

HOW DID I GET HERE: j.& j. notes

What more can we ask for than the truth? Even though we balance our lives with a barrage of information—news, TV, print adds, signs, work culture, commutes, family, friends, politics, religion, food, social networking, and moments throughout the day, mundane or profound—life calls for a multi-tasking of one's senses. The buzz of cultural information invents, imitates, and reworks fads, so that we are teased, denigrated, and so forth. Location and temporal influences inform our sense of self, and these niches and gullies exaggerate or minimize our perception of self. As a life of memories, time factors into all our lives, deepening the wounds or rewards.

Can we therefore find fascination in a scope of photographic portraits and landscape from one niche in this vast American culture of ours, the Midwest—more specifically, Wisconsin? How are we to understand an array of images, based in a specific location, and time? Whether intimate with this culture, as part of one's past or present, or an observer from a cultural distance, how do we decipher the people in the pictures, so odd and proud, solid in their existence, alien in their uniqueness, yet oddly familiar in their reflection of our sense of humanity.

Wherever we are in that process of becoming in the moment, we can't deny the challenge of amnesia. What we were as children, teenagers, young adults, adults, middle age, aged, old, dying, a day ago, an hour ago, is not the same as in the here and now. The startling aspect of Shimon's and Lindemann's work is their commitment to and relationship with their subjects. Stories accompany the portraits in their self-published catalog, *Observations Are Not Knowledge*, and we are stunned to realize that the photographers have invested time into their subjects, mainly years, following their stories, which are for the most part tragic and full of some element of rebellion. Rage against the law, torture of childhood, boredom of work or just plain boredom, confinement of location or limited access to resources, stagnation of an unsatisfying and unfulfilling existence, or loss or confusion of any ideals. And yet, despite their various struggles to harness some sense of completeness, the subjects stare out from the photographs, genuine and complete in the moment. They are stronger in the microsecond of their poses than one would glean from their stories. And so we as observers are caught a little off guard at the sheer strength and power of the image.

And perhaps our initial judgment if you really look becomes a fascination, and more scarily, a self recognition. These denizens are not so far from our lives; they exist, despite their stories, and in that moment on film, they represent what we so deeply fear ourselves: that constant amnesia forced upon us by time.

-s. bowen