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Jill Freedman: An Interview (April 2007).



*When did you start taking photographs and what did you choose to photograph?*

JF: 1966. Woke up one day and wanted a camera. Borrowed a friend's, went out into the street, shot two rolls, and knew I was a photographer.



*Were they photographers that have inspired you? And presently are there any?*

JF: Andre Kertesz, W. Eugene Smith, Dorothea Lange, Aaron Siskind, Robert Doisneau. Knocked me out. These days I'm more inspired by movies. I'd love to work with great storytellers like Woody or Scorsese or Barry Levinson. That would be fun.



*What camera do you favor?*

JF: 35mm. I work with Range Finders and SLRs.



*Were there any time where you feared being in a certain location/situation? Firehouse, Street Cops are books that document a humanity rarely seen and danger seldom experienced by civilians.*

JF: I was often scared running into fires and after bad guys. You never knew what was going to happen and it happened fast. But I'm an adrenaline junkie and I was there to get the picture.



*You have been documenting The Holocaust for several years: do you consider this a work in progress or is this documentation completed?*

JF: It's a work in progress. I have all the material. I need the time and the space to put it all together, to try to make the work worthy of the subject.



*I know you lived in London (England) for several years. What took you there?*

JF: After college I took a ship to Israel, then another to Marseilles where I traveled around, lived for a while in Paris, fell in love with London. Great beer and Indian food, also love the British humour. I also loved their famed reticence, but that seems to have gone with the great beer.



*And how did you come to choose Ireland? (A Time that Was: Irish Moments (1987) Ireland Ever (2004))*

JF: While I was living in London I was singing on the BBC every three weeks, closing out "The Tonight Show", just me and my guitar, live. I must have been very cute. During that time I went over to Ireland for a traditional music festival (1963), fell in love with the music and the people. I went back with my camera in 1973 for the first of my six trips when I would shoot until I ran out of money. I finally showed the pictures to Aaron Siskind who promptly wrote me a check for ten grand and said "Finish it." Thanks again, Aaron.




*You have traveled and documented live performances by several noted Jazz musicians (Count Basie, Sarah "Sassy" Vaughan, Joe Williams, Lionel Hamptons (1974), Dizzie Gillespie, Max Roach, Gerry Mulligan, Ray Brown, Harold Danko, Calvin Hill in 1981). Did you meet these performers as a performer yourself, through travel or as a concert attendee (understanding you have an innate passion for music)?*

JF: I have always been a jazz lover, especially bebop. So I sent myself on a Jazz Cruise in Oct. 1974 when I read that Sarah Vaughan was on. She was always my favorite. Imagine spending a week with Sarah Vaughan! Couldn't even open my mouth the first 2 days. This portrait was taken on shore leave in Bermuda, before we headed off to her friend's coffee shop. The other pictures, like Joe Williams and the Count, were from the Cruise. Dizzy's big band and Max and Gerry were taken for "Jazz America", 1981, a set of four videos. I was hired to shoot for a book which was to accompany them, but the book never happened. I realized when I saw my pictures that I should have been doing a lot more of this, since I felt that music so deep. And the camera is *my* instrument.




*Circus life has evolved since you shot and traveled with the Beattie-Cole circus in (1971?) (Pub.date of Circus Days is 1978). Will you ever document the circus life again or is this a closed chapter?*

JF: I've done it.


 Manifestations and parades are a frequent subject of your photographs. How was it documenting the poor people's campaign (daily march in Washington D.C. May – June 1968) Old News: Resurrection City (pub. 1970)? as far as I know this is your earliest published work- did participating in this march affect the rest of your choice of subject matter?

JF: It affected it in many ways. I went on the march to document an event in history, what I felt would be the last big nonviolent demonstration. They had just murdered Martin Luther King and this was his last project. I had never shot a story before, just pictures, moments. So this was the first thing I wrote and photographed, and I knew I was making a book. I am a storyteller, and books are my music. Since I had no money I lived in the mud with everyone else and ate baloney sandwiches like everyone else and dreamed of hot baths and warm beds. Later I realized that if I had stayed in hotels like everyone else, I never would have gotten the pictures. Also, I'd majored in Sociology and Anthropology and I'd lived in Europe, so I didn't need a shower every day. Same with traveling with the circus and living in the firehouses. Each time I was documenting a closed society within the larger society and I didn't even realize it at the time. I just loved elephants and action.

 Animals are also a favorite subject; from dogs, cats, birds and elephants to snakes, rabbits, monkeys and rats. Your elephant photographs are particularly touching-how did you get so close?

JF: I fell in love with elephants while traveling with the Beatty-Cole Circus in 1971. We had 12 and they moved me deeply, their intelligence, their affection, their grace. I was with them for 7 weeks and I missed their smell for a long time.

I've always loved animals. They delight me. I'm crazy about dogs and cats and horses and love most of the rest, even rodents. Little animals. Not their fault. I believe that our species is the least evolved. I have photographed the relationships between people and the other animals since I first started taking pictures. Didn't even realize it for years. I'm currently photographing the ways animals help us. Pet Therapy, for example. There are so many ways. Educating people and saving animals is my passion.

 What are you shooting now and are you experimenting with novel camera equipment?

JF: I've got a little 10 meg snapper that fits in my pocket. Instant gratification. Still working with the old boxes, and recently did a shoot in Iceland using just my one digital SLR and a zoom. What a joy. I'm dying to get my hands on a good range finder digital which will take my Leica lenses, have no delay time, and work like an M4, my favorite street-shooting box. Basically I love playing with anything I can get my hands on and I love all this new technology. It's exciting and fun and I wish I could just shoot and print and daydream all day long.

 Thank you Ms. Freedman.

