

photography

Story behind the picture

The Satanic Verses, 1989
Garry Clarkson



In 1989, I was a 22-year-old fledgling freelance in Bradford. I was fortunate to receive a request from Leeds Other Paper, a well-known alternative publication at the time, to cover a demonstration by Muslims protesting against Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*.

There was all this noise and commotion and I wasn't really sure how to represent the event. I then recognised one of the organisers who lived near me. He took me with him, pushing through the crowd and onto the podium, just in front of what was then the main police headquarters. I think knowing him helped, because he guided me to where the book burning was going to take place.

It was really cold and the protesters were stabbing the stick with the book on it in the air. There was a lot of shouting and it seemed kind of ominous.

The picture was eventually published on the cover of the newspaper and I became a regular contributor. In those pre-digital days, it was hard to get pictures out quickly, so the editors, who included Alice Nutter (of Chumbawamba fame), put me in touch with the nationals.

The picture was published widely, and became *The Independent*, *Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* 1989 pictures of the year. It was my first news assignment – my "baptism of fire". I've never equalled that picture in terms of regular publication since. It was partly a chance encounter, partly a sign of the times because there weren't many photographers there jostling for position and also the fact that the book burning became a powerful symbol of a clash of beliefs.

A month later, the fatwa was issued.



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