

MEIKO TAKECHI ARQUILLOS



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MEIKO TAKECHI ARQUILLOS says that no matter whom she's photographing, "there is a story to be told," and she sees it as her job to find that story, and translate it into a portrait that viewers immediately relate to.

"I originally started out taking pictures of kids because it was easy for me to connect with them," she says. "I love playful

and authentic sensibilities in images. What I usually do is really make myself seem very goofy—I don't need to try very hard either—and that lets people's guard down."

Last summer, editors at *The Guardian Weekend* assigned her to shoot a cover for a nostalgic story about summertime food you ate as a kid. Arquillos cast a boy named Charlie for the project. She had previously worked with him on a shoot for *Real Simple* magazine.

"He is not your usual happy, smiley kid," Arquillos says. "He has a lot of character. While he is super cute, he also has an attitude. I love that about him."

She explains that she's not interested in shooting "normal, cute kid pictures" because they're not authentic: Kids have more personality and complexity than such images suggest. *Guardian* Picture Editor Kate Edwards didn't want another cute kid photo for the story, either, "and I was so grateful," Arquillos says.

Arquillos was looking for something viewers would find familiar and unexpected at the same time, so she thought about scenarios that might have appealed to her as a kid. One idea she came up with was to show Charlie with not just one colorful Popsicle, but a bunch of them all at once, melting down his chin and arms.

"It is important to have some conversations to get to know the subject first," Arquillos says. "It is my way to figure out how far I can stretch it. In this case, I probably said something like, 'So Charlie! Do you like Popsicles? You do? How would you like it if I gave you eight more?!' Then I wait and see his reaction."

Charlie wasn't happy, and the cover photo she shot shows it.

"You look at it and go, 'Why [not]? Is he sneaking these Popsicles before his parents find out?' It always makes you stop and think about the story behind it when you see something unexpected," she says.

In preparation for all of her shoots, Arquillos comes up with a lot of ideas, but doesn't wed herself to any of them. "You have to be malleable," she says. "Often

something unexpected strikes during a shoot." She also avoids doing too much research on her subjects, for fear that it could drive away serendipity on set.

After tweaking the lighting and composition, Arquillos says, "I snap away like crazy as I talk to the subject. Sometimes real stuff comes out when a subject starts to get tired, but I have to be careful not to exhaust them."

—DAVID WALKER



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RIGHT: *The Guardian's* picture editor didn't want a typical cute kid portrait, "and I was so grateful," says Meiko Takechi Arquillos. To prepare for the shoot, she thought of scenarios that would have appealed to her as a kid.