

Rico Puhmann 1934–1996 in Memoriam

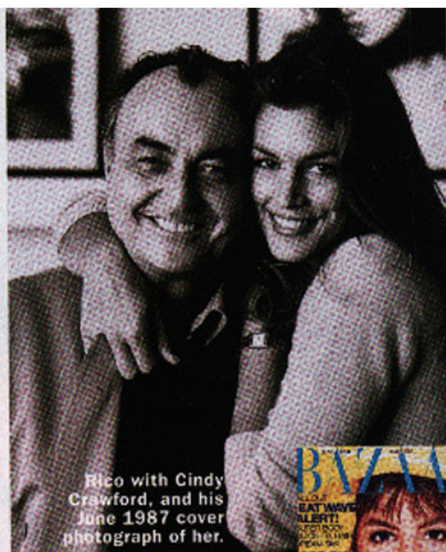
Fashion photographer Rico Puhmann died in the crash of TWA Flight 800 on July 17. Puhmann was chief photographer for "Harper's Bazaar" from 1973 to 1992, and shot more than 125 covers during his tenure. He was also a frequent contributor to other magazines, such as "GQ," "Glamour," and German "Vogue." Food writer, restaurant consultant, and cookbook author Christopher Idone shares his thoughts on the passing of his good friend.

I met Rico on the steps of New York's City Center 27 years ago. It was a beautiful October evening. We were young, confident, ambitious, and filled with dreams. He was dressed in a suit and tie, because that's what you wore to the theater in those days. I remember that his brown eyes were introspective, thoughtful, deliberate, and shy all at once. He would become a friend, and that friendship would flourish and grow until the end of his life.

Rico arrived in New York in the early '70s, a successful photographer from Berlin who was unknown here. He wanted to test (and taste!) the New York waters. Rico quickly joined the ranks of star photographers such as Hiro, Bill King, and Francesco Scavullo, creating beautiful pictures of beautiful girls, and inspiring and training the budding photographers who worked for him, including Paul Lange and Perry Hagopian.

He loved his adopted city and honored it in his work. I'd run into him from time to time, photographing some goddess wrapped in glorious clothes in Times Square while throngs of theatergoers paused to stare and admire. He shot his models on the Brooklyn Bridge and Columbus Circle, and used Central Park before it became a hackneyed movie set.

Rico's tales of the Russians invading Berlin when he was a kid were heart-wrenching. His first Coca-Cola and chocolate bar, brought to Berlin by American GIs, were his introduction to another place. But Rico never abandoned Berlin. Although he said it was foolish and wasteful, he kept an apartment in his native city. When



Rico with Cindy Crawford, and his June 1987 cover photograph of her.



his career wound down, he would return.

Rico was a consummate European, and a gentleman. He lived a simple but elegant life. His glamour was in the studio. Evenings were left for his friends, for listening to music and reading books; New York nightlife held little appeal. Even the restaurants he discovered were off the beaten track, quiet little places that offered the kind of solace he sought in the city.

It was thrilling to watch him work. When he finished a sitting he would clench his fists, raise his arms, and issue a bellowing war cry. I got to know this holler over the years, and it wasn't limited to the studio. He would bellow it out when walking along the beach, or at the end of a party, when his house was filled with friends. It was the way his joy manifested itself.

Mostly I will remember the time we spent alone. Rico was private, and lonely, too. But his solitude nourished his work and, I believe, equipped him to be a better friend.

Rico had plans. He was methodically editing a book of his life's work—starting with a photograph he had taken when he was 17. He'd been working on that forever.

But then there came the telephone call saying he was off to Paris on assignment with his young assistant, Lawrence Harris, and that he'd call in a couple of weeks. He left two days later than he had planned, and Rico and 229 others lit up the sky over the ocean near Long Island. None of us can comprehend why. ■