

You never know!

My mother taught me to never leave the house without keys, money, and clean underwear. “You never know . . .” I’ll add one more essential to that list. A CAMERA.

It was a chance happening photo-op during the intermission of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company’s opening night—just outside of the Minskoff Theater, NYC - January 1980. I am certainly not a ballet buff. But my former wife was, and Barbara, my sister-in-law had tickets—I didn’t have much choice. So there I was.

The silver lining: Barbara leaned over and said “That’s John Lennon.” I immediately thought of the Kremlin’s frozen coffin. Barbara had a way of putting people on, so with an attitude of total disbelief and sarcasm, I turned around and said “Where?” Not recognizing the back of his head, she practically pushed me in front of him and told me to take his picture. “Gulp!”



I am not a paparazzi, and probably never will be. But I said Oh! What the heck. Embarrassment goes away in time. So I got up the nerve and got off two frames, before I got polite and asked permission. He was deep in heated conversation with Robert Rauschenberg, who designed the sets for the ballet performance. Neither objected to my photography, but politely declined to pose. John went back into the theater with Yoko, and Robert Rauschenberg went back to his argument with Louise Nevelson.

I went back into the theater wondering how much intensifier I would need to get a decent negative from this way under-exposed tri-x film. As it turned out, I managed to get a good candid and serious mood shot of a person whom I consider to be *the* greatest and most influential musician of our time. It is a print that I’m proud to hang on the gallery wall of my home.

Milton Heiberg