

CLAYTON PATTERSON'S

Front Door Book

with

**ANGEL "LA2" ORTIZ,
MARCO HELLRAISER
& TRIBY L.E.S.**

THE FRONT DOOR PHOTOS & OTHER ARTISTIC REMINISCENCES:

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THE FRONT DOOR PHOTOS & OTHER ARTISTIC REMINISCENCES

**Clayton
Patterson**
with editorial
assistance from
Jim Feast

WALL OF FAME, HALL OF FAME

THE FRONT DOOR photos are a summation of everything I have ever learned. The photos are taken in front of the door at 161 Essex Street, which leads into Clayton Hats, Clayton Gallery and the Outlaw Art Museum. This also happens to be the place I live.

The front door represented two things for me: It was the Wall of Fame where I played host to many of the local graffiti writers and it was the background for many of the shots from the Hall of Fame.

The Hall of Fame was a board placed in the gallery window that held 32 photos, 3 ½ x 5 inch in size, that I had recently taken and would rotate on an almost weekly schedule. The period represented when I did this is basically from 1985 to 2002, at which point I went digital. The vast majority of the photographs were of Hispanics who lived on the Lower East Side. The L.E.S. in the '80s and into the '90s was not the hip place it is today. For the most part, the photos were representative of people who lived in the section that outsiders considered dangerous and that was normally out of bounds for those who had no business to be here.

The Hispanic L.E.S. was divided up into sections. One section was the area between Ave. A and Ave. D¹. Then you had the forgotten land between Houston and Delancey, from the Bowery to the East River. Then there was the neighborhood below East Broadway.

All these were the areas where the government and the police allowed drug dealing to operate. This is where you had 24-hour-a-day markets in which you could find every kind of illegal drug desired. The Alphabet City 9th precinct, which covers this area, had their own chapter in the Mollen Commission report, which was issued by a governmental body set up to weed out corruption in the police department.

For me, taking the front door photos was magic. It was like touching someone's soul. We were sharing a moment in time together, in a very intimate and deep way. I always felt a union, a deep connection and respect for my subjects. We were one. We were exposing our inner self to each other. I was saving a presence, a spirit, the image of a person from the moment, the here and now, for the future. All of us were the Lower East Side, one.

In front of my front door I photographed a cross-section of the neighborhood (and some visitors), including the ones going to school, the good kids, the bad kids, the in-between kids. Sometimes I took pictures of their mothers. I would get shots of the new babies, the basketball players, the boxers, of PS 20 principal Dr. Leonard Golubchick. I have photos of the limousine drivers, and of gangs such as members of the **PUERTO RICAN MAFIA, ALLEN BOYS, DOG POUND, NETA, LATIN KINGS, LA FAMILIA, CRIPS, BLOODS, LA BOBA MAFIA, HELLS ANGELS, MC**, many of the gang-bangers, including their so-called "bitches." Among them you'll find photos of **SATAN SINNER NOMADS, THE SECRET BACHELORS, THE SATAN SOULS MC (BROOKLYN), THE UNFORGIVEN MC (BRONX), SAVAGE SKULLS (LES), HELL RAISER, THE LSB (LUDLOW STREET BOYS), 357 (FROM ORCHARD), C TOWN (OF ELDRIDGE/BROOME), POINT RED (NORFOLK/RIVINGTON), BLUE THUNDER (FORSYTH), B BOYS, RIDGE & ATTORNEY BOYS**. There are also portraits of the journalists who came to see me, of the postman, the crews, the posses, such as the **REAL NIGGAS, HIT MEN, DYNAMITE BROTHERS**. I had a picture of Kato Nunchuckles, of prostitutes, outsiders, outlaws, drug dealers, hits sellers, and the graffiti writers. Among them you'd find the wanted, the unwanted, the hated, the loved, the drunks, the derelicts, and the homeless. There were the people who had fallen as far as they could before they were dead. On very rare occasions, over the years, maybe once or twice, even cops.

I made it possible for the people to get the photographs. I never gave the photos away for free. I did not care how broke you were, or how desperate you were. You give something away and it means nothing. I am an artist, this is my work, and it means something. It has value to me. No freebies. However, I would sell the photos for \$2 each.

If the person had no money, then they had to give up something to get it. An elementary school student could give me a drawing. A graffiti person could tag my book. A junkie could give me some stamped dope bags. Something that had meaning to you. It did not have to have a monetary value, but it had to have some personal importance. Money was not the object, respect was, appreciating my work, and understanding that I was giving them a work of mine that meant something to me.

¹A you were
adventurous,
B you were bold,
C you were crazy,
D you were dead.

The Evolution of a
CRO-MAGNON,
John Joseph p. 99

On the back of each photo, as I would explain to the people "buying" the photo, "I am going to do a drawing. That means you will have a photo and a drawing. When I become a famous artist, the drawing will be worth something, so, no matter what, in the future you will get your \$2 back. The drawing is going to be a seven-letter word. Using these seven letters, always the same seven letters, I will make you a drawing of something you request: a bicycle, a motorcycle, an artist's palette, a hand gun, a machine gun, a beer and so on. The only catch is that you must guess what the seven letter word means, otherwise you cannot have the photograph."

An added rule was that you had to be in the picture to get the picture. The only exception was your mother, or someone I knew who was close to you. If someone was in jail, the person's brother or a relative or close friend could get the photo.

No matter how tough or how much of a bad boy (or girl) someone was, I always wanted the best part of that person. The idea was to get them to smile, or at least relax. I never tried to get the gangster look. I wanted the most positive side.

In all my years of doing the Hall of Fame, I only once had a problem. I was sitting in my office, which is by the front store-front window. One afternoon a rather large muscular guy in his late twenties came by and starting tapping on the window. He was acting completely bugged out about the pictures. I had never photographed him before. I knew that this guy was twisted, so I went outside and we talked face to face with the parking meter between us. He had just gotten out of jail and he was tripping. He must have been dusted. After a few minutes, I invited him in to show him what the photos were about. He chilled, signed the book and was apologetic. I said, "No biggie. It's all good." I took his picture and told him to come back and check it out. It was necessary to calm the waters because my office was by the front window.

I traveled the whole community. Everyone knows I lived there. I was always open as to who I am and where I live. This kind of documentary work must be done with honesty and integrity. I am not dropping in, and then scooting away after I take a few "arty" pictures. I live in the community and take pictures of my associates in this life.

Those who saw or who were pictured in the L.E.S. Hall of Fame, especially youth and the people who spent a lot of time on the street, were appreciative. They loved to see it up.

There have been a number of occasions that I would run into someone who had been pictured on the Hall of Fame and it would be like we were old friends. It didn't matter if the person had moved out of the hood or out of the city whether he or she was doing well or just got out of jail. There was that moment of innocence again, that second where we would break through the walls that normally surround us. We smile and say hello. I was the picture guy.

I had photos of relatives that no one else in the family

had. A grandmother would want a picture of someone in the family who had passed away. Perhaps it was for a person whose relatives lived somewhere else and they had no picture of them, so they would get a photo from me and send it out. A son would want a photo of a father who was in jail. A person in jail would want a memory from the outside.

Sometimes I was amazed me by the attention the window got. Gazing in the window went on 24 hours a day. Even sometimes at 4 a.m. you would hear "Mira" "Mira" and there would be a crew holding the flame of a Bic lighter close to the window in order for them to see who was new, who was up.

Being in the window gave you fame. It grew into a neighborhood tradition whereby being in the window gave you pride, self respect, a place in the universe, a place of honor in the community. Very few of the cool white people who lived in the neighborhood or were passing through ever asked what this commotion was about. All they saw was a bunch of Hispanics in pictures in the window. A couple of them were smart enough to ask to be included. No problem. Anyone could be in the window.

This was a private world, belonging to the people in it. Not that it was meant to be private, but that's how it worked out. Elsa and I were making the Clayton Caps at the time. We made hats for many famous people, such as the artists Jim Dine and David Hockney. Every time Matt Dillon made a movie he would buy a custom cap, Gus Van Sant, got one as did Rob Reiner. We made a tour jacket back for Mick Jagger. However, anyone who came to buy a cap in the shop, never mentally crossed over to the pictures, no matter how many people were tapping the window. They might have asked, "What are they tapping for? Oh, I see?"

There were white artists who lived in the neighborhood, and a few others. Never once in the years the photos were in the window did I get an inquiry concerning the photos from anyone outside of the Hispanic community.

I was never a studio photographer. I was a street guy. Almost all the photos in the Hall were taken on the street. When the weather was right, it was on the streets where life was lived. You had the bodegas, which were like social clubs, with men playing dominos, drinking beer, playing music and numbers. Kids enjoying themselves outside their building.

Don't get me wrong. I am not portraying an idyll where everyone was good and chummy on the sidewalk. On the contrary, the streets were kept in order by the drug crews who, in the end, controlled the block. The streets were theirs. The only others who ran wild and free in these days were the kids. And even kids could be dangerous. A group of five or six pre-teen and early teens kids could rat pack and take down an elephant. They could scale the walls of almost any building.

Still, everyone was different and the types of people you met ran the gamut from flat-out criminals, murder-

ers and thieves, to some of the most gentle, caring, loving people you would ever want to meet.

Another important point about my photography and video was that it was something that anyone could do. It was not elitist. I was Everyman as artist. I used a one-hour developing service, a good one where I had rapport with the printers. The place took special care of me, but it was a commercial business, easily accessible to anyone, and inexpensive to boot. Let's call it, the people's photography.

The Wall of Fame was a collection of local graffiti tags on my front door. I do not claim to be "the" L.E.S. expert on graffiti, but I have documented my share of that world and know something about what I have come across. The Wall of Fame was covered with tags from the L.E.S. graffers. This part of the L.E.S. was off limits to most of the outsiders, who ran around various places and got their ups. The L.E.S. did not have the blow-ups and murals you see around today. The J and M trains, which traveled through the L.E.S. were not part of Henry Chalfant's incredible photographic history of the art in the subways.

The only large scale murals one saw were the R.I.P. ones done by Chico. Occasionally some of the local artists, Ron English, for example, made peace with the neighbors who ruled the block and painted a mural or two, outlaw style. The most acknowledged mainstream famous artist of them all was Jean Michael Basquiat, who would leave his mark when downtown scoring dope.

LA2 & KEITH HARING

ANOTHER L.E.S. ARTIST who got away with being a marker, more a fine-art type than graffiti writer, was Keith Haring. Keith worked on a couple of city-approved L.E.S. school murals, which is to say, he was no outlaw, in the sense that many of the graffiti taggers were.

Keith lived at 325 Broome street at the same time I did. I remember him as a nerd, who had a close-to buck tooth set of protruding front teeth. He was skinny, high energy, and had brown curly hair, thinning in the front. He was a gay nerd, wearing black Buddy Holly glasses (soon to be decorated with globs of colored acrylic paint), a baseball club-type, red-and-black, cloth and leather sleeved jacket. He was like a kid from a small town in Pennsylvania, and by no means yet a New Yorker when I knew him. A nice guy trying to desperately escape the SVA (the School of Visual Arts).

