

May—2006
Volume 2, Number 1



photograph by George Lottermoser

A NOLA Story

by Ben Rosow

My name is Ben Rosow and I live in New Orleans. I am an engineer and a musician. I am one of the lucky ones because my Uptown house in the “Sliver by the River” did not flood after Katrina, although it did receive extensive damage that remains un-repaired to this day, due to the scarcity of contractors.

Today is Sunday so this afternoon I decided to take a bike ride around the neighborhood to get some exercise and to force myself to get closer to the reality of what is going on all around me in my city in limbo. I tooled around the Tulane University campus where I saw a huge sports complex that occupies about half the ground area undergoing a massive renovation. This includes a brand new football practice facility which will double as a soccer and track stadium, and a total renovation of the baseball diamond.

It made me question the shutting down of so many university departments (including mechanical engineering) and

the essential gutting of many departments that the public has been told are being retained. We know so many professors who are leaving that it makes me wonder if Tulane can survive the harsh cuts that most residents feel are horrible management decisions.

But enough about Tulane—I next tooled up across Claiborne avenue where the flooding really got bad. I got my fill of deserted houses and the spring weeds that are starting to turn into jungles in the front yards. The hopeful signs I did see were that where 4 months ago I would see maybe one house every 2 blocks with some activity, now I was seeing about 5 houses with residents, trailers, or workers per block. This is MUCH better than what we had back then and I feel nothing but awed admiration for the families that can survive such total losses and still come back to destroyed neighborhoods to make our city whole again. They embody the resilience and determination that we Americans like to think we possess. We need

to treat these people right, even when their neighborhoods are not fit for flood-free existence. If it's not practical for them to have their neighborhoods back, I feel that we owe it to them to find a way for these courageous “flood pioneers” to come back to rebuild our city. If you lived in a disaster area, wouldn't you want the most determined folks, who are willing to gut it out, to be the ones to help you rebuild?

It was a sunny balmy day this afternoon, the air clear and dry like California. But beautiful days like this are always laced with irony and sadness in post Katrina New Orleans. So after riding my bike through many blocks of flood zone on this gorgeous day, I was in a fragile mood when I crossed back over Claiborne Street by the empty McMain High School. I pulled over to the side of the street when I passed near the third floor room with the open windows where I used to stop to hear the band practicing on Wednesday and

continued on page 3

BEING *there*

Loss & Change

The drive began, in the middle of the night, with a low, growling scream born deep in my belly. It grew in pitch and volume as I pulled out of the driveway on to Mequon Road. Tears immediately followed as memories and the realization that I'll never share another thought with my dad, nor he with me, blew through my mind. Our relationship was over. Done. Forever.

Just a few minutes earlier, on Christmas eve night, 2003, I'd been awakened with the news that my father had died. As I drove the hour and a half to be with his mortal remains, as well as my mother, sister and her family in Madison, thoughts and feelings, quite new to me, flooded both my consciousness and eyes. A part of me left with him.

Divorce also caused deep feelings of losing self; literally who am I? If not a married family man, then who? A marriage, a family, lives with its own sentience. Losing a partner can feel like an amputation of major limbs. A partnership, like a spine, when broken, can cause paralysis.

Best friends have moved out of my life — some forever — some for reasons that I understand — others for reasons that I can not understand.

In the late 80's ten thousand dollars worth of photographic equipment was stolen out of my van in Sante Fe. Again. Anger. Violation. Worse than the loss of money — my portfolio of original Ektachrome sheet film had been taken — the work itself — irreplaceable — never to be reproduced and of little or no value to anyone but myself — the proof of a decade of expertise as a professional, commercial photographer. Gone.

Back in the 70's I'd become a bit of a weekend fisherman. I'd collected all that was necessary to enjoy the sport — some very fine rods and reels, lures and and all related tackle. Fisherman was part of who I considered myself to be. Not a large part — but a part which allowed me to speak experientially with other fisherfolks. After a few years of ever more investment of time and money in my fisher persona someone broke into our garage and stole my gear. It pissed me off. I felt violated.

