be creative. I think that storytelling, it used to be such a literal format and it's really, it's gotten so poetic and people are using all kinds of ways to express themselves and don't be afraid to you know, it doesn't always have to be literal. Figure out how do you want it? Maybe doing collaboration, maybe you partner with a photographer or a poet. You know collaboration is important in today's world. I think the more you can work with people to get your body of work seeing with the multiple viewpoint could be interesting.

Jason McSparren: Thank you very much for that question. Thank you so much to the next story. I'd like to ask you one more question. And I think this question kind of goes to trying to get into the background in understanding your sort of secret source. How you approach the subject in please? Would you mind asking your question?

Audience: Yeah. Sure. Hi Ami. So my question is about the sustainability and that's kind of the topic of today's event. So I was wondering how do you intertwine the idea of sustainability with storytelling through photography?

Ami Vitale: I mean, I feel like you mean as a story of sustainability within. Okay. Well, you know, I've actually been kind of approaching the storytelling from different angles and different like my approach has been to really work with communities in a deep and meaningful way over years and in and so, you know, I haven't really discussed sustainability per se in that in those stories, but I would say that my goal is to help those nonprofits become a sustainable on their own. So I really work intensely trying to raise money for them, trying to develop a multitude of different mediums like, filmmaking, using art, using photography doing talks, doing collaborating with other photographers to do big scale fundraising, so I try to just really keep working to elevate these communities. I'm not sure I'm answering your question because I feel like I haven't really covered the issue of sustainability, but I think that it's something I'm happy to go off-screen with you to talk with you more intensely about what ideas you have because it really is about you and I it's a wonderful topic that you should go into deeply and I think that thing is like, how are you going to find your unique way of telling that story and we all have a unique vision, it's just sort of digging deep inside yourself and getting vulnerable in a way with yourself to kind of dig up what it is that you can work on.

Jason McSparren: Great, you know it was very clear. Yes. Absolutely. We have our discussion today is being viewed on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. So I want to take a question from one of our

YouTube viewers. Lauren is asking can you speak about the cultural competency and your approach to relationship building in the field, especially as a white woman parachuting into foreign countries. Trying to capture the lives of these communities.

Ami Vitale: Thank you. That is such an important question. And I think that you know, I started down this path when the Rhinos were being moved and really got involved in Northern Kenya and just got really? I think my answer is I spend a lot of time and a lot of my own time and investment, so I also feel like I really try to make sure that the work is benefiting the communities and it's not this totally extractive thing. And the next thing I'm working on right now is actually training and giving the tools and the training to 40 indigenous storytellers in Kenya in the same communities I've been working in. Because I feel like, in a lot of ways that was how it worked 10, 20 years ago is like yeah, we were asked to go on and tell the stories all around the world. But you know what, people are beautiful storytellers themselves.

They can tell their own stories and that it means I think that a multitude of viewpoints is important. It doesn't mean that you know, all storytelling should stop. I just it mean that we need to be empowering one another to tell our own stories and I really look at that deeply and think that we've got to find ways and I think that it's about getting engaged in a meaningful way that your again not extracting things and making sure that you're giving back in in really deep meaningful ways.

And you know, I just spend so much of my life trying to figure out how do we develop collaborations, where you're elevating people story and also yeah turning donors to the work that they're doing because people need funding and so I really try to raise much needed funding for these communities and that's part of what my enthusiasm is. Kind of I'm not just a photographer, I'm working on a lot of different things to make sure that again, you know, it can be really colonial in a lot of ways just even storytelling and I think being aware of that, being aware of the impact we can have both positive and negative and doing Justice like, it's there's a lot on issues of climate and the environment there's you know, you definitely asked a question that we should have a whole seminar about really can't be answered in two minutes, but that's sort of how I approach it.

Jason McSparren: That's a fantastic answer. I really do think that you touched on some really important details and issues and I think you've really done a nice job of informing a good answer to the question. So, thanks for that. We are just about hitting the four o'clock hour. So about 45 minutes in, I was wondering if you'd like to transition into another story this way our audience gives us a little bit more of the scope of your experience before our time is up today, story and then we'll ask, you know several more questions from the audience.

Ami Vitale: Yeah, and I'll just give one example, I'm going to just pull this other story up here. So, let me just share the screen and I mean, I guess my main point by sharing, you know, one thing I would just say regarding storytelling is that, embrace all the tools that you possibly can, push yourself, learn new medium. So I was just a photographer in the beginning and then I realized that I needed to do more than that, more than just taking pictures. You need to really learn to use your voice in a lot of ways, so I began with writing and taking pictures and then I push myself to learn video and then kind of even get out there and start speaking and then mentorship, that also addresses some of the last question to I think it's really important that we are when you get to a certain point or learn something sharing and mentoring, I mean all of us need to be doing more of that to create a more just and equal world. I really think that's important.