In 1982, Keith was about to find himself by finding someone else. He met graffiti artist **LA2**. LA2's drawing style was exactly what Keith was searching for as an inspiration for his development. LA2 had his own original style, respect, credibility, and realness. His pieces were a form of unself-conscious perfection.

LA2 was naïve to the ways of the art world. He dropped out of school to join the Keith Haring Circus. LA's

art was real and came with all of the street authenticity that the art world was dying to touch. He was viewed as bringing with him such associations as street, danger, outsider, outlaw, naïve, primitive. But, on top of these associations, which may or may not have had much reality to them, he was very street smart, very NYC. And he had that mystical presence, which takes a small thing and endows it with blessing, cleansing it of conventional, hackneyed aspects and making it brightly new.

The collaboration between LA2 and Keith Haring was high-energy art. The first show at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery was in two large spaces. The Gallery, a converted garage on Greene Street, southwest side, was two jam-packed floors. There was a massed after-party in the basement of a building on Broadway and Houston. A massive blowout. At the time, it was the biggest show in town. Keith was now in the public spotlight and loved it. LA2 going along for the ride, getting paid.

This collaborative exhibition changed Tony Shafrazi's status. He went from being an Iranian criminal scoundrel, who had desecrated the Museum of Modern Art's Picasso's Guernica, by spray painting in red paint KILL LIES ALL across the surface, to a darling in the art world. Tony Shafrazi was now a trend-setter.

The image used on the poster for this exhibition was a photograph of Keith and LA2. LA2 had his shirt off, wore shorts, and looked like a cute, young, tanned Puerto Rican helper. This image, where LA2 was used like a movie extra, added the touch of Modern Primitive people craved at this time. This show came off as Keith Haring -- not what it really was, Keith Haring & LA2, no, more accurately, LA2 and Keith Haring.

Keith's partnering with LA2 was not only for street cred. Keith was learning about hardcore L.E.S. street graffiti culture, which is its own world. Keith was learning how to make and use the tools of street graf. Keith loved young and innocent Spanish boys, which brought a certain amount of tension into their relationship as LA2 is straight, but LA2, born and raised on the L.E.S., told Keith flat out, "I don't play that." LA2 was Keith's L.E.S. safety factor, as well as being the one who helped define Keith's new art look and visual sense of style. This style is what Keith needed to finally express what he had been looking for.

Keith had obtained a legit street connection, street smart letters, and a link to a crew - TNS. Keith was now on a fast-moving, quick-learning intro to the L.E.S. streets.

LA2 was a partner on so many of Keith's early, most recognizable, most loved, images. LA2 filling in the background of Keith's graphic, cartoonish figures transformed Keith's simple line figures into art. Keith's was throwing up his vocabulary of a 3-Eyed TV, a Crawling Radiant Baby, the Space Craft, the Barking Dog. He was so creative with simple cartoonish line figures, and LA2, the street Pollack, brought the undersurface to life, spreading out everywhere across the picture plane. As they contin-



ued collaborating, Keith learned about dripping black ink pens and started to loosen his style.²

Keith's 325 Broome Street basement studio used to be my studio. Since I worked for the landlord, and this space was not rented, it was my studio. Keith saw me working in there and asked the landlord about this space. Since I was not paying rent, Keith took over my free studio, and made it his first rented studio in which he did so much of his early 3D work with LA2. When I moved out I left some things behind. The baby crib Keith painted used to be mine.

To get back to my analysis of the relation of Haring to LA2, I would aver further that the collaboration with LA2 pushed Keith into new areas, from working on flat surfaces to sculpture. Keith and LA took large fiberglass replicas, purchased from Industrial Plastics on Canal Street. They would cover a Statue of Liberty or a life-size Copenhagen Little Mermaid or a Michelangelo statue of David or a King Tut sarcophagus.

LA2 took that name to mean "Little Angel" the city of LA being the big Angel. LA2, Angel Ortiz, at 15 quit school to become Keith's collaborator. LA2 connected with Keith right at the beginning of his career and, according to LA2, remained, even at the end of his life, one of Haring's few collaborators. So, you can see, LA2 was a very key factor in Keith's becoming an important and influential artist.

Yet, strangely enough, or maybe it's not so strange, LA2 is an invisible presence in the different histories that have been done on Keith Haring. It is bizarre. We are talking top experts in the world, the most acknowledged historians of modern American art, and they cannot see the presence of LA2 in the history of Keith Haring.

We all know the opening of Ellison's *Invisible Man*, one of the most famous passages in American literature. The narrator says, though he is as visible as you or I, when he, a black man, walks down the street in a white section of New York, he has to pinch himself because he feels like he has suddenly become transparent because no one can see him. This is Ellison writing about the 1940s!

Strangely enough, when I read about Haring, I also have to pinch myself for LA2 has become invisible.

LA2's drawing is right there for everyone to see. Think about this. Art critics and other experts often use a high level of erudition in examining the images on the surface, drawing on signs and symbols from all over the ancient to the modern world, but suddenly when it seems that the surface of a piece by a white, art school-educated artist, might not be a solo production, but product of a collaboration with a high-school dropout, minority artist, these critics seemed to have gone blind. Not one made the discovery that all of those LA2 drawings, **LA ROCK TNS- LAII**, and so on were done by LA2, Angel Ortiz. So many Keith Haring works are collaborations done by two individuals who were as connected as Braque and Picasso as they ushered in the birth of Cubism. As with those two masters, LA2, young Puerto Rican artist, is Keith's equal

partner during Keith's early years, which added up to about half of Keith's creative life span. LA2 also worked with Keith at the end of his life.

You want the evidence of this blindness. Take the Whitney book, ©Keith Haring by Elisabeth Sussman (1997: Whitney Museum of Art). This oversized, expensive, well produced, well researched, scholarly-sounding tome, whose text speaks in an authentic, professional voice, purports to be distilling all the available information on Keith Haring. Sussman would have it that she dug high and low, going through covens, ditches, beehives, friends' basement boxes, and schools of learning, looking for any and all information on Keith Haring. After all this, working in collaboration with the Haring Foundation, as well as dredging up firsthand accounts from any number of people, who possessed background knowledge of the man in question, LA2 only appears in the book (overtly) in a wooden Indian nickel-sized sidebar photo on page 176. Look closely at the photo – you'll need a magnifying glass -- and you'll see it's LA2 drawing on the King Tut piece, with Keith. LA2s is doing his drawing in this photo.

LA2 did not draw Keith's images. LA2 only did his own original art.

For another example of the disappearance of Haring's collaborator in Sussman's book, examine the color pages listed as photos from the 1982 Keith Haring Tony Shafrazi Gallery exhibition. Note the black-light sculpture pieces in the environmental installation basement. On the sculpture, you see LA2's uncredited drawings.

Take the depiction of the Keith Haring Bowery Mural. It's the work of three artists, Haring, LA and Soe, each with their own drawings on the piece. Two are uncredited, though. Then turn to the photos on pages 148-151. These are LA2's drawings, again uncredited. Pinch yourself.

LA2's drawings do not take a translator to explain where each letter exists or to decode a mysterious visual language. LA2 is basic image. It is right there for all to see. Yet, no one can see it. Not an invisible man, but an invisible artist.

LA2, down on his luck, at the bottom of his game, depressed, feeling completed robbed and rejected, came knocking at my door asking for help. I am not a dealer, but, when I do art show, I exhibit outsider art. I gave LA2 a one-man show and was able to get him an informative article in the Village Voice³. Keith's Pop Shop was selling Keith Haring products that had been done solely by LA2.

I got a photograph of one such product, an umbrella that was being sold as a Keith Haring, but was strictly done by LA2, along with an article, into a major German art magazine. I was hoping that making this information public would make the people in charge of the Haring estate sensitive to LA2's plight. No such luck.

A few years later LA2 came to me a second time. The Haring Foundation to celebrate what would be Keith's 50th birthday, had recreated Keith's mural at Bowery and Houston. Again LA2 was excluded. LA2, still very much

²Once Keith came to my studio to borrow some paint. He saw a manikin bust I had painted white and put pencil and painted marks all over. Keith then moved into doing line drawings on manikin parts, maybe inspired by what he saw in my studio, maybe not. He also began doing 3D objects, like the dented Yellow Taxi fender, he worked on with LA2.

³www.villagevoice.com/2002-07-23/news/keith-haring-ts-silent-partner/

an admirer of his old partner, wanted to pay tribute to Keith by adding his collaboration to the wall. I told him to wait a couple of days. I would see about lining up some press.

Two days later LA came over to my place. We carried my 10' aluminum ladder to the wall and LA went about his magic. To make this wall authentic, SOE came by and added his tag. LA included my name. I was able to get an article in the NY Times and the NY Sun¹. Again, not a word from the Foundation, all was as quiet and still as Elvis in his grave. However, even though they had spent \$30,000 making this Haring reproduction, they never removed LA2's artwork.

LA and Keith's shared and reversed the roles of the teacher and mentor. Sometimes LA2 was the teacher, sometimes Keith. LA2 would be the street guy & Keith the inside & business guy.

I would say LA2 is the first graffiti artist to have made the crossover from the street to the halls of the most respected museums in the world and between the covers of numerous historical documents. LA2 went from school-dropout, graffiti vandal to a creator right up there in the galaxy of great, 20th century American artists. Only problem is: Nobody looks at the sky to see his constellation there. Nobody acknowledges the facts about him yet! He also began doing 3D objects, like the dented Yellow Taxi fender, he worked on with Haring.

I wish that the people connected to the Haring estate would recognize LA2. LA2 is not angry; he just wants his rightful place in history and a share of what they owe him. He wants them to stop calling the collaborations between LA2 and Keith just Keith Haring art. I do not have time for this, but the deeper one looks into this rip-off the more interesting this deception can become. Imagine how many pieces of this LA2 Keith Haring work has been sold privately and in auctions as just Keith Haring art. I think that the collaboration adds richness and vitality to the history.

L.E.S. GRAFFITI

L.E.S. GRAFFITI HAS NOT been written into the histories of this urban art, and understandably so. Studies of graffiti by art historians center on the murals and blow-ups, which are taken to be the masterpieces of the form. They are works that garnered all-city fame. L.E.S. tags, by contrast, were local. They were like ping pong games. Fast and furious. Thrown up quickly on dangerous, well-guarded-by-drug-dealers ground, with local crews lurking around every corner. Up, down, over, back and forth, sneaking into territories and putting up your tag. Leaving your mark, letting everyone on the block know you were there, but that none of them could stop you putting it up. It could be more of a muscle game than an art thing. Proof of existence. Claiming one's territory. Sticking it in someone's face. Throwing up tags could be a very dangerous

sport. Rivalries spurred fierce conflict between graffiti crews.

One incident I remember is when a couple of members of graffiti group **ADT (AVE. D TERRORISTS)**, after graduating from Seward Park High School, went back the first day of school the next semester, and slashed the throat of a member of **WON (WRITING OVER NIGGERS)** crew. Happily, they did not kill the youth, but caused the person serious damage. The perpetrators of the crime got long prison sentences. This was a very sad, senseless, tragic crime for everyone involved. These boys were constantly on both the Wall of Fame and the Hall of Fame. To me these boys were bright, ambitious, innocent youths caught up in a dangerous inner city game of chicken. The leading perpetrator spent years in jail, wasting his artistic talent and incredible spirit.