All of a sudden I was no longer a fisherman. I never regained the energy to reestablish my fisherself. Apparently he wasn't all that committed.

I've also lost art work to flooded basements. But I was young then; and could still imagine that I could create it all again; and naively even forever.

When I've lost clients, after decades of working together, I also found my inner businessman shattered for longer than I'd have imagined possible.

All of these losses brought with them powerful feelings of grief, anger — and in various combinations: thoughts of betrayal, bouts of confusion, an assaulted ego, discombobulated mind — what do I do now? Who am I without this person, these things or this client or job?

Certainly, I'm no longer as I once was. Can I rebuild the life I had before the loss? Do I want to? Who cares?

My mother has not recovered from the loss of my father. She has become a different person; depressed and disengaged from life in the world. She has retreated and become extremely weak. She seems to have little interest in herself or her home — much less the world outside her windows. Lost; almost all sense of connection, not just to others, but to life itself. At some level, when I lost my father I also lost my mother.

I've also watched friends lose their loved ones to death or divorce, businesses, and/or jobs over the years. Some of them have yet to find the strength and resolve to recover from their losses.

On March 17th I drove to New Orleans and photographed the upper 9th Ward, where thousands of middle class, and often elderly, folks lost absolutely everything. Their material goods. Their homes. Their neighbors. Their jobs. All lost to the effects of hurricane Katrina. Additionally, those who did not also lose their very lives, were displaced — driven from their neighborhood, community, city and many even from their state. On the March 18th, seven months after Katrina, I photographed the Pontilly Neighborhood Association meeting facilitated by Bert Stitt

Listening to residents' fears, sadness and anger often brought

tears of empathy to my eyes. Witnessing their spirit and resolve to rebuild their lives brought tears of joy.

In *Yoga for People Who Can't Be Bothered to Do It* Geoff Dyer writes: 'Brodsky wrote: "One is changed by what one loves." Brodsky was consciously changing Auden's several permutations of this sentiment. In 1933 Auden had suggested that, "men are changed by what they do"; the *New Year Letter* of 1940 supplemented this with the idea that "we are changed by what we change"; ten years later in *In Transit* he made the more elaborate claim that

Somewhere are places where we
have really been.
dear spaces
Of our deeds and faces, scenes
we remember
As unchanging because
there we changed'

So. In this issue we ponder loss and change. Loss certainly implies change. And change almost always demands some loss. However, as Ben Rosow demonstrates in our cover story — we also need to regain our lives and value the treasures which survive our losses.

George Lottermoser, publisher

continued from page 1

Friday afternoons. If you have ever heard a New Orleans High School marching band, then you know where jazz and rock and roll came from. In an age where teenagers around the country are listening to mind numbing rap at hellish volume, or vapid post punk with no new musical content, this was the only city in the America where, on a Saturday morning, you could see 7 young black pre-teens walking down the streetcar line passing a saxophone or a euphonium back and forth and trying to be the macho man who could play the impossible lick from the days band practice that nobody could get right. What a sight! You know that music is part of the culture when teenage boys think that horn playing is a man's work.

So I stood on my bike on the sidewalk below the band room at McMain and I imagined that I heard the band playing, horribly out of tune, scratching out a new chart for the first time. I imagined I heard a loud sax player enthusiastically showing off his favorite tune of the week. No. No, I was actually hearing a sax player, and playing exceptionally well. It wasn't coming from the band room, but the auditorium was right next door so I moved a few feet down the street toward the auditorium door. But it wasn't coming from there either. It was coming from across the street at the Ursuline Academy. Now the ground around Ursuline is about 2 feet lower than that of



McMain so where McMain took on about 4 feet of water, Ursuline took on about 6. But there is no flood line left on the walls of Ursuline and I noticed a few cars parked in a back access lot. So I crossed the street and started following the sound on my bike. I couldn't tell if it was coming from inside the chapel or if the music was outdoors but this was a seriously good player with a very full sound. The tune was something I definitely recognized but I couldn't quite place it. I followed the sound around a few corners until I came to a dead end between two wings of the building with a formidable plank door at the other end. THAT

was where the sound was coming from.