I want to just give one last story here that I just came back from in addition to doing the Rhino ovum pick up in December, I have been working with a new nonprofit called Save Giraffes Now and they're partners in Kenya Northern Rangelands Trust the Roku Conservationist, Kenya Wildlife service and I heard a long time ago there's this plan to these giraffes became stranded on what was once a peninsula in a remote place, the peninsula turned to an island because every day it rained so much that this landscape the water rises 6 inches every single day.

Jason McSparren: Wow, that's incredible

Ami Vitale: And this is an image of these incredible rainstorms that are literally, sinking people's homes and everybody's being impacted and so the rains are coming and this place that used to be grasslands where people graze their livestock. And this was the peninsula that these giraffes were and they became marooned on this island. And if you see the kind of front part where there's some water there one giraffe had actually been stranded on the lower part with hippos and crocodiles and snakes. She had a baby down there in her baby was killed by a snake and they knew that they had to take dramatic efforts to get these giraffe off the sinking landscape. Here are the giraffe and they had to move them onto a raft and really float them and this is Mike there, Wonderful Mike who lives on this island. When the crocodiles, hippos, snakes and that a giraffe and he takes care of them looks after them and was training them to get comfortable with walking onto a barge. That was then moved and here he is with his giraffe. And so I always love you know, the human story. There is one story about the environment that does not involve the story of humanity. There are all intricately connected and then, you know, they ended up having to dart these two giraffes that they moved in December and then they had to tie them these ropes to eventually get them onto this barge where they then took it to a place that is not flooding. And then this is the community coming to watch this scene unfolding and I just want to end, you know, I take these pictures. I also did video and I it went viral, we got it out to all the media around the world, but I felt like, once I do that, I also have this obligation to get out there and I knew it was the end of the year where people tend to donate right at the end of the year and so I made this, you know this whole media plan which involved sharing the story of Save Giraffes Now, so Saved Giraffe Now told me that it did end up raising a lot of money for them simply by sharing their stories on my Instagram and you know, really just making sure that not only do you share this story, but you give people a way where they can contribute and sometimes it is just financial support, sometimes it's volunteering, sometimes whatever way you can do it. It's just to be sure that we are not just storytellers not just journalist, but it's our obligation and responsibility to get out there and give people some answers. Like what do we do in this really critical moment and not to be afraid to do that?

Jason McSparren: Right and I think you really again you're telling stories with these photos. And what you're doing is as you say, you know, you're highlighting other people's voices and you are attracting, you know, a large audiences because of your skills in your approach and the beauty of the photos that you're able to take. So it's really good to see the work that you're doing and it's really good to see that your motivation is not only as you said earlier, you know, you're not motivated by the awards and everything which are great. However, you really are just a storyteller wants to tell these stories highlight these issues and really in the end hopefully make a difference a positive different for sustainable development etc., you know and sustainable environmental.

Ami Vitale: Thank you so much Jason. There's two questions. I want to answer that came up just now. So now who funded the Giraffes Now? Nat Geo did not send me and I ended up Saved Giraffe Now give me some support, but then I you know, I think that it's almost like I've done this circle like the beginning of my career. I realized that you know, very often you just have to go and do the stories and then sell them after and in a lot of ways.

I find that better because you own all the copyright to your story then and then you have the ability when you know you have a good story. You know who gave me this advice is Susan Meiselas this one of the most amazing. She was a magnum one of the first, not the first but she's a magnum female photographer and she told me hang on to your copyright always it's valuable, don't ever give it away. And I'm not saying that partnerships aren't important and I'm really privileged to work for National Geographic. It's an honor but in some cases, you know, when a story like that that I knew would be very viral. It's like in a lot of ways it was better than I would have had to give all the rights to National Geographic and then I wouldn't be able to publish anywhere else. So, you know kind of weighing the odds.

I also wanted to touch on the ethical question. One thing I'd like to say is that I really spend a lot of time gaining trust with the community, so that they actually asked me to come they want me there. They know that I'm you know that we're partners in this and I think establishing that trust and not making this all about you and your photography is really important. You need to make sure, really ask yourself that tough question. Why am I doing this and it just takes time. Like I have done a lot of investment myself in these stories. And so, you know asking yourself those ethical questions are really important and I'm glad that the world is kind of changing and waking up to this. It's very important. Yeah.

Jason McSparren: Absolutely. Fantastic. Fantastic. Okay. Do we have any other interesting questions here? There are many questions. Okay. You just talk about the ethics of there. Yeah, and somebody's asking how do you establish that trust?

Ami Vitale: Yeah, you know, I do take a lot of time without the camera talking to people like before I even get on an airplane and go visit. The first thing I do is I reach out to all the community members, the leaders in the community, the people working there to have these discussions and to ask them. Like is this am I welcome?