As I have been pointing out, for the most part L.E.S. graffiti consisted of tags staking out territory. True, there were some from the '80s and early '90s who became famous players, including **CLAW**, **HAZE**, **SANESMITH**, and **LEE**, who did an Allen Boys mural, which is still up. Another important tag, **DMS (DOC MARTIN SKINS)**, named in reference to the hardcore scene, I started seeing in the '90s.

Still, the majority of L.E.S. tag history, as of now, has not been seriously documented and stays underground. The @149st NYC Cyber Bench Site, which is an excellent site, misses the bulk of the L.E.S. crews who were up on the Wall of Fame. There is a mention of 501, but no information.

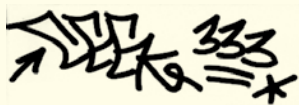
Indeed, if one were to grant some significance to those L.E.S. taggers that were the most prolific and had staying power, I would have to say, surprisingly, these are some of the least recognized, never mentioned in graf history. The most ups are **SEN 4**, **MF THE MISSING FOUNDATION**, and **CEEK 333**.

SEN 4. I have seen his tag around forever, but I know nothing about him. I have no idea if I have met him or not or if I have photographed him or not.

ON CEEK 333

CEEK 333 is a different story. **CEEK** has had many opportunities to be documented doing and talking about the art that means so much to him. I wanted him profiled in this book. For many years, I have photographed him, and different parts of his crew in front of the door. **CEEK** and the **333** crew have been up on both the Wall of Fame and the Hall of Fame for many years. We both have mad love and respect for each other.

Indeed, that is the way he would want it. If I may quote from his email, the gist of what he said is this: *Much respect, but I am politically and philosophically against being documented. My basic motto is no book or video will ever record my history. He goes on, The only history I am concerned about is the memories of those who knew me,*



what I did, and who spent time with me. Those people who see my art in pictures or black books or on the streets. Those memories will live on forever and will never die. Moreover, he states, *My art speaks for itself... wherever there is art of mine, that's what I call my voice. That art speaks to those who are in that area passing by... or to those who live there.*

The work I have done throughout the years is what I call my live interview. Actions speak louder than words. My art speaks louder than any words ever put in a dictionary. I am a strong believer in that idea.

To avoid confusion, remember that doing graffiti in a public place is illegal and so many of the artists prefer not to be identified. CEEK's statement is simply that he would not personally put his name to an art exhibit or book of his creations, although he is not against seeing his work in general works on graffiti styles or, for that matter, in this book, which will become evident in his next statement.

So thanks again, Clayton ... it will be nice to see some of my art in your book ... that will be awesome. ... wishing you all the success in your book that you deserve ... and earned. You have a tremendous amount of recognition in my mind ... for all you have done for our area, the Lower East Side.

You are what I call the voice of truth that defends the rights of the unheard or the timid, those who are afraid to stand up for their rights. You fight for a better environment, better way of living. A Political Activist, The Voice Of The Lower East Side, Who Records Unjustified Acts Committed By The Cops And Unfair Treatment In Our Society ... and for that I thank you, bro. You always kept that shit real, alright. Clayton, peace bro.

He later continued, *Again, it would be nice to see some of my best artwork in your book, like the stuff that was on Broome and Eldridge. I hope you snapped a shot of that when you ran into Tony The Photographer Who Documents Graffiti on Broome. There was nice art there that would be cool to see in your book as well as many others pictures you may have gathered Throughout The Years.*

You can quote all this by permission of CEEK, who stands by what he says, who says what he means. This is what he said. Peace.

After this long email from CEEK, I replied, in a way to show an appreciation of both his artistic and leadership skills, "I know that 333 is your crew, your creation, and it has always been your crew. I know that 333 represented half evil. Half of 666. It has the potential to be either, depending on the forces it is facing. Good gets good. Evil gets evil."

I went on to mention that he had previously told me about how he felt interviews were pointless because the work belongs in the street and speaks for itself. This was something he had written me earlier. I asked if he still stood by that earlier message.

His reply, *Yes, Clayton, you are absolutely right [in reminding me of the previous message]. You Hit It Right On*

The Nail ... I Stand By My Message ... One Hundred And Ten Percent.....I stick to My Gunsthat's Never gonna change.

PETER MISSING & ASSORTED GRAFFITI CREWS

ANOTHER PERSON who is always left out of graffiti history is Peter Missing, from the band the Missing Foundation. Yet, if you ask anyone who has been around the streets, they all know about Peter's tag, an upside-down champagne glass with three lines for the content pouring out, with two 2 or 3 slashes crossing the downward strokes.

Peter's graffiti image has been picked up and used by many different people. As the peace symbol was to the '60s, certainly on the L.E.S., Peter's symbol became synonymous with the squatter and anti-gentrification movements. It became a political symbol that is found in different housing struggles around the world. It became an anti-gentrification tag that shows up in Germany and Amsterdam. It is also the only graffiti tag that I have seen as a tattoo on people from as far away as Europe, as well as, on numerous people in America. It is a symbol for Peter's band Missing Foundation and also one of Peter's main fine art images.

I gave Peter Missing an art exhibition at the Clayton Gallery & Outlaw Art Museum in 2002. Colin Moynihan wrote an article for the NY Times profiling Peter and mentioning the show². Almost immediately, Heather MacDonald responded with a scathing article condemning the Times for covering this show. Her article came out in both the NY Sun and the Manhattan Institute's City Journal. The Manhattan institute, a conservative think tank, was founded in 1978 by William J Casey and others. Casey may be recognized as a former head of the C.I.A. The Manhattan Institute was used as an idea factory during Giuliani Time. Following are some of her comments:

Reporter Colin Moynihan rapturously profiles an aging Lower East Side anarchist who has spent his adult life destroying and mooching off of other people's property as a graffiti vandal and a squatter. Twenty years ago, anarchist Peter Missing created a crude icon, shaped vaguely like an upside-down martini glass, to protest drunken-driving checkpoints.

But what do you know? This scourge of private property has been trying desperately to cash in on his life of crime! An "art" gallery has been selling pilfered signs and pieces of billboard scrawled with Mr. Missing's childish martini glass, and Mr. Missing has been unapologetically scarfing up the profits.

Mr. Missing's graffiti war yielded the predictable effect: delaying the much-needed revitalization of the troubled Lower East Side. A Missing admirer (and, heaven help us, an art teacher) tells the Times: "Pete's symbol was successful in that it helped scare away developers.



On the surface this is arrant absurdity. The riots and turmoil in the Tompkins Square Park area in the late 1980s, according to MacDonald, was not caused by abandoned buildings, police repression, and planned shrinkage, which meant transferring medical, fire and police personnel away from the area. No, such conditions can hardly be held guilty for rioting when one can blame the more culpable “Missing’s graffiti war.”

What surprised me about the Heather MacDonald article, especially since she wrote it for the prestigious City Journal, was not only that she blamed graffiti from stopping gentrification in the ’80s – it couldn’t have been, say, the fact that the neighborhood was unsafe for outsiders to walk through – but that all her information was glommed from Moynihan’s piece. She never came to the show, never interviewed Peter, never spoke to me or to Mr. Moynihan.

It is one thing to be a lazy journalist; another to be columnist for the prestigious journal of a respected institution, an institute that prides itself on its conservation ideology, it’s right-wing correctness, and that was started by a the head of the CIA. This is intelligence gathering for a right-wing think tank? This is ignorance, stupidity and an opinion based only on biased thinking.

Come to think of it, maybe the Bush Administration has the same M.O. Remember the leaking to the media about Valerie Elise Plame Wilson being a CIA agent. This information was planted in the news to punish her, because she got it right when she contradicted the Bush administration’s statement that Iraq was getting uranium from Africa.

Wilson actually went to Africa to investigate the matter herself, but this firsthand information, like Moynihan’s, was ignored by the higher ups. In an analogous way, whatever positive evaluations flowed from Moynihan’s on-site view of the show was rejected by MacDonald, who didn’t bother coming to the show or consulting with anyone involved, delivered irresponsible and sociologically laughable opinions. Remember Bush got us into an illegal, senseless and economically devastating war by making the false claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

Then he later blamed the incompetent CIA operatives for getting it all wrong. Should we be thankful that MacDonald did not call Peter a terrorist and try to get him whacked?

It is very scary when one thinks of how much respect and power these people have. How, after Katrina, they left the people in New Orleans to die, how they completely ruined our economy, and have implemented all of these new laws under the Patriot Act.

Peter moved to Germany.

Most of the other crews and people who tagged the door and will only be recognized by people from the L.E.S. A few like **CEEK 333, MF, AND THE VIOLATORS**, expanded outside of the community’s boundaries. Less known were such groups and people as **BBB (BARUCH BAD BOYS), 501,**

ADT (AVE. D TERRORISTS), WON CREW (WRITING OVER NIGGA’S), TSK (TRIPLE SIX KINGS), TNS (THEY NEVER STOP OR TAKE NO SHIT), LSB (LUDLOW STREET BOYS), FOS (FLIP OUT SQUAD), THE 3RD AND C POSSE, IRAK, RFC (RUNNING FROM COPS), MSK (MAD SOCIETY KINGS), FTW, FRIDGE, DAST, VR, LER, LESK, DECK, JAE, DUKE 9, SF, PRES, SEMZ, BABA, BUGS, SHOCK, SEMI, 3 DEE, CEVE, HECK 1, SPER, FEX.

Add to them, the eccentric artist Red Ed Braddock 3rd, who used to write the numbers where the Dow Jones average was at the moment. He claims that (for most times) one can figure out what day and time of day the tag was written by looking up the history of the number.

When I asked him about this, he emailed more details, pointing out that “the Dow number (1717.06, for example) is an average of 30 various big time stocks. The Dow number changes anytime one of the thirty stocks makes a price movement.”

Ed noted, further, that the New York Stock Exchange “fixes the Dow number at the end of the day,” and this can, and has been used, as another way for people to commemorate dates in a manner that will not be understood by the average onlooker. For instance, he mentions that “1717.06 was painted on a brick in front of Ray’s News in the late summer of 1985. [Moreover] Scott Brofsky has it at his place in Woodstock [has] a good brick number 1907.06.”

WHY I DID IT AND WHERE I CAME FROM

(EARLY SCHOOLING)

WHY DID I DO THIS PUBLIC SERVICE?

There is no question that through my documenting of the community I accumulated fame, if not in the public eye, then certainly in the underground. Add that to the infamy I had in the eyes of the police department (in that my tape of the 1988 Tompkins Square pitched battle was one big reason it was classified as a police riot, and in the aftermath of that, one chief was retired, a captain moved out of the precinct, and six cops were criminally indicted). Some call me a legend, not knowing, though, how Elsa and a (very) few others stood behind me.

This is important because these people were being photographed not by just anyone, but someone who has a proven artistic and political track record. If I have some substance in both the community and the city (the former being more important to me) that means they have significance. I am giving them my power and soul.

Perhaps, I’m sensitive about this point because I grew up in a family whose father was even considered eccentric by our working class neighbors and completely unacceptable by my mother’s relatives. We were outsiders according to the middle class. I came to understand from the tip of my nose right to the bottom of my soul what it means to come from a place that others see as socially unaccept-

able. This is communicated without words, without even gestures, but loud and clear nonetheless. We were poor and the poor were despised by the better off majority.