As I sat and listened, an old nun appeared at a window and mouthed to me, "It's really loud isn't it? I think they can hear it down on Canal Street."

"Well I heard it on the street but it isn't so loud there," I said. "I like it."

"Would you like to come in?" she said, motioning to the heavy wooden door.

"Really? Yes, very much" I said, envisioning a lone guy enjoying the special sound of his horn in an empty chapel. I quickly

photograph by Jeffery Smith
parked my bike by the wall without locking it. Nobody would bother to steal it here away from the street. The old nun opened the door and I met her at the top of the steps. When I walked through, I felt like the Ronald Coleman character in the movie *Lost Horizon* when he stepped through the crack in the mountains and first laid eyes on Shangri-la. I never had imagined that the plain brick walls of Ursuline Academy hid from public view a beautiful courtyard the size of a couple of basketball courts, with statues, benches, palm trees, and grassy knolls. It was filled with families today, black and white,

hundreds of people. "Wow. What is this?" I asked the nun.

"It's our annual spaghetti dinner," she said matter of factly. "Come in. We do this every year. I hope it's not too loud for you."

"No, no—I love it. Thank-you." I was already starting to be overcome by emotion. I loved this, especially the fact that this event was so gracefully and calmly integrated. I began to walk to where I could see the sax player whose sound was much clearer inside the courtyard. His style was becoming more recognizable to me as I listened. When I got close enough to see a black man with a shaved head I began wondering. I turned to a guy in a folding chair. "Is that Gary Brown?" I asked. He just shook his head that he didn't know.

Now Gary Brown is a national treasure who has worked five nights a week down at a French Quarter clip joint for the last twenty plus years. He always has a wonderful band and he is a most charismatic performer, in addition to being a most lyrical and flat out hot horn player. He mugs for the women and looks into your eyes when he thinks that you need to really hear what he's about to play. A business associate from Denmark once said to me, "How come he plays in a dump in the French Quarter? If he played in Europe, he'd be famous. He'd play to sold out theaters. How come nobody knows him here?"

So there was Gary Brown on a

stage in the middle of the beautiful courtyard on a sunny day playing to a harmoniously integrated crowd of families. He had a little boombox CD player patched into the PA system playing the backing tracks from one of his CDs. A most cheesy setup but he was **PLAYING FOR KEEPS**. And that doesn't mean playing loud and honking. He was playing sweetly with every melodic trick he could think of. By this time there was a ring of about 6 little kids sitting on the patio right in front of the stage. So Gary pulled out his Sopranino, a tiny little sax, and began to play an exquisite ballad called Paper Maché. He came off the stage and stood directly in front of the kids and played just to them as if they were the most important audience in the world. He would go up to each one of them in turn, the bell of his horn a foot from each little face. He'd take a breath and play special phrases directly to each one. And the children just sat there, mesmerized, gazing into his face. And this went on for song after song.

On this wonderful day, in this little Shangri-la behind the walls of a Catholic school started by the very first group of women that came to New Orleans in the 1600's, everything was so perfectly alive and healthy that, needless to say, I started crying. I tried to not make a fool of myself, but anyone who saw me knew. But I could not leave. I had to soak in it. I wiped my eyes with my bicycle glove and

composed myself as I watched and listened to the very epitome of what makes New Orleans so special. Yes, we have inequality and incompetence. Yes we have graft, apathy, and seemingly immovable inertia. Yes we are ridiculously close to sea level and we are at risk from the encroaching Gulf of Mexico. But we also have the key to life here in this crazy place. Those who don't want to see it, will never see it. Those who do, can't ever forget it. This nutty city is a treasure and a source of sanity for the rest of the country. To let it die of neglect would be like letting Boston or New York or San Francisco or Chicago die. America would never be the same without it. If you aren't sure that you know enough to believe that New Orleans is a treasure, take it from one who knows, that's me. I know and it is.

