

# LIFE & STYLE



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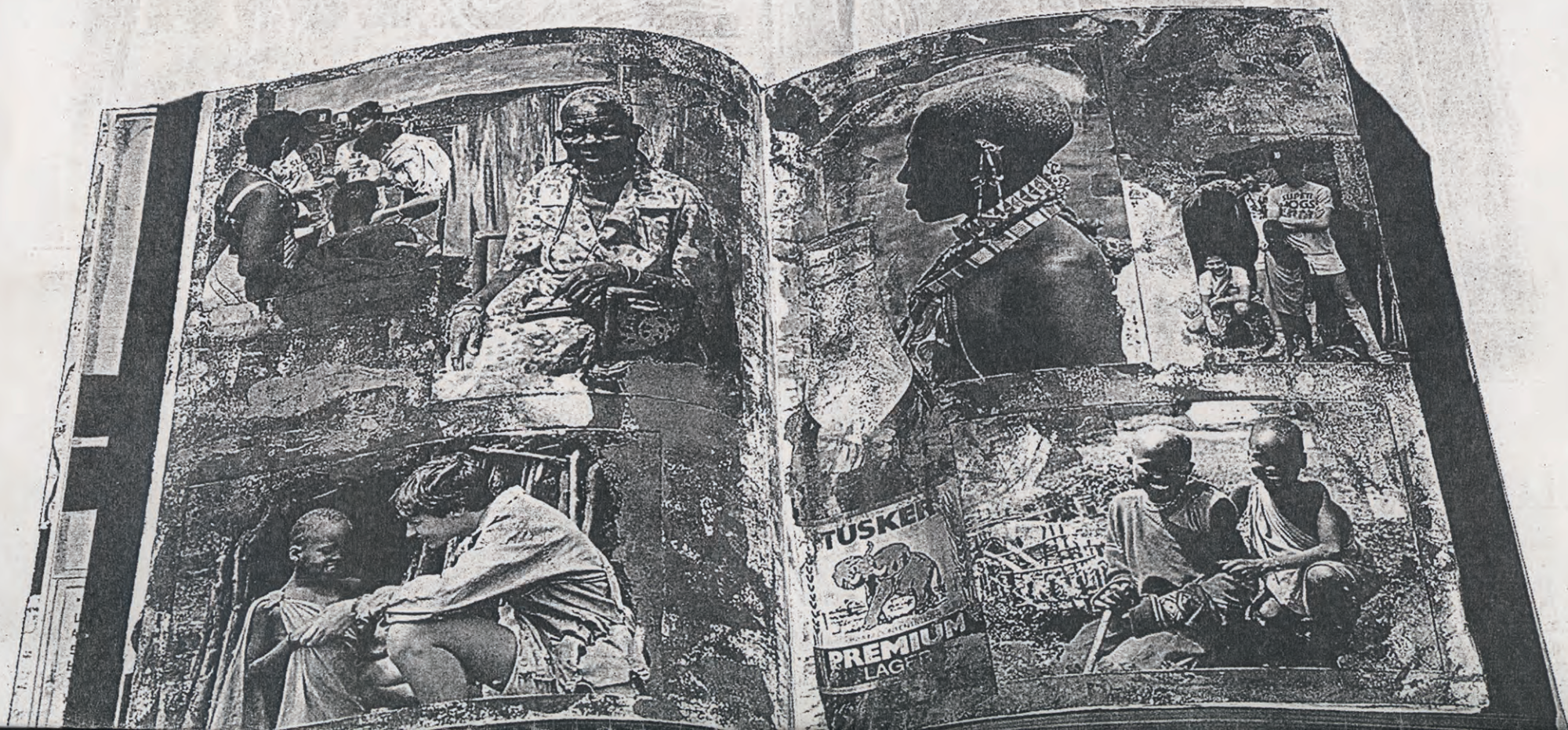
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"The Journey Is the Destination" is a vibrant collage of drawings, scrawlings and photos, a work of overlapping images. Below left is a picture from the book showing two girls in Africa.

# Loss and Redemption

By all accounts, Dan Eldon was an extraordinary young man. But at 22, he was stoned to death in Somalia. A new book—a compilation of his many journals—is a testament to his life and the family that loved him.