My mother was a nurse's aide at the Red Cross Crippled Children's Hospital. She worked the 3 to 11 shift. It was a back-breaking job, quite literally since mother suffered back problems. The money didn't stretch very far, and I recall that after work, late at night, even in the dead cold Canadian winter, mother would sometimes make the long walk home, across the city, to save the 25-cent bus fare. After giving that job years of sacrifice, the hospital changed hands and she lost her pension.

My father did whatever mysterious things he did. Who knows, but it was not about making money. As a young kid I remember him working as a truck driver's helper and him speaking about the humiliation he had to endure. He was a plasterer, but would not work as one because he thought that the union was a communist idea.

As a child the thing that disturbed me most about my father was he was extremely religious. And ever since childhood we did not get along. I rebelled, and church, again because of the social hierarchy and demand for a certain kind of conformity, was never for me, I did admire his character, his individuality, and the way he did what he wanted to do, no matter what the neighbors thought.

As a kid, I determined I would not be pushed around. I was tough enough that few could kick my ass. Was good looking enough to have all the girlfriends I wanted. Was smart enough in school to always be in the "good" class. And cool enough to have all the friends I needed.

But working class people were outsiders, yes, and in school we were reminded how separate we were from the teachers who came into the community to offer us the benefit of their "better" middle-class upbringings.

Our elementary and junior high school was considered (by the teachers) one of the worst disciplinary problem schools in the city. After you were sent to this school, there was no place else to go, and so, along with the neighborhood children, they transferred in dead-end kids, for whom this was a last resource.

From my point of view, it was the teachers, not the students, who were here as a last resort. I remember one "special" teacher, an ex-army creep, who would go around the class and say, "I smell old butts." He thought it was funny. We smoked cigarettes but not all at once. They were expensive so we would take a few drags and save the rest for later. He would confiscate them if he found them. He also had a cruel habit. He'd give the smaller kids an unexpected blow right behind the ear with his middle-finger knuckle. Thankfully, he never did that to me, or not sure how I would have responded. I passionately hated this kind of subhuman treatment.

I also took my share of blows, with a strap. This was a piece of hard, but flexible rubber, about 15" long, 1 1/2" wide, divided length-wise into 3 color sections. The middle was black, the sides burnt orange. Administering the

punishment was the ex-army creep again. Besides being a teacher, he was vice-principal, a job he probably took so he'd get to do the strapping. The principal had to be there as a witness, so this guy wouldn't get out of hand.

I remember the ritual well. With his left hand he would firmly grip your wrist and with his right hand, bring the strap over his head and then, BANG, down on your outstretched palm. It hurt like a

From one hand to the next, same procedure, back and forth. His mouth would contort, forming a grimace. You would tighten your whole body, grit your teeth and smile at him. No matter what he said, you said nothing. You didn't dare talk, cause you were doing everything in your power to hold back.

When the strapping was over, and you had paid your debt to society, you would, with burning hands, carefully open the door, leave the principal's office, turn right, walk the few yards down the short hall, then right again down the long hallway. Then run like hell downstairs to the washroom, as tears were streaming down your face and a blind rage poured through you. You had to get to the privacy of the basement washroom or who knows what would happen. Down there, you'd be kicking over the garbage can or whatever else was around.

Them and us. Assistant principals and students. Rich and poor. Successful gallery artists and young people throwing up on trains and walls. Wall Street/City Hall and Losaida. The window was my gift to US.

HIGH SCHOOL & ART SCHOOL

WHEN I GRADUATED out of that school, I wanted them to remember me. The school was made from sandstone and the tradition, among the so-called bad kids, was to take black inkbottles fling them at the school, leaving a large dark black splat. Not for me. I wanted to personalize my memory.

Over the summer I went to the school and carved my name into the sandstone, multiple times. The principal was extremely upset and threatened to have the school sandblasted and my parents pay for it. Some of my carvings were taken off, the most obvious ones by the main entrance, but I can still find, deep in the stone, **CLAYTON 63**.

After grade 9, I left home but I continued into high school. A number of friends never made it out of grade 10 and a measly few went to university. A larger group ended up in jail. Most became plumbers, welders, cops, truck drivers, or took other working-class professions. The really good kids became teachers.

It always baffled me why we were seen as such bad kids when I knew from experience we were all basically good people and as intelligent as any other group of people. We were placed in this box by society – that is to say, by those who directed social attitudes through the mass media and other sources of the dissemination of informa-

tion -- who created a Them and Us. Yes, some kids, who, because of the extreme nature of their upbringing, were caught up with a serious, very edgy anger, so they had the potential to be real dangerous. But every class has those who are haunted by demons. I usually liked, empathized and was friends with those kids.

Every social class is haunted by demons, as I said, but the way the social structure works, those with social status and connections (as I have witnessed) skate through their troubles. As opposed to what happens to those in the lower ranks, for the connected who err on the wrong side of the law, there is usually no jail time, and they are typically found not guilty, if their case ever makes it that far. For an example, take a look at the youthful delinquent behavior of President George W. Bush and presidential hopeful John McCain and look where they ended up. For these guys anything they did, criminal or otherwise, did not matter, because they had daddy and mommy, money, arrogance and privilege to skate through any situation, and skate through they did.

I was never involved in criminality, though some of my peers went that way. Fights. Wait a minute. That's something else. There were fights almost every day after school, and often enough I was at the center of one of them. Once when I was older, I knocked a guy out at a party, thought I killed him. That ended my fighting. I hung up my gloves, besides I do not like hurting people.

Coming out of this grade-school environment, I didn't expect much from high school. Thankfully, I had an amazing teacher, Miss Goddard. She taught art. She changed my life. She gave me life. However, the adjustment to a more middle-class high school was not an easy one.

High school was on and off. In my visits to the office, I was often told I should do well in school, but it always sounded like I was being talked down to. Besides, personally, crazy as this may sound, I always had this inner voice that told me I was here to do something important. Who knows why I thought like this? But I so loved art, which Miss Goddard taught so lovingly that, eventually, I got into the Alberta College of Art. Another let-down. I had visions what going to art school would be. I thought art was going to be my ticket to glory.

This school was a total nightmare, which would have killed me, really, if I did not have this inner faith in self and who I am. I got along and made good friends with students, but couldn't stomach the pompous, unenlightening instructors. After the first year and the start of the second, I had to get out. This place made me feel alienated and humiliated. I entered into a period of heavy darkness.

One good thing about it, though, was I met Elsa Ren-saa. She is smart, creative, an individual, thinks on her own, and thinks outside the box. Funny thing is she is not the least bit working class, she came from a hardworking intellectual family. A few years later we met again, and got together to stay, now passing 36 years.

(I guess you'll understand, having read about my

early life, that it is experiences like this, that ignited one of the fires that burn in my soul, the one kept hot by my passionate hatred of inequality and social discrimination. That's where I got a dislike of police brutality. I lived through being one of the kids who does not have what the others have.

My Wall of Fame gave everyone equal props, no matter who you were, how bad your background was, how difficult your life, how poor. Everyone is equal on the wall.)

A few years passed. Out of art school, not being an 8 to 5 working person, not mentally able to take working at menial jobs, or having someone standing over me telling me what to do, and still wanting to be an artist, I decided to try to get into university. I was not academically qualified, but I was able to get in. I took art for one semester, but again couldn't take the atmosphere and so switched to education.

Education was practical as I could get a job with my degree while I continued to pursue my artistic goals. And there was a second benefit. The art instructors did not take the education students seriously. So, while they forced the art students to follow whatever fad was current in academia, I was free to explore any ideas I wanted.

I found myself fascinated with printmaking. I spent a year at the University of Calgary, then switched to the University of Alberta in Edmonton, so I could live with Elsa, with whom I had reconnected. At this university I had one really incredible printmaking professor, Gary Olson, who was inspired by the art that I was making. (We are friends till this day.) Then, in my 3rd year, I had an education professor whom I connected with, a man who respected me, and through him I was offered, in a tough job market and without my degree, an absolutely astonishing opportunity to teach art full time at a country high school. The job was exciting and I loved it.

TEACHING ART IN MEMORIAL COMPOSITE HIGH SCHOOL

I TOOK THIS JOB very seriously. I was in a large 2-room space, in the school yard, separate from the main school building, which meant I had a freedom to do as I pleased. I had the whole range of students: from the failing to the honors, from the most troubled to the most socialized, including kids from two Indian reservations. Even these Indian areas were studies in contrasts. One reservation was rich with gas and oil money, and the other was dirt poor. I identified with all the students and worked hard to inspire all of them.

I had a nice budget. As we went along, I learned as many crafts as I could. We did soapstone carving, wood-block printing, wood carving, batik making, drawing, painting, and put murals on the school walls. We built musical instruments; made ceramics, both hand-molded

and pots thrown on the wheel; did clay sculpture; made hand-pulled rugs; and one kid even did a bronze casting.

I'd get a visiting craftsperson from one of the Indian reservations to show us how to make beaded headbands. Such visits gave a sense of pride to the Indian kids. If you could make a headband, then you could take that as far as your inspiration could soar.

I wanted something creative and stimulating for every student. We collected local ingredients to make natural dyes for wool. A farmer brought a sheep to the school and let us shear it. We dyed the wool with natural dyes. Next, we learned how to drop spin the wool, making thread, which was then woven into a weaving. This whole process was important because it took away vague, abstract ideas many of them might have held, concerning, for example, how clothes are made, and replaced them with concrete knowledge as we went, step by step through the process, making it visually comprehensible to every student. And each step gave them something to participate in. The hands-on boys loved the shearing of the sheep, collecting materials and experimenting with making colors; many girls liked the weaving. Although, the school was outside the city, a parent in the community was inspired to get a story about this sheep shearing, dying, and weaving into one of the main city newspapers.

Since I was allowed to teach as I saw fit, and I had a cross-section of the school population, I wanted my charges to have an experience that would open mental doorways. For those who could handle the freedom of choice, I allowed the presentation of many opinions and options. For those not interested in too much freedom and needing structure, I offered the hands-on options, so that everyone could find something to fascinate him or her. If every class member, each in a unique way, could connect with something in the class, I felt I was doing my job. I could care less what the professional art people thought art was or where the lines lay that separated craft from fine art. I was inspiring kids to think creatively. That was goal number one.

If someone made a beautiful batik, then I was good with that, too. If the person decided to take that skill and make a product that he or she could sell at the country fair, then the student had learned how to think independently, as well as opened the possibility of being self-sufficient. If it was to be saleable, it would have to come up to certain aesthetic standards. This got the would-be marketer thinking on yet another level, gaining a sense of aesthetics, as well as, learning a craft. Opening those doors gave them options, possibilities, roads to follow, which could lead to any number of life-changing adventures. I was also teaching usable skills.

I wanted them to learn to think if not in an abstract, literary way, then in a visual and creative way. They would learn to appreciate the visual world, as well as the fact that one can create options. If I could inspire them to continue on with what we were learning, even, with a

hobby, then I had added something of creative pleasure to their life. Maybe a student wanted my advice as to painting flames on cars or making a fanzine and binding it. No problem. My thought was, for high school students, art could be whatever they wanted it to be. I would give them technical skills, a sense for craftsmanship, a direction to look in something inspirational to think about.