Ben Rosow is a musician and Application Engineer for MLC CAD



Sheet music found in the French Quarter
photograph by George Lottermoser



Photographing hometown.

by Jeffery Smith

photograph by Jeffery Smith

I didn't want to photograph the destruction left by Katrina. It wasn't just me. Nobody here held a morbid curiosity after the floodwaters receded. After a month in a Houston motel, my wife and I were hollow, dispassionate. We knew that nothing could be worse than Hurricane Betsy, but we bought a house on high ground anyway. We knew we wouldn't be flooded, and we weren't. Everyone else was.

It wasn't until late January that fellow photographers persuaded me to document the most catastrophic event in American

history. The worst damage was in the Lower Ninth Ward, an old neighborhood adjacent to the Industrial Canal. A friend had lost two siblings there in 1965 when Betsy flooded their home. Katrina was far worse than Betsy. The second deluge of water brought on by Hurricane Rita three weeks after Katrina was inconsequential. By then, the only life in the Lower Ninth Ward was pets still stranded on rooftops.

Five months after the storm, the area was remarkably unchanged. Some streets had been cleared to

allow rescuers in; everything else appeared untouched. There were few vehicles on the roads. Spray paint on the weatherboards of houses still standing documented the number of bodies removed. There were no footprints. It looked like the waters had receded the week before. But it had been five months with little rain. What didn't float was buried in mud, what did was scattered everywhere. And there was still the odor of death and decomposition in the houses as many residents were still unaccounted for.

Ode to Katrina's Winds and Waters of Change



On March 18th, 2006, some 350 residents of the Pontchartrain Park and Gentilly Woods neighborhoods in New Orleans gathered for a post-Katrina Visioning and Planning Conference for their neighborhoods at the Hellenic Center of the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity on Robert E. Lee Blvd.

The conference consisted of four elements: 1. What do we know and what do we need to know? 2. How do we feel about what we know and our situation? 3. What are our hopes and dreams for a healthy and vital future for our neighborhoods? 4. What are the practical steps forward?

This free verse ode extrapolates the writings of participants as they reflected on their Mads, Sads, and Glads regarding their emotional experience of post-Katrina life.

Bert Stitt, Lead Facilitator

From the residents of Pontchartrain Park and Gentilly Woods. In their own words.

Mad and Angry

Suites at the Superdome
go unused.
when
Thousands of people,
Some very ill,
at the Convention Center.
Why?

Treated like cattle,
with no respect
as a human being.
Residents gone
and
Biggest Crime against Humanity
now going on
to keep them

from returning.

The Ridiculous
Racism shown
and
the break up of Families
and
Friends.
Sadness on the faces
of almost all
New Orleanians
lack encouragement.
Family is displaced
Community
and
Security gone.
And
Next Door Neighbors
never return.

Moved four times
in six months.
Can't live

in my house
and
enjoy what
I worked so hard for.
and
I don't have any money
to rebuild my house
and
have to stay
Out of Town
and
I don't want to.

Looting of my property;
Jewelry, antique coins,
Antique gun collection

My home destroyed,
landscaping decimated.
And
all important documents
missing.
Fruit trees gone
all my pets dead,
and
couldn't get back home

and
check possessions.

Mad because Katrina messed up
homes.
Please
bring things back.
I wonder why
Katrina messed up homes.
Oh,
I know I want homes
fixed.

Lost House, Lawn, Neighbors,
and
Peace of Mind.
The flood washed away
Memories and
All my Precious
Photo Albums
Family and Friends.
Lost my jazz collection.
So many people
Lost their Lives.

