Four-time Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer William Snyder ’81 (professional photography) is back in the RIT classroom. But this time he’s the teacher, inspiring future photojournalists to be passionate about their craft and their ideas.

“The work you can generate yourself and be passionate about usually ends up being your best work,” says Snyder. “I stress this to the students: Generate your own stories. Find things you are passionate about. Don’t let anybody tell you not to. You may not get the OK to do it, but do it anyway.”

Snyder cites his trip to Romania in 1990 to cover AIDS among orphans. His boss at The Dallas Morning News didn’t like his story idea, but Snyder forged ahead anyway, financing the trip himself. Snyder says that project changed him both personally and professionally, and ultimately earned him his second Pulitzer.

“These orphans were severely neglected,” says Snyder. “I kept thinking about my son in that position. And that emotional connection informed my work and made me think about things I had never thought about. It changed the way I worked from that point on. Because of all the attention generated from the Pulitzer, the Romanian government was embarrassed and cleaned up its act a little bit.”

It’s Snyder’s persistence that Mike Geissinger, one of Snyder’s former photography professors, believes has been one of the keys to his success.

“With him, like many of my students, the best learning took place one-on-one,” says Geissinger. “What William did after graduation was keep at it. He pushed hard and kept producing work that attracted a lot of attention, and for very good reason. William can certainly be held as a ‘poster boy’ for striving hard in photojournalism with just cause.”

Following graduation from RIT, Snyder landed at The Miami News for a couple of years and then spent 23 years at The Dallas Morning News. The newspaper business offered him variety. His numerous assignments included covering the Miami Dolphins in the Super Bowl, elections in Haiti and Romania, the explosion of the Challenger space shuttle, the ’91 coup attempt in the Soviet Union, the re-unification of Germany, seal hunting in Newfoundland, Republican Conventions and five Olympics.
William Snyder’s Pulitzers

1989: Shared the prize for Explanatory Journalism for coverage of an airplane crash.

1991: Received the prize for Feature Photography for coverage of neglected children in Romanian orphanages.

1993: Shared the prize for Spot News Photography with Ken Geiger ’80 for their coverage of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games.

2006: As photo editor for The Dallas Morning News, led the team that received the Breaking News Photography prize for coverage of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Geiger ’80 (photography) won a Pulitzer for their sports coverage of the 1992 Olympic games in Barcelona, Spain.

Snyder, who became chair of the photojournalism department in RIT’s School of Photographic Arts and Sciences as of spring quarter this year, hopes to grow and improve the program.

Oscar Durand, a fourth-year photojournalism major, has taken several courses from Snyder including Picture Story and Portfolio Development. With Snyder’s guidance, Durand says he’s become a better storyteller. Following graduation in May, he aspires to work at a newspaper or news agency.

“I feel that with his help, I have grown a great deal as a photojournalist,” says Durand. “He has helped me identify my strengths and weaknesses. I feel he is absolutely dedicated to helping his students. Every time that I need to ask him for help, want to show him some work and get his opinion, he’s always been there for me. I am also inspired by his passion and dedication to photojournalism. He doesn’t just teach classes. I can tell he really wants every single one of us to improve and be the best photojournalists we can.”

For Snyder, the students motivate him to want to do better.

“The students have a knowledge and a passion that is inspiring. And it pushes me. I want to help them look at this particular area of photography in a different way than what they are used to.”

Kelly Downs