

## *Introduction - Twenty-Six Series - Photographs & Essays*

IN the second grade, while waiting for my mother to pick me up from St. Patrick's elementary school in Corpus Christi, Texas, I buried a penny, deep along the edge of a sidewalk. It had something to do with not forgetting and all the questions that surface during childhood. Today, I imagine the coin still buried, still waiting in the dark on the side of the aging pathway. A child's hand was the last to hold it. Abraham Lincoln was on one side, on the other, "*One Cent - E. Pluribus Unum*".

*Photography* is not just about *Photographs*.

*Photographs* are also about what is imagined or remembered inside and outside the borders of the photograph at that moment in time. Mood rearranges understanding. Care attaches weight and gravity. Experience wraps its arms around a moment. Perception rises like bread and is rarely limited to what is directly in front of us. Photographs specialize in time travel, moving from now to then. The language of "looking" goes deeper than surfaces. My fingerprint on the buried penny was a topographical map, but it offered no clear guidance on how to live.

All of my photographic series (including the many portrait series) are connected in wanting to know more - a desire to understand individuals and communities and places and ideas unlike my own. I fell in love with the medium of Photography and of all its irregular destinations. Photography teaches that experience is best acquired by paying attention. I think of a camera not as a barrier that separates the photographer from the subject but more as a connected passageway, like stopping while walking to have a conversation. Randomness and intentionality stroll hand in hand.

The nature of photography has to do in part with one's relationship with light and the delicacy of attention. Every photograph holds a secret. The twenty-six series of photographs in this

collection were made between 1983-2000 and the essays were written in 2020-23. The distance between making the photographs and writing about the photographs has offered perspective.

I used photographic film, processed and printed in my darkroom. Most of the photographs were made using a large format 8x10" Deardorff View Camera. I was fortunate to be a photographer during the period of film. Film takes time. I might carry only 14 sheets of film because of the weight of the camera and film plates. What focused light would I choose to land on a sheet of film on this particular day?

Photographs have a multitude of dualities.

- The photographic negative arrives before the photographic silver print.
- The paradox of photographic time --realization of "then" and "now".
- The reality of what I saw and felt, and what was actually there.
- The actual content (what is photographed) and then the ever-changing quality of light, the many ripples of soft greys, incandescent blacks, creamy whites all attached and holding on to that content.
- The viewer of a photograph may find aspects of the photograph the photographer never knew were there.

Every photograph is ambiguous, susceptible to multiple meanings. Photographs are not quiet nor are they untroubled. So much is missing from a still photograph, sometimes everything. It could be the bite of cold air in the early mornings - the moving, murmuring of distant voices - single words and destinations floating in air. It might be the smell of smoke, dried leaves or the memory of rain. How does one photograph the serious remoteness of landscapes or the emotional longing many feel and share? Emotions and desires and bent propensities are illusive. Even with all of a photograph's limitations and uncertainties, a still image, a photograph can be so mysteriously powerful. The act of photographing is also the act of holding on to something. Photographs are like memory but they are always more and less than memory. In the middle of the night, in the darkroom with a soft orange glow of the safelight, photographs resting in running water are owners of their own light.

Working as a photographer has always been about setting an idea or question into motion to discover what photographs – experiences - revelations might emerge from that hopeful endeavor. Like rain-water swirling down a valley, where will it end up? “*Light and dark*” are invitations to critical thinking. “*A flash of light*” in our peripheral vision is an exclamation mark. Uncertainty and unpredictability are symbols in the same way as satisfaction or delight. What images should we tattoo on the surface of our skin? A face - a single tree or maybe a wish? Every person, every place is a map to somewhere else.

(Between 1998-2019 I made four long-term Audio & Photography traveling exhibitions. (*Children of Children- Teenage pregnancy – 3 years.*) (*Fine Line – Mental Health/Mental Illness – 4 years.*) (*About Hunger & Resilience – 4 1/2 years.*) and (*My Heart Is Not Blind - On Blindness & Perception – 7 years.*) The audio & photographic documentaries are not a part of this collection.) [michaelnye.org](http://michaelnye.org)