Not that I wouldn't give more traditional art lessons for those who wanted and needed them. If a young person could paint, I let that student open up and take a large bite, maybe do a mural in the main hall. I wanted to give the talented ones, who were planning to go on further in their art education, the skills as well as the confidence to place them on an equal or better footing with any other first-year student in college.

Just as some students enjoyed the hands-on aspects but did not get overly fired up, others were visually creative and thought outside the box. With them, I tried to nurture that raw talent. It's possible to overlook artistic creativity because it may seem eccentric and obscure and thus off-putting. Moreover, when a creative person is young and faces rejection or incomprehension of his or her work, it can be stifling. Self expression is linked to self-confidence, something that is easy to damage and destroy.

Now here's something I've come to see over the years. Belief in one's self is different from self-confidence. You can lack a self-confident presence and still have a powerful belief in yourself. Belief in one's self amounts to faith that one can achieve certain things. A nervous and insecure person who fumbles and stumbles in front of people may have private knowledge of a realized talent, of the power of their unappreciated imagination.

I'm not talking about some dreamy adolescent hope. Many young creative artists spend years perfecting their drawing, writing, musical or other skills in private, not having peers or interested adults with which to share their early efforts. They know about their own secret, hidden treasure from years of honing their abilities. They have a veiled self confidence, a belief that they will eventually be understood and discovered. I took it as my job to explore for, find, and then nurture those with special talents.

I know about this hidden existence of skill, and the ability to think creatively, because I always had such a belief about myself. Based on my own artistic work and my drive to create, I felt I would make a contribution to society. Already in my first serious job, I was doing things that engaged the students, inspired them, even those who came to class with a prejudice against art-making, I was able to stimulate them to do constructive work. My method of teaching may not have followed the traditional rules of public school art education, yet, I knew this was the way to give the students something they needed but never expected to obtain from the in-a-rut school system they attended. It was a system that tended to socialize kids. but not educate or teach them to think.

I always knew that I would do something bigger than what was expected by all those people who were trying to guide me in the wrong direction, and that I would make a contribution, which would eventually be recognized. I say this to all you who have a burning faith in yourself. I said to myself that it may take years to get what you're offering discovered, but you know you will get there. It does not matter if today people do not see what you are doing, someday they will, just keep the faith and keep going. Do not listen to those evil disciplinarians, or the wrong critics, or the cynics who are trying to socialize you into a box. Listen to your inner voice as no one really knows who you are or what you have to offer except for yourself. Your inner faith, personal vision, and drive can carry you through thick and thin and even the darkest of hours. You just have to get up, put your boots on and keep on trucking. Leave as many hints around as possible.

I say this because no matter how hard the bastards tried, they may have knocked me down, and they did, they may injured me for a while, and they did, they may have made me stumble, and they did, but they could never break or stop me. I had an internal form of self confidence. Still do. Nobody can define art as what they see on the table today, and as what is popular in the trendiest galleries. Creativity is a mysterious thing. It is unpredictable and will well up in the least-expected places.

A TYPOLOGY OF STUDENTS

IT WAS HERE in my high school classroom that I discovered the 2 types of A students and 2 types of D students. One type of A student was your best friend in class till they got their A. After that, they were gone, off to brownnose someone else. Total careerists. The other type of A student was just bright Pupils like this could do the work, no worries. They were friendly in class and stayed friendly when they moved out of your class. Since I was lucky to not have a specific curriculum, I could give such students a larger challenge than I offered more plodding students.

Then there were 2 types of D student. I tended not to fail students. You really had to try to fail in my class or to get a low grade. I had a good rapport with the students and most did their best. But it was obvious that some of the poorer students had trouble doing the work, which could be because of emotional problems or that they just were not able to comprehend what was going on. The other type of D student just could not follow the rules. These pupils tended to do what they wanted in class since they hated and rebelled against the confinement that school represented. Funny thing, this group tended to be very intelligent, as bright as the A students, just not socialized into doing schoolwork. This group too needed a larger challenge to engage them, but it was worth the effort.

In each class the special A and special D students were the rare ones. Most kids are normal and firmly set in the

middle of the road. Not everyone may have seen this type of people, but it was a pattern I found, and one I still see in life. It is not hard to see the careerist, especially in New York, or to be totally stunned by the creativity and beauty in, let's say, a wild and free one's outlaw graffiti painted on a wall, taking lines and color where they have never been or it was ever imagined they could be. The same vivid creativity can be found in people who find new ways to design cars and motorcycles and in those who invent new forms of paint jobs on these vehicles. Pin-striping has its own field of masters, as does the world of tattoo.

Let me give 2 simple examples. It's the truly beautiful image of the Flying Death Head center patch on a Hells Angels' jacket. Not only is it a work of absolute beauty, it triggers different kinds of emotional reactions. And in terms of simplicity of design, Peter Missing's symbol is brilliant, and it too gets numerous kinds of reactions, as seen by Heather MacDonald's response.

I had another very rare type of D student. Out of all the kids I taught, I only saw two of these. One was from the poor Indian reservation; the other was a small farm kid. Both of these kids seemed primitive. They thought and worked in a very simplified way. They made images and objects one would almost associate with an early stage of civilization- like Eskimo sculpture. Neither was verbally articulate, but I dealt with them on a non-verbal level. They made astonishing sculpture and flat-surface pieces with a real, alive, spiritual simplistic beauty to them.

Maybe they belonged to the truly creative minority. Years later, I discovered that most of the really creative ones in art school do not make it through till the end. They fly the coop. The careerists tend to get careers, but as with the late 19th and early 20th century art world, I expect the outsiders to come in and knock the careerists off the map of what is important to the history of civilization. Twist my arm and tell me what is important in today's Chelsea art- keep twisting I cannot hear you. The art world today is more about money than art.

After the first year of teaching, I went to summer school, and then, in my second year, took night classes to finish my degree, which I was awarded that year. I stayed at the school 3 terms, long enough to take one group from grade 10 to 12. Both the staff and the students liked me. I loved and was a good at the job. But I still had my visions of making another type of mark on history.

Teaching was inspiring and exhausting. My impression was it was almost impossible to keep up your enthusiasm as an instructor over the long term. One day in the staffroom, I stood there looking at the people and thinking no matter who I think I am or how different or creative, if I stay here, in 5 years I will be exactly the same as everyone in the room. If you take the hardest and sharpest rock you can find, and keep rubbing it, eventually all the rough edges will be gone. You will end up with a smooth and shiny surface. I know there are teachers who do maintain their fire even after years of work, rare ones. For me, I

felt it was time to prove myself as an artist.

Who knows why I thought I could do this? But I took my inspiration both from the A and D students, the special ones, and also from my fellows in elementary and junior high school, especially those who had sparks of creativity and intelligence, but gave up on themselves. I wanted to stand up for all these comrades and the unusual, unconventional students I had contact with. It seemed to me that many of them had great gifts of creativity and intelligence, but often lacked the confidence to push ahead. My succeeding, if I did, would at least show that if you have the belief and the desire, no matter how far outside the mainstream you are and no matter how weird some people may think you are, eventually what you have to say will gain a hearing and a place in the wider world.

One lesson that I appreciated learning from my teaching experience was that there are teachers who really care. I saw that teaching is one of the most important careers and I realize how much of an influence a positive, caring teacher can have on the young unformed minds. Create the right learning environment and great things can happen. This was a school filled with caring and sensitive teacher. I developed much love and respect for them. This was a real learning experience.

Build schools like prisons and you will create prisoners. We want young minds to minds to be free to explore the amazing things in life, unhindered by the those who have a prejudice against those they teach.

PRINTMAKING

I WANTED TO TRY art again. I lived in Edmonton, Alberta, and I could not see any route to get into art except through an institution. There were very few art opportunities in Alberta, and except for Elsa and Dick LeMay, the kid I left home with who dropped out of school halfway through grade 10 and lived in Calgary, there was nobody who thought like me. So, since I couldn't stomach typical art education, I decided I would go the printmaking route in another province. Get out from under the blanket of repression I was mentally burned and burdened by.

Printmaking is more focused on craft and not consumed with all the instructor's self-referential ideas, ideas which have been picked and learned piecemeal from sources with which the teachers usually have no connection. In other words, a typical art school professor would be, for example a third-generation abstract painter who had learned art from someone who had learned from a book and maybe made one trip to NYC to spend an hour in a museum looking at the real abstract expressionists. I dreaded art classes taught by such derivative artists.

I remember one instructor who had a set agenda as to how he thought each piece had to be. This was only about taste, his taste. He was trying to modify my thinking not in an appreciative manner, but with unconstructive criti-

cism. "That is good," he'd say, "but it needs more blue over there. That red does not go with that black."

"Huh? Excuse me? Why should I conform my vision to your jaundiced and warped taste? Save it for your children." Since the instructor was a follower rather than a leader, I felt like saying, "Teach me the craft, and I will learn to think on my own. Explain what ideas changed history and teach me how and why these changes took place, but do not hold me artistically accountable for the images from art history classes, and expect me to follow exactly in the footsteps of my great predecessors. Even if I was inclined to go on that dubious path, the pictures you are showing me in books or on the screen are infinitely distant from the originals, since they lack the size, texture, color, and surface, and even the emotional resonance. So teach me the ideas." (Obviously film and video are an exception to my comments on reproductions since the original can be viewed firsthand.)

I was accepted into the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design which was considered the best school in Canada. Because of my art education degree, I was able to transfer credits and in 1 year, go straight through winter, summer, and fall to obtain my degree. To make money, I first had a bartender job in a workingman's tavern. Then I scored an etching technician job. I taught a summer etching course, and learned it was possible to get part-time teaching gigs if you can fill a class. All you had to do was make a flyer and go fishing for pupils. A new door was opened that I walked through on more than one occasion.

This art school experience was very good, perhaps because I had gone into printmaking. What the instructors most cared about were your skills at printing and your comprehension of the medium.

These teachers really knew their craft. The lithography instructor was a graduate of the Albuquerque Tamarind print workshop when it was at its peak. True, he was anal, uptight, and boring, but, on the plus side, he methodical and thorough in teaching skills and techniques. Even his boringness had its positive side in that when he droned on repeating the same thing, you would suddenly realize he was making a valid point, which was worth learning. Because he had been a printmaker, he had a collection of actual prints created by well-known artists. He would bring these prints to class and we could, up close, look at original art, which could be a breath-taking experience.

I was also lucky because the school had a marvelous library and a batch of students from all over the globe, including unusual places like Greenland and Labrador. They thought differently from your average Western Canadian and had varied life experiences.

The school also sponsored talks by a wide range of visiting artists. The school had a strong connection to NYC. From the library, I found catalogs of art that I had never heard of, and rare books, including, for example, on the Viennese Actionists. From other students I learned about

art that inspired them, also by people never mentioned in class, such as The Hairy Who. (Occasionally, we also learned non-artistic rarities. A lady from Greenland gave me a dinner of seal flippers!) The visiting artists were inspiring because, again, I was being introduced to ideas I had never heard about, for example, in a lecture and video screening by Vito Acconci.