I need their blessings before I even start, then when I get there take the camera put it in your camera bag and go talk to people and find out we all like you shaped sometimes people shape the story before they even get on the airplane and go to any place and you need to understand what the story is to them. And I also think find those stories in your own community. They're all around us and climate change that is impacting everybody. And if you search closely like there is beautiful stories right in your backyard.

Jason McSparren: All right. We have a question here from Adriana Fernandez and Adrianna is asking, how do you plan your work? You kind of just talk about that some people show up to the subject site, you know with this story already planned but this is the she's asking you how do you plan your work? She thinks it's important to plan, media have a strategy Etc. so that you can be effective and your story will have more impact. Yeah, give us any insight on that.

Ami Vitale: Yeah, the first case, read everything you can. I mean so much so that like if you're you are studying Panda, read so much that you're thinking like a panda bear like get in the head of whatever it is that you're interested in and then get on the phone and start talking to people and then you do when you first visit, plan out a strategy where you're going to be making multiple visits. And spending time I mean real-time and I think it like a story almost should become a lifetime story for you where you're just finding different threads of it and maybe you start a new story. But then like we've another it's like weaving a beautiful tapestry and you know creating community around it. I really love this idea of collaboration, find people that are already working on the story and ask if you can be collaborating

on this topic with them and helping them, I think we have to get away from this word competitive to collaborative. It's so important in today's world and then, you just there will be beautiful progress and painful setbacks always like, you're gonna fail multiple times, but just get up and keep on dancing because you just can't focus on so much of about work it's all about our attitudes and just not letting things get you down and drag you down. The despair can be overwhelming at times. Somebody asked that. How do you not let the despair get to you? Well, the truth is, you know, everybody working in the field is so amazing that you need these wonderful selfless people, the ones that are not the celebrities, the ones that go for the people that don't have the same spotlight shined on them and go shine a spotlight on the unsung heroes. There are so many of them. They need to be their work, their beautiful voices to be amplified and you can do that by going and finding those kind of hidden gems and people to work with.

Jason McSparren: We're getting a lot of questions, people are curious about how COVID-19 might be impacting your work specifically but then they're also curious about the agencies that you're working with the Giraffe Rescue Team as well as the White Rhino Team as well, is the COVID-19 impacting those issues as well.

Ami Vitale: Absolutely it is, you know, I think we were all we've all been grounded and both a giraffe and the Rhino story actually coincided at the same exact time and there is a decision that they had to do it, the team had to go and do these stories right away and I actually took classes about safety and got the whole lessons and equipment, how to travel and be safe and I got tested, you have to get tested and then get on the plane, basically I got tested the same, within 24 hours the test came back and then I got on a plane with my test and went over and was just really careful. And I've actually been living very I don't see anybody right now, except my partner and we you really try to just stay safe. Yeah, it's tough and then just kind of go when I had to go and I've almost been called like his part of the team so both Giraffe and the Rhino teams kind of consider me part of their team, which is an honor but it's you know, I have a relationship that is developed over like now a decade.

Jason McSparren: Very interesting. Okay. Ami Ashrak asks first he says that he's very thankful for you sharing your ideas. He's really interested. But he also wants to know what one of the most difficult situations that you faced out in the field doing your work.

Ami Vitale: I would also say here's something. Should talk about this important politics are always there. You know, I think it's about giving credit to all the parties and I think that's something to be very aware of, that people are sensitive. We live in this social media world where you know, it matters who you tag, who you give credit to and sometimes we make mistakes unintentionally. Own up to your mistakes if you let somebody out add them right away be aware of the politics, be aware that you may not even know what you're walking into but like people may not like each other and you're walking into the middle of this because at the end of the day, we're all humans and I think it's really important to be aware of the local politics wherever you are and just be careful and aware of what job is, you need to be the Storyteller and not get involved in all the politics and do your job but give credit to everybody and I would say that's something that I really try to do.

Did I answer your question? I can't remember. What was the original question was.

Jason McSparren: What is one of the most difficult situations you've been in but I really think that you touch on, you know, a universal difficulty.

Ami Vitale: It is just politics everywhere whether you're in Academia, in journalism, in conservation, politics exist sadly and I think maybe not sadly politics exist, and maybe it's a way to create a more just world, but people want change everywhere and it's time to acknowledge and create a more just and equitable world and be aware of everything happening and know that you're not going to always be welcoming, sometimes you have to step away and find another direction.

Jason McSparren: Here's another really good question from Neha Johnny. She's asking for she comments and tells us that you telling us some beautiful stories and she's really pleased with that but how did you find access for the first story that you've ever told. So she's talking about how do you kind of crack into such an industry I suppose.