Bulldozing commenced in early March. By March 20, 177 more bodies were found; Katrina's death toll rose to 1,599. Many bodies still remain unidentified. At least sixty residents of the Lower Ninth Ward are unaccounted for as of this writing. Sixty had been Betsy's final death toll for the entire state forty years earlier.

Jeffery Smith is a college biology professor and freelance photographer living in New Orleans.





People are saying,
Don't we pay taxes
That we should not
Depend
On the government
For help?
The system failed
It's people
Due to man-made issues.
Yet,
The Federal Government and
Insurance Companies
responding as if
An act of Nature
and
Therefore no responsibility
To the citizens.

Levee system
Not designed
To safeguard.
My house sat
In six feet of nasty water.
And,

It did not have to happen.
Failure of the levees
Army Corps failure.
And
spend money on War
But not the Nation's People.
Photo ops
do not help us.
Waste
And incompetence:
Levee Board
Corps of Engineers
FEMA.
And
Sewer and Water Board
Opposed
The Army Corps plan
To put gates
At lake
And
At four canals.
Fix the Levees!

Sad and Weary

Familiar friends, places
And
Things are gone.
I can't cope
With this.
It's hard.
So many people
Are
Depressed.

I lost my Grandma.
My cousin became seriously ill.
My daughter was displaced.
My Aztec bedroom set
Destroyed by flood water.
A very good friend
died.

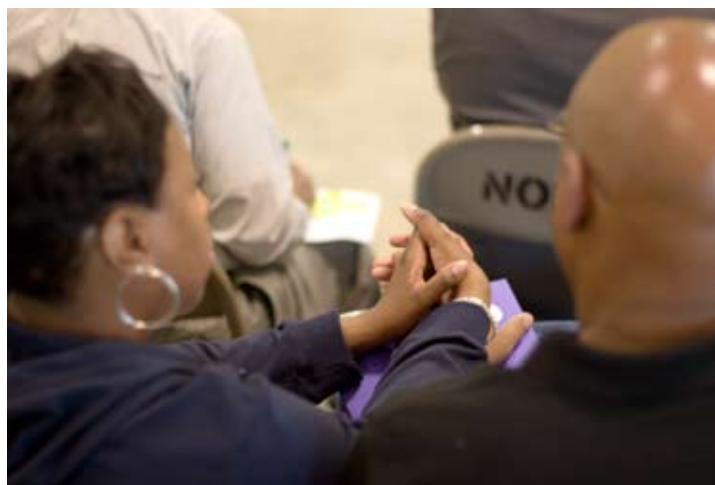
Separated from
my only son,
I may never see again.
I lost
My dad's big chair

I can't relax
In my living room
and
listen to the jazz masters
or
watch sports
with my son.

I miss my neighborhood
It was taken away
and
Replaced with Worry.
A lot of people
I'll never see again.

I see the dead
Trees.
I have to travel so far.
I can't come back home.
Pontchartrain Park has changed
Forever.

Family scattered to all ends;
Colorado, Dallas, Texas, Lake
Charles,
Baton Rouge, Lavonia, Atlanta,
Columbus,
Baltimore.



I will never own a home again.
Elderly people have lost
Everything.
No longer feel
financially secure.

Glad and Grateful

No one died or was injured
in my family.
Glad for all the kind
and
wonderful people
during Katrina.
Glad for all
the new friends made
during Katrina.
We are alive.
Thankful for my life and others.

Alive and Surviving each day.
I can smile and laugh again.
My son was able to relocate
to a place of his choice,
get a good job,
continue school,
has his own apt.
and
bought a car.

I got a chance to experience life
and
living
in other communities of the
country.
The kindness
and
compassion extended
by strangers.