Another highlight of my year was a trip to NYC. Elsa and I slept on the floor of Franklin Furnace a pillar in the Tribeca gallery scene at the time, in itself an avant-garde learning experience. This trip made me realize that coming to NYC was one of my options.

I did well at the school and got my degree, the year passing without any drama or emotional turmoil. In fact, this was my first real wholesome and enjoyable educational learning experience. The printing classes had a dedicated, hard-working group of students, and we often would stay up most of the night working on prints. It was a liberating time. I made a contribution to all my classes.

However, I must say, it was strange that after I graduated, and tried to open a line of communication back to the school, as when I had my own gallery and wrote the school about it, I never got any response.

Once, not so many years ago, I met the head of the university, Garry Kennedy, at his NYC art opening. I guess I trapped him and buffaloed him into coming to see the Clayton Gallery and Outlaw Art Museum. The Peter Missing exhibition was up. I don't think he appreciated what he was looking at. I can't deny I was disappointed, and a bit hurt.

I know instructors from the all the different schools I attended come to NYC, but they never stop by my gallery. Maybe I was a little weird for them as a student to the all of these instructors, but I mean, really, it is an art school! We weren't there to get MBAs.

I thought about why they ignored my invitations. I wasn't asking them to meet me at a homeless shelter, I own an art gallery. True the art may be radical or outside the mainstream, yet, still got interesting articles in the press including the NY Times.

MY LIFE HISTORY IS A RESPONSE TO HISTORY

MAYBE, I THOUGHT, coming from an eccentric working class family, I was never properly socialized into the ways of the middle class. My father never connected with the neighbors, in fact, because of his eccentricities, if we lived in a more middle class world he would have been at war with them. All of his friends, and he had many who were connected to his many personal interests, never lived around us.

My mother worked the 3 to 11 shift, which means she was never around after school, and she did not socialize with the neighbors. I do not ever remember a neighbor coming to our house.

We have a transient history, always moving. My father's family went from Scotland to America a few hundred years ago, and then migrated up to Nova Scotia, then headed west to a homestead in Saskatchewan, always looking to improve themselves. They became farmers on the plains of Canada, first living in sod houses and, surviving the brutal winters. In the late '40s my father and an Indian friend made the several hundred mile trek, from Saskatchewan to Alberta, traveling in covered wagon and bringing a herd of horses. My mother's side came from Sweden and landed in Minnesota. Her parents moved to Saskatchewan, then my mother went with my father to Alberta.

So, to return to my point, I guess that I may not have approached the instructors in the middle-class manner to which they were accustomed, and even if I were just inviting them to, say, see a group art show, I couldn't understand their reluctance to come. But you would think, once one of their students has established himself (or herself) in the NYC world, no matter what that student's roots are, they would take some notice. More fool me, I guess.

But it is all good, in the long run, because, even if I didn't get much satisfaction from the staff after I graduated, while I was there I was truly inspired and thinking when I was in that learning environment. I appreciate being introduced to so many different ways to think about art, although, come to think of it, I found out about the more innovative artists either from fellow students, the visiting artists, the library and from the great library collections, not from teachers. So, in sum, I say: In the end it is what is in your head that matters, not what is in theirs. You live in your world not theirs.

Long ago I made the decision to live in my own world, not someone else's. Be my own guide. In the end we live and we die, so there's not enough time to try to live up to (or down to) someone else's preconceptions. I took this view as far as I could. I refused to be trapped by any job, so I could be as free as possible. In this way, I could devote my whole life to art, so that (ideally) everything I do is art. Life is art and art is life. It is similar to being a rose. Everything about the rose, the smell, the color, the texture, the petals, the thorns, the stem, the roots, is all rose. I am like the rose.

Someone once got on my case, said I was foolish to do things like expose incidents of police brutality, which ended up getting me put in jail (as I will explain later). This person rejected my idea that I must live independently and stand up for my and other people's rights with the response that everything is temporal and nothing matters. I told him, even if all life is passing, and even if each person's individual ability to impact events is small in most (not all) cases, it is the way you live your life that determines the quality of that life. If you back down, when there is an opportunity to help people in a major way – and those opportunities occur in every life – then you haven't really lived, because you never dared.

I have chosen to work for what we think is right and make a contribution to what we think will be a better society. I came to NYC with the ambition of making a change in the world, leaving something behind, to make a statement about my existence in this temporary world. Yes even, an unprivileged kid from the poor end of Calgary, from an eccentric family, can be equal to those who make a contribution and change in NYC, thus the world.

In fact, it is my acceptance of the fact that our time on earth is short that has kept me in fighting trim. Otherwise, a long time ago, I would have taken my accumulated laurels, sold my property when the market was high, and gone out and drank from the cup my successes.

It is the temporal that gives me strength, that allows me to realize that this moment of difficulty will pass. That no, I should not take the easy road, not give in or to prostrate myself at the feet of some compromised temporal success.

I do this work out of a sense of duty to the forgotten ones, the outlaws, those who have less, those who do not have the chance, the unsuccessful, the poor, the under privileged. It is not just for art and glory that I am on this journey, a part of it is for the symbol, a representative from that dark unseen, unrecognized end of the world.

I feel I am just getting to the beginning part of the reason for my temporal existence. Until now, I have just been in the hunting and gathering stages. It is time to start putting the puzzle together so others can see what my intentions and contribution is.

Yes, judged as single individuals, everything is temporal, we are smaller and less significant than a grain of sand. Yet, if a person links his or her life to a larger collective, as I do in my art and life, I become a whole beach.

Again, the message to that eccentric, misunderstood, isolated individual, of any class, rich or poor, who does not fit in, but has that burning internal fire that just does not seem to want to go out. The only thing that really counts is to get up, put your boots on, and get marching.

I tell you, Stay the course. Never give up. Never give in. Do not let other people's prejudices get in your way. Just do it. Just make that contribution and to help change to the direction of history.

ROAD TO NEW YORK

AFTER I GOT MY DEGREE, I got a teaching job back west. I helped print a Commonwealth Games Print Portfolio and taught printmaking at a university extension program. Elsa worked at a commercial art job.

We lived a simple, inexpensive life style, so I was able to give much free time to making art. Not too long after, I got a job teaching at the art school, which I had had so many problems with. I worked hard and made myself available to any student who wanted help. To get practice, I volunteered to print the art of any instructor who want-

ed the experience of making a fine art print. My fee was more than reasonable. They buy the paper and I would print an edition of 20-25 prints, keeping a couple of prints for my own collection. Much to my surprise this idea intimidated most instructors.

One thing I began to see was working inside an institution was an all-pervasive pettiness. The system was hierarchal in a way that dominated people's thought. Everyone was warring and worrying about my, yours, whoever's status and business. The rule was don't stand out. Keep your head down and keep quiet. No place for a person who made waves. For whatever reason, I tend to be noticeable.

By now I had overcome my demons. That is to say, I had become an equal to any and all of those education people who put me down. I taught in the public school system, and at that art college. I am not a victim to my demons, I said to myself. I conquer them. It was time to get on with my life and work on my larger ambitions. Time for NYC. I applied to be a printer at a fine art print shop in New York. The owner of the shop wrote a textbook and had a solid reputation. Elsa and I both got a job there.

In 1979 we moved to the city. Then, after 3 weeks in Brooklyn, we relocated to the L.E.S. The print shop was interesting, as I printed some famous artists' work, and learned how to steel face copper plates, and to make the archaic photogravure plates.

The first question for us was how we were to live while we tried to market our art. Now Elsa is exceptional at both drawing and painting, is very careful and fastidious in her work and had an expert's knowledge in commercial printing. With all this talent, she easily picked up the necessary skills to be a chromist. Chromistry is an obscure printmaking job, which is done more in France than over here. The chromist translates the artist's work from a painting or a drawing and makes it into a fine art print. In 1980, Ronald Reagan became president and the wealthy were having a high old time. Fine art prints were a tax shelter. Paloma Picasso sold a number of her father's images to be made into fine art prints. Elsa drew many of the Picasso prints that are were sold in commercial fine art galleries. The work was plentiful and the pay was enough to satisfy our needs. Life was good.

After settling down and producing a body of work, I checked out the Soho art scene and got into a decent Soho art gallery. I was getting a career going: one-man shows, reviews, inclusion in a couple of highly regarded collections, such as that of Richard Brown Baker. Who knows what might have happened, but the social scene was just not me. It was too pretentious, with too much concentration on self. I found the same Us versus Them mentality, this time rendered as Me vs. You, a mentality that had turned me off in grammar school. Hated it. It was like art school. Too much ego concern. I left the SoHo world and I would soon bury my heart and soul in the L.E.S. Do my art there.

However, there was a step between Soho and the L.E.S. When we first moved from Brooklyn, I found that, right from the start, I got along well with the landlord. He was from Hungary and had survived the work camps. He got to America, where he started off penniless and struggling, but, eventually, was able to buy buildings on the street of broken dreams, the Bowery.

On the one hand, he was a kind, considerate, humble man, but (metaphorically speaking) if you gave him the finger, he gave you the fist. I liked him and ended up becoming the manager of his buildings, which meant putting together workers with jobs that needed to be done. It was not complicated and I was basically my own boss. It both fit my schedule and was an incredible learning experience. Not just as far as working with others, but in that I got a practical, inside view of NYC real estate. I saw that it was possible for someone (with not a lot of money) to buy buildings. All this took place, when Reagan was president and moving us towards a global economy.

NEW YORK REAL ESTATE SCENE

ONE FACTOR IMPORTANT at that time was that Hong Kong (whose lease to Britain was running out) and Taiwan both had a fear of being taken over by Mainland China, and the wealthy in those places were shifting a massive amount of money into NYC's Chinatown. There was a colossal amount of Chinese money crossing Canal Street, buying up as much property as was possible to buy.

I had a front-row seat view of this explosion of property buying. I had a Chinese friend who told me the ambition in the community was for Chinatown to take over the area from Broadway to the East River, all the way to 14th Street. In the end this did not happen, but Little Italy was swallowed up by Chinatown. And Chinese money was able to reach all across the L.E.S. and purchase numerous properties.

So, in contradiction to popular perceptions, it was not the artists renting spaces that was fueling the gentrification. It was the Chinese buying frenzy that ignited the property price wars. I witnessed rents racing skyward. Elsa and I got the message. If we do not stabilize our living now and buy a place to live, we would be priced out of existence, or at least out of the neighborhood.

This was 1982. The L.E.S. was still a ghetto, and there were places that could be seen as similar to the earlier Bowery, which had been notorious up till the early '80s as a rundown, blighted slum and haven for winos. We would take a walk at night with our dog and look at property. Sol, the landlord I worked for, would give us his valued opinion on the buildings we were considering.

WE BUY A BUILDING & JOIN THE COMMUNITY

AFTER A YEAR OF LOOKING, we found a two-story building on Essex Street that we wanted to buy. This was not going to be easy. We were rejected by 42 banks.

Then, one day, Elsa marched up to the office of the vice president of City Bank, where she talked to the secretary, and explained our plan. We would rent out the first floor, whose rental income would be as much as I would make at a steady job. Elsa convinced her of the feasibility of our plan and we got the loan. As we planned, the first floor paid the mortgage. We lived a plain and simple life, based on doing our own thing, and we survived.