From "The Journey Is the Destination: The Journals of Dan Eldon," Chronicle Books

Story by  
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present blur in violent abutments of colors and words, visions of love and danger, much as they did for Kathy Eldon in the fall when she visited Mogadishu, the place in Africa where a mob murdered her son four years ago.

" . . . and from the roof [of the Al Sahafi

" . . . a man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous. . . ."

**Machiavelli, quoted in "The Journey Is the Destination"**

**T**ime scrambles across the pages of Dan Eldon's journals. Past and

Hotel] we listened to the story of how the journalists would watch the gunfire and the artillery, while listening to Edith Piaf and chewing *khat*," she recalls. "We were surrounded by [our escorts], loaded down with ammunition clips, watching for snipers. We were not in grave danger, but there is the potential that anything can happen. . . ."

Sitting in her West Hollywood apartment, the city below an image of hazy, benign congestion, Kathy can still feel herself hurtling through Mogadishu on a long overdue rendezvous with her son's ghost. She wanted to stand where he had been stoned, see the street, the earth and sky that he had last seen. Four years have done little to change that spot. The battered city, with its potholed streets and bullet-pocked villas, is still in pathetic ruin.

Please see **ELDON, E2**



CON KEYES / Los Angeles Times

Amy and Kathy Eldon, sister and mother of Dan, respectively, hold one of his original journals. "He was drawn to Somalia by the anarchy," Kathy Eldon says. "He was repulsed and attracted to a country with no rules."



# ELDON

## Continued from E2

his anger at the U.N. and American mission, especially the work of retired U.S. Adm. Jonathan Howe, who commanded the U.N. forces there, a man "ill-suited to his task," Mike Eldon says.

"Here you had this isolated American enclave in the least American society you could have. Add to that the unfortunate American way of demonizing its opponents, and you have a crazy situation," says Mike, particularly pained to have been told by a reporter from the Washington Post that while his son was being killed, a U.S. Cobra helicopter circled overhead, reportedly having been instructed not to land unless military personnel were in danger.

Kathy's anger toward the military is sadly cut by the guilt of a mother who left a marriage and moved away from her children. "Had I lived a different life," she wonders, "not left my husband, not encouraged Dan to become a journalist, would he maybe still be alive?"

Her grief led her to a no-man's land, a period during which relationships fell apart. She crashed her car, she wandered the beach in Santa Monica. By the end of '93, she admits, her life, caught between wanting to memorialize her son and the pain of that effort, wasn't working.

"When you lose someone young, you see the brevity of life," she says. "If you're here only a little while, what are you going to do? If you die tomorrow, are you living the life of your choice? I knew I had to live life that I was postponing, but finding the purpose was difficult."

□

"Only the dead have seen the end of war."

Plato, quoted in "The Journey Is the Destination"

Amy Eldon has not had a day off in six weeks. No sooner had she gotten off the plane from a tour of Africa than she went to work in Century City, editing almost 100 hours of film for the two-hour documentary that Turner Broadcasting will air this year. "Dying to Tell the Story" is a mix of interviews, featuring, among others, Eddie Adams (best known for his

## Dan Eldon's Mission: To Dance in Africa

*In 1989, Dan Eldon organized strangers and friends and raised \$17,000 for a refugee camp in Malawi. That summer, they climbed aboard two Land Rovers and drove 3,000 miles along the Kenya coast and inland, across arid bush and mountains to the camp, where one Land Rover was donated to the Save the Children Fund and the money was donated to the Norwegian Refugee Council.*

*The mission statement for this safari was written by Dan Eldon:*

"To explore the unknown and the familiar, distant and near, and to record in detail and with the eyes of a child, any beauty (of the flesh or otherwise), horror, irony, traces of utopia or Hell. Select your team with care, but when in doubt, take on some new crew and give them a chance. But avoid at all costs fluctuations of sincerity with your best people. . . .

"Look for solutions, not problems. . . .

"Note: There is little difference between being lost and exploring. . . .

"It is foolish and hazardous not to dance in Africa. . . .

"The most important part of vehicle maintenance is clear windows, so if you are broken down you will enjoy the beauty of the view. Also ensure that electronic devices to play music are properly serviced. The more music you like, the happier you will be."

photograph of a Vietnamese police chief executing a Viet Cong at point-blank range in 1968), CNN correspondent Christiane Amanpour and noted combat photographer Don McCullen.

