Nin January 1997, Martha Rial followed refugees in Tanzania for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. The story had a personal angle for Rial: her sister, Amy, was a nurse with the International Rescue Committee in Tanzania. The stream of refugees had been walking for almost 24 hours. "They were trying to flee, to go deeper into the bush." Troops forced them back to Rwanda.  

*Courtesy Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*
Throughout the course of the 20th and into the 21st century, news photographers worldwide documented all manner of human suffering in an effort to call attention to the ills of society and to emphasize, either subtly or overtly, a dire need for change. Homelessness in the United States, genocide in Africa, political upheaval in Central America, and war in the Middle East have all been chronicled through the lens of the photojournalist, offering a unique visual perspective on the trials and tribulations of the world in which we live. News photography, though, has historically captured not only moments of pain and suffering, but also times of elation, celebration, and joy. Some news photographs make people laugh, others make them cry, still others incite action. And a small, select number have effectively changed the course of history. It is the unparalleled, evocative power of the medium—the ability of the visual image to elicit profound emotional responses and to stimulate change—that makes photography one of the most essential of all journalistic tools.

Recognizing the significance of the field as both an art form and for its impact on shaping people's perceptions the world over, the Pulitzer Foundation began awarding annual prizes in photography in 1942. Early winners included, most notably, the late Joe Rosenthal, whose photograph of U.S. Marines raising an American flag at Iwo Jima became a timeless symbol of World War II. In 1968, reflecting the changing nature of the field, the award was divided into two categories: one award designated for feature photography and another for breaking, or spot, news. Over the years, a great majority of the winners tackled tough emotional subjects in their works, reinforcing the importance ascribed to news photography for its ability to raise awareness of the horrors of the world and stimulate understanding, appreciation, and change.
The 1960s peace movement adopted this photo, “Vietcong Execution,” as a symbol of war’s brutality. But AP photographer Eddie Adams, who stayed in touch with General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, chief of South Vietnam’s national police, the man who shot the South Vietnamese prisoner in this image, said the photo wrongly stereotyped Loan: “If you’re this general and you just caught this guy after he killed some of your people ... how do you know you wouldn’t have pulled that trigger yourself? You have to put yourself in that situation.... It’s a war.” Courtesy The Associated Press
On display at the History Center from April 15 – August 5, 2007, Capture the Moment: The Pulitzer Prize Photographs is the first comprehensive exhibition of Pulitzer Prize-winning photography assembled to date. A moving tribute to the history of photo-journalism, the exhibit critically examines the images of every photographer awarded the prize since its inception and the compelling stories surrounding how and why these photographs were taken. The photographers featured in the exhibition hail from throughout the United States and abroad. The content of their acclaimed images spans seven decades, five continents, and nearly 30 countries.

Over the years, the Pittsburgh region has produced a number of Pulitzer Prize winners. Vietnam War correspondent Edward T. Adams, a New Kensington native, received the 1969 spot news award for his photograph of the assassination of a Viet Cong insurgent in the streets of Saigon. Immediately upon publication, the image had a tremendous impact on the world community and, as is often the case, on the photographer himself. Throughout the rest of his career, Adams rarely spoke about this photograph and when he did, lamented the fact that he won the Pulitzer for such a haunting and destructive image. As a student at Kent State University, Natrona Heights native John Paul Filo covered the Vietnam War protest shootings on campus in graphic detail, earning the 1971 spot news prize at the young age of 21. Capturing the chaos and violence of Vietnam, this pair of photographs played an important role in changing public opinion on the conflict in Southeast Asia and went down in history as the two most iconic images of an entire era.

The decade of the 1990s witnessed two additional winners with Pittsburgh connections. The 1992 award in feature photography went to former Pittsburgh Press photographer John Kaplan whose series titled "Age 21 in America" chronicled the lifestyle choices of American youths. Containing images of heavy metal singers, male prostitutes, football players, and murder suspects, his series was a moving and unbiased portrait of the choices young Americans make and the paths they follow into adulthood. Martha Rial, a Pittsburgh native and former Post-Gazette photographer, dedicated a portion of her career to documenting Rwandan refugees in the aftermath of the ethnic warfare and genocide afflicting Central Africa in the mid-1990s. Her series, "Trek of Tears: An African Journey," earned the 1998 Pulitzer for spot news, calling renewed attention to the recent human rights atrocities on the continent of Africa.

Representing only a few of the nearly 150 images in Capture the Moment, the photographs shown here illustrate the incredible ability of the medium to capture moments of history. They also underscore the achievements made by Pittsburgh-area photographers in earning one of photography's most prestigious prizes.

An accompanying book featuring behind-the-scenes stories of each photo is available at the History Center's Museum Shop or online at store.pghhistory.org for $29.95. Members receive a 10% discount.
"A great majority of the winners tackled tough emotional subjects in their works ... to raise awareness of the horrors of the world and stimulate understanding, appreciation, and change."

John Filo, a photojournalism student at Kent State University, thought the national guardsmen were shooting blanks. They weren't. A boy lay in a puddle of blood. "A girl came up and knelt over the body and let out a god-awful scream. That made me click the camera." On May 4, 1970, four students died. Eight guardsmen were indicted. No one was convicted. Courtesy John Paul Filo
In 1991, John Kaplan decided to photograph a diverse group of 21-year-olds, “people who were cultural icons, people who we might fantasize being when we grow up and ... people who had been left behind.” Courtesy John Kaplan