The first floor had a Dominican clothing factory. Squatters were on the top floor. We came by and told the squatters we were moving in, with them if necessary, at the end of the month. They left. We saw they hadn't fixed anything up. The roof leaked. There was a mountain of garbage and empty bottles, including gallon bottles filled with piss.

So, we set up a four-person tent in the middle of the floor, moved into the tent with our dog, Gunnar, cooked on a camp stove and got busy tearing down the walls and rebuilding. I hired a couple of guys we knew from the Bowery hotels and a Puerto Rican from the neighborhood, which made up a strong and reliable crew. After three months of solid work, the place was fixed up enough that we could get back to doing our own thing, so to speak.

As I said, this was a rough area back then. The first night we moved into the building, we were looking out the window, enjoying the idea of living here, and we saw someone get shot across the street. Eventually the cops showed up. It seemed to be no big drama in this neck of the woods. At some point, the body was taken away. Hmm. Seemed like the Wild West.

My immediate desire was to integrate into the place and become a part of the community. Other than the fact that it was an inner-city Hispanic culture, which I would have to gradually assimilate to, in most aspects the people were easy to relate to. We had a lot in common, though I never spoke the language.

In all of the years, we never had a problem with anyone in the community, except once. Four brothers ran our local bodega. One brother thought he was a gangster. I never did. One day, after a drug bust, he got really angry with me and came outside, yelling and screaming. His brothers were standing there. After a couple of minutes, I looked at the other brothers, laughed and said, "It's a good thing I don't speak Spanish." They laughed and that was it.

Over the years I photographed them, except for the angry one, and their kids growing up. My link was the photographs. From just taking their photos, we developed a love and feeling of being "family," a sense that was always there, and still is. When we meet, it is like a reunion. It is the smile, the laughing, the handshakes that count, not the talking. I think it's like this with many people.

Nonverbal communication takes precedence, establishing a love and a respect.

ON FAMILIES, LOVE & BEING AN OUTSIDER

IN A WAY IT WAS LIKE that with my family. I moved away at an early age, and never made any kind of connection with my father, and my mother was quite abstract and lived in her own world. But I love them dearly, always have. I accept the fact that there was never any way to get close to them.

You learn that love can be abstract. It exists in your head. It is something you carry in your heart. And that is fine, and that is the way it is. You still love them as much as anyone loves their parents.

I would go home to visit my parents, and after about 10 minutes we were all up to speed with. "Hey, how are you," and that was it. Especially my mother, but also my father, would push Elsa and I to stay for lunch. I would amuse myself doing something in a part of the house where no one was. We would eat. It was nice, a forced kind of chatty moment, a little tense. Then it was time to leave. A handshake with my father. Maybe a hug with my mom. If I could kiss her on the cheek, it would only be once. Twice, forget it.

What one has to understand is that he gave me the gift of life on more than one level. We lived in one of the most conservative places in Canada. He made it possible for me to be independent, to follow my own compass. He was eccentric and lived his life his way, and other than the fascism of fundamentalist Christianity, he was a truly creative individual. Had everything been perfect, I would have been a plumber or some kind of tradesman. A worker. As it is, I have never have been a worker and nor lived a settled, conformist way of life. Instead I went on a wild and exciting adventure. Anything wrong with that?

As to Elsa, she is basically a recluse. If she almost never talks to anyone on the phone or if we never had any company that would be fine with her. She likes to work and learn new things. Now it is computers. Her ability to amuse herself may be a result of the fact her mother was in her forties when Elsa was born and then died when she was young. Her father was elderly. So, she had to find her own things to do.

She is very stable, always the same, self-possessed. She has no problem talking to people, but I think she is happiest working at home, with only me and the dogs around. Me, I need to be around people.

As I said, I can deal with being an outsider if necessary, but the longer I lived on the L.E.S., the more I became part of the neighborhood. I wanted to be even more a part of it so I entered, in my own way, street life. I started to take my photography there on the street and then displayed it on the Hall of Fame.

Photography is a perfect social tool for me. I can go to

an event and have something to do. I have a reason to be there. I will be occupied, inside my own head, doing something I love, yet a participant and communicating with people. I am adding to the event, making a contribution. You can see, in this way, I am both an insider and an outsider at the same time. With this way of looking at things, the level of communication may not be on the surface, but it can be, sometimes, on a very deep level.

Under these circumstances, I have a shield between myself and others. I have an exit I can use, saying, "Oh, excuse me, I can't talk anymore, I have to photograph that person."

The reality is this. In a social scene, as opposed to a political activity, most people are thinking about themselves. Thinking about whom they should meet and talk to. Who is that person and so on? When I am talking pictures, I am concentrating on them, not getting caught up in concerns about who to meet, not thinking about myself and my relationship to the social scene. I think about the people whose picture I am taking and their place in this universe. This is also my attitude with the front window, for example. Taking photos, I was going beyond simply passing the time, but was giving back to the people in the neighborhood, communicating, passing the love, respect, and admiration, as we went along sharing a moment in time. Then it was over.

You learn to live with who you are and what you have. By taking the pictures and mixing in the community, I have come to know hundreds of people. And I myself have become a well known figure in the community, a few calling me the mayor of the Lower East Side. I don't know about that, but I do know that I share, I communicate, and I put something into the mix. I give something substantial back.

THE WINDOW, THE COMMUNITY AND MY DOCUMENTING IT

MY WINDOW tells the story. I have no desire to be connected to the mainstream, to the real mayor of the city, that is, nor am I interested in obtaining a place up higher in the social hierarchy. If I had wanted that, I would have filled my window with pictures of Madonna.

Instead, the photos in the window represent the people from my neighborhood. Most of them are from the lower class. They don't belong to the well-documented part of the social world. They, like me, are outside the orbit of the powerful. I am one of them in body, soul, memory, and spirit, even while, at times, my mind can be in its own space somewhere else.

Let me lay it on the line. With the Hall of Fame photos, as with the thousands of my other photos of people I have taken, it is my ambition to leave a truly amazing collection of photos of an inner city people: the good, the bad,

the dangerous, the kind, the sweet, the smart, the not-so-smart, the creative, the drunks, the religious, the ones whose minds are somewhere else, the average, the unusual, as well as, the outsiders, who may not have come from amongst the poor, but are outsiders.

And much of the collection, taken during a socially and economically depressed period, is of the street and those who walk it in a lower-class area. Given the nature of the photos, the volume of them, and the size and the scale of the collection of images, it's unlikely any other collections of this kind exists anywhere else.

My ambition is that this work get recognized and appreciated for what it is, to get the whole understood, and I mean, the photo collection, yes, but also the art and the ideas, as well as Elsa's enormous contribution. CLAYTON equally represents Clayton and Elsa, who have been collaborators all down the line.

I am the noisy, noticeable one up front, but we both deserve our place in history. And this is important for one reason. Because my work, although it does represent me peripherally, the guts of it, the true content is not ME, but rather US, all the people talked about here. This collection and body of work stands as a symbol for others who have no power. I do not stand alone.

Those who know my story, how I was jailed multiple times. The court case where I refused to give the courts my videotape of the Tompkins Square Park Police Riot and how this tape eventually did a lot to contribute to a purge of corrupt cops, those who know this see that power can come from inside, from an internal point of view.

My story and success should tell you that knowing you are right carries a lot of power. Power is based on faith. You can fight the power. I tell people that you do not have to compromise who you are or what you believe in, just because others do not comprehend what you are doing. That incomprehension may be disquieting, but it can't to stop you if you are determined. Just keep working, keep pushing.

As to my feeling about art, let me say, I call it a reflection of time and place. It can't help but be. Even if your work is outside the norm and reflecting an internal point of view, you are still in the here and now.

I feel, further, that you should flow naturally with the time. At least, that is how I have conducted my contact with our environment, almost never going where I was not invited, just walking through the doors that open to me. If I am invited to the dressing room of the Pyramid Club, I document that part. When I have done what I have come to do, though the show goes on (it must go on), I usually take off.

I've been invited many places in this community as you can tell from the photographs. I am a fan of what I am invited into, not of things in general, learning about that scene so far as and only so far as I have been welcomed to it. For example, since I am very familiar with parts (but only some parts) of the history of CBGBs -- much love, respect for my introduction by Ray Beez -- a friend found it

bizarre I didn't know many of the songs sung on and the people involved with the Punk scene. Fact is I don't know any of the songs as I was never there. I learn as far as I am invited into a space. That is my life and my journey.

This is not to say I have not formed deep connections, for I am extremely loyal to people who are a part of who I am and share a part of who they are with me. I will go a long way out of my way to help.

BRIEF FORAY BACK INTO THE GALLERY WORLD

BUT LET'S TURN from these reflections on life and art and move to a more biographical note. As the years passed, even though I did reach a level of fame and recognition, I never tried to get back into the art world, which had so turned me off. After all these years, I decided to try the game again. What the hell.

I decided to get into a Chelsea Gallery. I needed a front person because if I show up, the labels are immediately plastered on, "biker," "weirdo" or whatever.

I called my friend, Billy Leroy. Like me, he's had an interesting life, but he started out considerably further up the social hierarchy. He's from a well-off family, with an aristocratic genealogy, grew up on the Upper East Side, went to prep school, lived in Paris and wore \$800 shoes. I knew him because he hung around the well-known L.E.S. MC club and he has a business called Billy's Antiques and Props. I picked him as my front man.

Through a connection of his, Allen Steele, he got an interview at a good Chelsea gallery, Kinz, Tillou and Feigen. They loved the photos and immediately gave me a one-man exhibition at the beginning of the next season. They also spent the time and money to turn some of my photographs into exquisite prints. They, Michelle Tillou and Lance Kinz, did an absolutely wonderful job of mounting the exhibition, which turned out superbly. Tell you the truth, no matter how wonderful the people I worked with were, I still could not really connect with their crowd. And it turned out, Billy was not happy with that world either, so after the initial introduction, he moved on. I am back to square one, and have to do all the face work myself. Who knows where this is going to go? I still need to find someone who understands my work.

CAPTURED: THE FILM

MEANWHILE, a real stroke of luck came in the form of two young filmmakers: Ben Solomon and Dan Levin. As high school students, they used to hang out in their friend Filipo Chia's house. I know the mother of Filipo.

Ben, Dan and Filipo went on an adventure to Cuba to find some inspiring hip-hop and make a documentary film on the scene there. Getting to go to forbidden Communist Cuba was one major hurdle they had to get over. While

there, they found this amazing hip-hop group. Being able to document this scene took real diplomatic skills, and then to cut together a fine piece of work took another set of extraordinary abilities. As they shared their work with me, I was impressed with their ambition, their sense of adventure, and their ability to pull all this off and make high-quality work. Through the store aLife I was able to write and get a review of their film into the magazine Mass Appeal.

They went off to film school, graduated and came back to say they wanted to make a film on Elsa, me and the archives.

To tell the truth, over the years several legitimate movie and TV people come to me with the thought of making something out of my archives, a movie, a TV show, something creative, using my work. The result was always the same. Too many themes, too many choices, and the pros always ended up getting lost.