After Dan's death, Amy started to wonder who he was and who he might have become. Her curiosity led her to write a treatment for this documentary, a profile of photojournalists who risk their lives in the line of work.

"It's the story of how war photographers never lose faith," she explains. "How they persevere in spite of the horrors they record, and whether they will always have a job or if someday we can make them jobless."

She looks at one of the journals on the dining room table. A magnetic presence throughout the journals, she is only a year older than Dan was when he died, but in her poise and thoughtfulness, you get a sense of who Dan might have been. Her hair is cut shorter than in the journals, but her smile is clearly recognizable. The journals have become a bridge for her, presenting questions that she and Dan asked together but that he never got to answer.

"How do you get the message across to people who are desensitized to violence? Maybe the journals can do this. Maybe our film." She abruptly changes the subject. "I'm sick of people characterizing young people as Gen-Xers. We're not all Beavis and Butt-heads. We have an opportunity to be anything. We are interested in discovering a new paradigm for being,

and you don't have to go to Somalia to do it."

Twenty miles from West Hollywood, down on 48th Street in South-Central, teenagers are captioning pictures on the Macintosh. On the wall behind them are a couple of Dan's photographs. The kids are sitting in the Dan Eldon room of the Blazers Safe Haven, a center in the neighborhood to visit after school and learn more about life than from the street. Bennie Davenport, the founder, learned about Dan Eldon the hard way: when Dan and the other journalists died.

"It was quite devastating to hear that such positive kids could have their lives cut short, through no fault of their own," remembers Davenport, who read about Dan's death in the paper and who met Kathy Eldon later at a benefit for a homeless artist. At the time he didn't know who she was; it was only after he showed her the Blazers facility that she mentioned her son. "I always thought Dan would be a perfect role model," says Davenport, "and he and his life would point the way to other kids, letting them know what would be possible for them to do with their lives. We needed a hero, a standard-bearer. I thought we could dedicate a room to Dan."

Back in Nairobi, about 15 miles out of town, on the campus of a woman's college that once was a coffee farm, the Depot, the Dan Eldon Place of Tomorrow, is thriving. Like Blazers, the Depot is a youth development center. One of

its directors is Mike Eldon.

"We develop life skills for young people, such as team building, communication, leadership, problem solving," Mike says, "the usual things which aren't very usual here."

At the Depot, Mike has recreated the room where his son used to work on his journals when he was in Nairobi. On its walls are the Islamic prayer boards Dan brought back from Somalia, some of his photographs and a big horn, the Harpo Marx kind of horn with a huge rubber bulb, that Dan had on his Land Rover.

"I'm not focused on Somali mobs or American helicopter pilots anymore," Mike says from his home in Nairobi, a home that overlooks the Ngong Hills, a sight that provides a connection to his son, who so often played there. "I'm focused on the way I enjoyed Dan as a son and a friend. We enjoyed so much together: humor, photography, our trips. That lives; that's fun. Now it's a smile rather than a tear."

Half a world away, Kathy is no less connected to Dan's spirit. At a recent publication party held in the Beverly Hills home of Lisa Henson, producer with Janet Yang and Kathy of the film on Dan's life, Kathy took a moment to talk to the guests and addressed what she believes is really important.

"As representatives of the most powerful industry in the world, I implore you to inspire, to stir, to move people to greatness. We have power in this community. Even Somalia is affected by Hollywood. In Mogadishu, we saw pictures of Gunmen standing next to 'Rambo' posters. So what are we going to do with this power? How are we going to raise the consciousness of the people on this planet so we don't kill each other? How are we going to use the power of media in a positive way?"

Kathy's words flowed smoothly; her eloquence poured through a crucible of sadness and grief. She is both tough and tender, ingenuous and savvy, and determined that her son and the meaning of his life not be forgotten. Last year, speaking to the Freedom Forum, she quoted St. Francis of Assisi: ". . . where there is violence, let each of us make a move toward gentleness; where there is anger, let us begin to forgive; where there is chaos, let us find harmony; and where there is hatred, let us learn to love."