The Lord was not ready for me.
I am here for a purpose.
I am a child of God

and
 God takes care of his own.
 I'm grateful to God
 for
 allowing me to be here today.
 I'm still alive,
 by the power of God.
 He left me here for his sure
 purpose,
 not mine, in health.
 God kept my family
 alive and got us all together.
 A place to stay
 while my home is being
 rebuilt.
 God sent friends
 and
 good people to help.
 God has spared myself,
 My Family
 and
 Friends.
 Through God's grace
 I can rebuild.
 I am glad that God is great,
 God is good,
 we are here and alive.
 Thanks to God for taking care of
 me.
 Glad God helps me make it through
 this mess.

Glad we got our house gutted
 and
 glad to be back home.
 We got a new trailer.
 I made the honor roll.

Glad that I survived
 this horrific event
 and
 have a positive attitude.
 My children are adapting

And
 are still happy children.
 My family are all well.
 My sister's children
 and
 grandchildren are alive and safe.
 My 79-year-old mother survived the
 storm.
 My son got to attend a great school.
 He is picked up by a school bus.
 The school is diverse, clean, huge,
 three gymnasiums, two football
 fields,
 all kinds of student interest
 organizations,
 supportive teachers
 and
 administration,
 and
 a respectful interaction
 between the community
 and
 the school board.

Glad for life.
 Have the opportunity to make it
 better.
 know I can start again.

Glad for a yard
 for my dog.
 My deck in the morning
 for reading,
 and
 evening prayers.
 And
 my old job
 making a position for me
 to come back to.
 Have a frame of a house
 to come back to
 and
 repair.



I have someplace to stay,
 not being in a shelter
 or hotel
 and
 All of my family is safe
 and
 alive.
 My entire family
 left the city.
 no deaths.

I would certainly be happy
 to see
 the area redeveloped
 and
 become livable again.
 Glad that citizens
 want to work cooperatively
 across racial, social and economic
 lines.

God bringing me through this

with all of His blessings and grace.
 Glad to see the spirit of the people.
 The spirit of Mardi Gras
 and seeing the tourists
 coming back to the city.
 School system has a chance
 to totally restructure itself
 into an effective institution.
 Have a better, peaceful, safe place
 to return to.
 I can redo part of my home
 such as the bedroom
 and
 bathroom.
 Glad to have a chance
 to redo my den.
 And
 opportunity to rebuild
 my house in a way as
 to never be devastated
 this way again.

Friends and gatherings.
 An opportunity to begin anew.
 Thank you Jesus.

Our church St. Gabriel has
 reopened.

I was able to pay off my mortgage
 loan.
 I have a job.
 Debts are reduced or eradicated.

Glad to be here today
 to see the positiveness of so many
 neighbors, to be back in N.O.
 and to eat N.O. food.
 Glad that I came
 to the Visioning Conference
 It gives me hope
 for a brighter future.
 Glad that others
 still vibrate to the rhythm
 of Second Line New Orleans.
 People who believe
 and are passionate
 about the uniqueness of our
 culture.

I know the difference
 between needs
 and
 wants.
 Realized
 things
 are not important.
 So many people now
 have a new perspective
 on material wealth,
 attitudes.

*photographs which accompany
Ode to Katrina's Winds and Waters
of Change
by George Lottermoser*