Ami Vitale: Yeah, I mean, so I've been doing this now over 20 years and my answer is I usually go and you know, somebody took that quote go and live the story. Well I go I you know, when I wanted to tell a story for example my work began really and gosh. We just think we're back that I it started, I moved to the Czech Republic and that's when I learned that I think it's really important that your know not parachuting into a place and spending years in whatever it is that you're interested in. You need to be there in present.

But how did I crack into it? I got a job at a small business newspaper in Prague. That was the first, you know, I was first in editor, so I worked for Associated Press for four years on the news desk in New York and Washington DC. So I really first learned how the media industry works from the inside and that was really helpful. I really do I suggest that is a way of getting in. Think about becoming an editor, Like that's a very good way to understand the media and the flaws of it, you know, and so I did that and then I move to the Czech Republic and started working for a little small business journal taking portraits of business mostly businessmen. There were not very many businesswomen. And kind of learned the culture of, where I was and then kind of quit after a year of doing that and started to go and I jumped in both feet and started covering the war in Kosovo and became a conflict photographer for about 10 years and then we'll that's what I'm yeah, but I can like it if there's not enough time to talk about all of this, but I would say to you, a good way to get in is find a story in your backyard and go deep.

Jason McSparren: May I ask that were you contracted to do your first story in Kosovo or is this something that you just had an interest in, you went there and you follow the story and then you went back and sold it.

Ami Vitale: I have always had to invest in the stories myself because sadly, actually as a woman I would never get those assignments and people paying for me to go and I felt like even today, I usually have to invest in the story myself because, people still they don't invest in you until they see it. I almost here's the truth. I usually have to give almost a finished product for people to even see what I'm imagining and it's been a lot of you know, and then I have to say the media industry has changed quite a bit and it's very hard to sustain yourself.

So I would say become well-versed in writing, in doing video, doing stories and maybe you know, my secret has been to just dig into one story very deeply and then produce a lot of different, the Rhino Story how I funded that in the beginning. I made video I made stories, I wrote about it and I just go deep and produce a lot of different material for different mediums and then, you know get out there and talk about it. And so you develop, you become a voice on whatever issue it is that you're working on and then you have all these different assets. So for the Rhino story I ended up being able to sell my video clips to, ABC News and NBC and then you know how the Maggie magazine pieces and so I think

it's like diversity matters in everything not just in the storytellers but in our skills, so he the word of today is diversify wrestler,

Jason McSparren: Right exactly. You can continue to pursue new skills continuous to new avenues. Right? Look for trends in the media or whatever it is that you're aiming to interact with. Absolutely. We're just about done.

I'm gonna give you some time to leave some closing remarks, but there's a little quote that I want to speak to that you had said earlier and again, I just think it's a really powerful quote. I just want to make sure that our audience is aware of this and again this comes from your website amitale.com.

And this is at the end of the story about the White Rhinos in the death of the last male white Rhino. And you have said that, "this is not just a story to me. We are witnessing extinction right now, on our watch poaching is not slowing down if the current trajectory of killing continues, it's entirely possible that all species of Rhinos will be functionally extinct within our lifetimes removal of a keystone species has a huge effect on the ecosystem in on all of us these giants meaning the Rhinos, these giants are part of a complex world created over millions of years and their survival is intertwined with our own without rhinos and elephants and other Wildlife, we suffer a loss of imagination, a loss of wonder, a loss of beautiful possibilities, when we see ourselves as part of nature, we understand that saving nature is really about saving ourselves and you conclude by saying Sudan taught me that."

Ladies and gentleman. I really want you to think about that comment the re by Ami Vitale because we get lost a lot of times in the modern world and we forget that we are intricately connected to the natural world and our actions have impacts and I really want you to think about that going forward. Ami, would you have something to add in our concluding remarks?

Ami Vitale: Thank you so much for hosting me and I would say that community is so important right now. Our community of storytelling tellers and there's so many beautiful communities that are evolving right now reach out, keep in touch and let's all stay connected and empowering each other because you know, I think that there's room enough for all of us, and we need to truly hear one another and I'm just really want to help all of you. Please stay connected and thank you for tuning in and thank you Jason for and the Green Institute for hosting this thank you.

Jason McSparren: Absolutely Ami our pleasure. Thank you very much. Ladies and Gentlemen. Please give a round of applause to Ami Vitale. She's a photojournalist working independently as well as for the National Geographic magazine. She covers sustainability and thinking about the theme that she covers humanities, intrinsic, connection to the natural world, please stay tuned take a look at Ami's website at Amivitale.com. Please also take a look at the green Institute website at www.greeninstitute.ng as well as the Green Room. Please stay updated with us on Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Thanks so much. Ladies and gentlemen for joining us today. We've had an enjoyable time talking with you. Please take a look at our schedule. We will be here again next month. Thanks so much. Have a great weekend.

Audience (s): Thank you. Thank you.