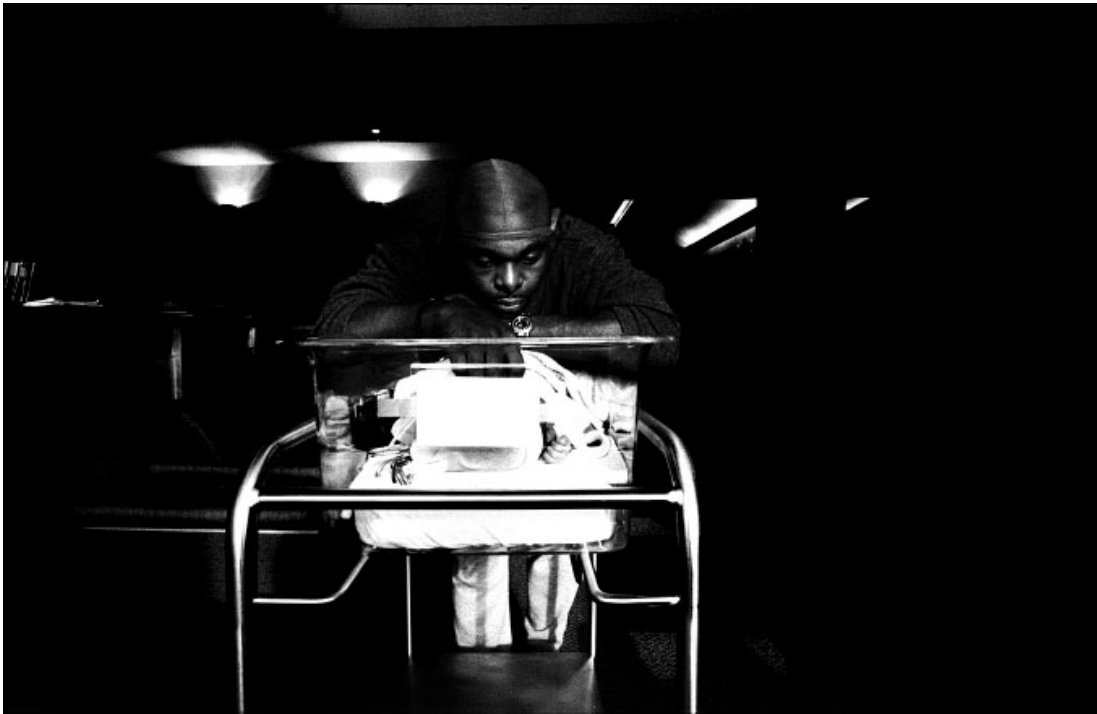


Below: In September, Morgan City Louisiana was asked to place temporary housing for Katrina victims. Finally, in January, construction was begun on a site about a mile out of town on a coastal lake. The lease term is 18 months, and they are finishing additions to the water mains this week to service the FEMA site, so the occupants can move in.

photograph by Sonny Carter

Sonny Carter is a former TV news photographer in New Orleans, now doing editorial photography for magazines, who's "Lebenswerk" is preserving a large collection consisting of French Colonial documents and 1920's to 1960's photography at Northwestern State University of Louisiana.





Loss and Change



photographs by B. D. Colen

B.D. Colen created and teaches a popular course called Documentary Photography/Photo Journalism: Still Images in a World of Motion, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and teaches a course called A Day in Our Life at the Maine Photographic Workshops. Additionally, B.D. Colen is an Olympus Visionary, whose digital photography is supported in part by Olympus America.



Publisher:

George Lottermoser

We must administer the cultural prescription of awareness, acceptance, positive confrontation and optimism; while reducing the cultural poisons of denial, avoidance, cynicism and hypocrisy now running rampant around our planet.

Editor:

David White

Contributors to this issue:

Ben Rosow

Jeffery Smith

B. D. Colen

Bert Stitt

and citizens of New Orleans

Sonny Carter

We invite your contributions, comments and critiques of both this publication and the larger cultures of our planet (it belongs to all of us—we best take care of it—heh?).

Office:

*10050 North Port Washington Rd
Mequon, WI 53092*

Phone: 242-241-9375

Email: george@imagist.com

Web: imagist.com/behere

Mission:

This periodical publication intends to present views from writers, poets, photographers and artists, as they witness reality, for the purpose of shifting consciousness toward peace, clarity, affirmation of life, generosity, stewardship, wisdom, creativity and beauty; and away from fear, hate, greed, war, destruction, deceit, pretense, ignorance and confusion.

Copyright © 2006

belongs to the authors and artists who generously contributed to the content.