These two, Ben and Dan, came in with the energy of an Oklahoma tornado, with the concentration of our dog, Spider, digging for the milk bone I hid under the covers. Nothing was going to sidetrack them.

I gave them access to the archives. Once they had enough material to get started, they were joined by the editor Jenner Furst. They never shifted off the storyline they had created, never got lost or overwhelmed. The end result was *Captured, The Movie*. They are the first people to get the essence of the story - the beginning, the struggle, the work, the art, the archives, the activism, the changing of NYC. I was bowled over with the movie.

Even though the major festivals have bounced us, for example, the Tribeca Film Festival, which is NYC-based. It does not matter. The filmmakers nailed it. And, the best part of it is that people under 35 love the film. The system, the academy, and the mainstream people, like those who run Tribeca, do not understand what the struggle is all about. That's normal. But having the youth so enthusiastic is a pure joy. They get it.

If I can embroider on this theme for another moment, what is sad about the elimination from Tribeca is that these 3 young guys, making their first film, coming from creative artistic families, born and raised in NYC, are exactly the kind of filmmakers this festival should be supporting. Apparently, Martin Scorsese and Robert DiNiro, who are key to the Tribeca festival, have lost contact with their roots and their appreciation for the fact that someone helped them get started.

Mean Streets is a good movie. One critic described it as the best student film ever made. I agree. A good film, but it does not have the fully developed genius of *Goodfellas*. The director was allowed to work on his craft in this and earlier films. When he made *Mean Streets*, Scorsese had already made the film *Boxcar Bertha* for Roger Corman, who, with his low budget American International production company, had helped so many young directors, including Coppola, James Cameron (of *Titanic* fame), Ron

Howard, and Jonathan Demme (*Silence of the Lambs*), with their first projects.

Nowadays, it seems DiNiro is lost in Hollywood while Scorsese makes documentaries about the stars of his youth, Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones, and so on. Fine. But let's not forget or blank out the next generation of NYC filmmakers. Give something back, the way Corman did.

A critic might say I am only kvetching because the movie is about me. However, once you see the film you realize that it is not so much about me as about the people I support (through activism, photos and gallery shows), people whose work I want to see saved, remembered, discovered, understood, and finally appreciated.

To possess too much talent can be a curse. Creative artists tend to be similar to (the stereotype of) anarchists. To get to the new, they destroy the old, breaking the rules, reforming the mold. They pioneer new directions in thinking, opening alternative pathways, bringing visions that are far different from what society sees. No wonder people supporting the status quo see them as crazy.

If that exceptional artist is lucky, he or she will find an equally creative businessperson or anyone who sees through the madness and has the means to support the artist's creative endeavors. The exceptional artist also needs a bridge builder, some special person who can make the artist's seemingly fantastic ideas accessible to those who should know. Other than Peggy Guggenheim and Clement Greenburg, I cannot imagine there being many other people who (at first) had the ability to see what Jackson Pollack was doing. They built the bridges from the artists to the public.

SOME EXCEPTIONAL ARTISTS I HAVE KNOWN

OVER THE YEARS, often enough, I've seen extraordinarily creative, productive artists who never got that bridge to the mainstream and so were unjustly and unfortunately neglected.

Let me give some examples.

At the Pyramid Club I witnessed two people, typical A student types, hone their craft to a level of perfection that was both highly professional, yet not so extravagant that the masses couldn't catch onto what they were doing. These two became commercially successful stars: Lady Bunny and RuPaul.

Meanwhile, working on the same stage, the drag artist Peter Kwaloff was one of the most creative artists in that circle. Every week he would create a new character, complete with newly handmade outfits, done by Peter. These costumes were complete with inventive adornments on the shoes, self styled earrings, hat, dress, accessories, and the make-up. I wish these imaginative costumes had been saved, but in any case, thankfully, I have a good-sized collection of photographs representing his creativity. He is massively overlooked. By the way, Mr.

Fashion, Peter's backup singer, shown in *Captured The Movie*, just died.

Another example is Ray Beez, (R.I.P.), lead singer of War Zone, the skinhead band. He is underappreciated as to his social contribution. Ray's significance was not only his creativity and his musical ability, but his humanity, that is, his supportive, compassionate, loving personality. He had a remarkable ability to get people to unite, get along, and collectively use a space in peace. His openness and welcoming attitude gave many people the confidence to be a player in a band or a participant in a scene that was cliquish and difficult to break into. His genre was hardcore, which tended to attract a rough and tumble crowd that could easily break into violence. He defused all the tension.

Nelson Sullivan, (R.I.P.), who I have also tried to memorialize, is the person who changed my life by turning me on to video. He's a misunderstood cameraman genius. Most people don't grasp the problems of "one man, one handheld camera," especially when the solo camera-person is trying to capture the essence of a live music performance, working to make the shots interesting, but ones that flow into a seamless and continuous whole, without the viewer noticing any disruptions.

Think of shooting a group of people in one stage show, with different kinds of lighting playing across the space, and trying to do so without a flaw. It's like skinning an apple peel into 1/8-inch strips without breaking the peel. Only differences are the apple is possible to hold in one hand, does not move and the knife cut is uniform, following a clearly defined straight line. A large stage with numerous players expands the difficulties.

Nelson was the first person I ever saw who perfected the skill of "shooting" himself with his handheld camera, while, for example, walking down the street or entering a cross-town bus, never losing concentration or wobbling his outstretched camera arm.

His use of the video camera as artist's tool predated much of the type of camera work one sees used today. Today's MTV style is pure Nelson. He documentary camera style was years ahead of the rest of the pack.

Another person whose life I have fully documented is that of Jim "Mosaic Man" Power, the Vietnam vet, who has been contributing to the beautification of the L.E.S. by decorating the community with his mosaics. His Mosaic Trail includes all the lampposts he has decorated, sidewalk holes he has filled with mosaics, wall murals, building interiors he has beautified, sprinkled throughout the neighborhood, and his Avenue of the Arts. These mosaics create a special feeling of place.

Even if you do not notice the art, you intuitively feel the vibe of these broken chips of colored clay tiles, smashed plates, cups, saucers, lamps and other decorative ceramic items, along with the sparkling shards of mirror. Jim has taken the mosaic to places it was never imagined being as well as used materials never before used for mosaic work.

If you ask him about his work, he describes a whole mental landscape, that is creative, far out, complex, and original.

There has to be a species of madness connected to devoting most of your adult life and giving all your unpaid labor to making an unsubsidized work of public art. Jim spent years, bent over, working on his knees in a neighborhood that was then considered dangerous. The only protection he had was his trusty hammer. He was vulnerable. Crazyies have attacked him and he has been robbed. Jim has lived a completely Spartan existence: no nutritious or home-cooked meals, no refrigerator or kitchen table, no bed, no home. In place of that he had a bedroll on a floor, sometimes a place in a squat, or a corner in a basement furnace room.

Gentrification had closed all of these doors, and Jim has been forced out onto the street, with the sidewalk as his new bed. As old age creeps into his body, which is now a physical wreck, his hip joints are worn to the point he is hardly able to walk. His teeth are ground down to little nubs, broken shards poking out of his bleeding gums. Yet, no matter how many obstacles he is faced with, he stays his course, alone, except for his companion dog, Jessie Jane.

Who among us has this kind of vision, ambition and dedication to give every drop of sweat, blood and even your health, to just keep making an art, which continues to get more beautiful and complex?

And it's not just that no one supports him. There is this devious, constantly rising, sinister energy that's been inching its way towards successfully eliminating this incredible public art that defines a whole community, which Jim calls the Village. This subtle desecration of this important public artwork comes in the form of silver paint covering the mosaics on the lampposts, or, more drastically, the city's replacing the mosaic lamp poles with pseudo-artistic, expensive, factory-perfect, big-bellied black monsters. The excuses given for replacing the perfectly fine lamps already there is that they add a certain elegant beauty to the community (barf) and that there is no way anyone can steal electricity by plugging in a radio. In other words, another homeland security rationalization for eliminating one of the few spiritual aspects of the public environment.

Jim keeps fighting and doing his thing, but he does need new hips and a place to live. It would be wonderful if this monument to what the human spirit can, with a faith, hope, creativity and the desire to serve, accomplish were to be saved and celebrated. Jim's work must be officially recognized and saved before he dies.

Then, there's another person of great value whose memory I try to sustain. Joey SEMZ, (R.I.P.), is one of my favorite songwriters and singers. He was not a guitar virtuoso, but contributed to music with his lyrics, his passion, and his ability to reach way down deep into those dark emotional cavities of our soul. In all his songs, he spoke for the disenfranchised, the disjointed, the outlaw, lost ones, rejected and tortured in their souls.

There's also Jerry "The Peddler" Wade. Jerry got his name from selling on the street. He had a long history as a Yippie & squatter activist, with one of his specialties being leading a street mob, which, at times, has veered off and become a riot. He was one of the organizers of the Tompkins Square Park concerts: the summer punk shows, the Squatter May Day concert, and Tompkins Square Park Police Riot Anniversary concert.

BORIS LURIE

ANOTHER IMPORTANT figure was Boris Lurie, (R.I.P.), a survivor of the horrors of WW2. The distaff side of his family, except for one sister, was murdered by the Nazis. He and his father went through years in Nazi work camps.

Boris is one of the first Holocaust artists in America. He, along with Sam Goodman and Stanley Fisher, started a protest movement known as No!art, which reflects his vision. This is a view that is still too radical, even after all these years, for the establishment to deal with. He had an absolute dedication and commitment, so that he would not compromise his art, no matter the consequences, no matter how much rejection he faced.

We were friends, which means we had the opportunity to share long conversations about art, and I had the time to spend getting to know his vision. Unlike most of the people I've discussed so far, Boris is getting some recognition, albeit in Germany. I was able to "hand deliver" (that is, get him on the plane and bring him to the show) Boris to the Buchenwald Concentration camp for his one-man exhibition, held in the basement decontamination area.

Even though the art show at this memorial site was for survivors, Boris included a videotape of mine. He also included my videotape when there was a major No!art retrospective in three galleries in Berlin. Although I do not normally join groups, I did ally my protest art with that of Boris and his No!art group. I did this because Boris asked me.

The critics say the vitality of the No!art movement didn't outlast the early '60s, but its power is still felt. Dietmar Kirvis and myself carry the torch for Boris. Dietmar does the website.

Boris mixed art and protest into a vital and startling *mélange*, but, as of yet, we have not found the critics who have any understanding of his work. I take it as my duty to my friend's memory to speak of his art until the right person comes along to pick up the load.

In America, the few writers who have taken the time to look into what he was doing, at least superficially, place his art in the category of Dada. As I see it, this is a miscategorization.

Duchamp and others in the French group (allied to Surrealism) were anarchistic, their message a criticism of the academy. The art, like the upside-down urinal signed

R. Mutt, was offensive, but it was the work of a young person who had grown up with an upper-middle-class insider's anti-authoritarianism. One had to have a legitimate connection to the academy to pull this off. Does anyone actually believe that some unknown from nowhere could have gotten this statement recognized as great art? Or find this art collected by the academy?

These were privileged, nice boys, acting like bad boys by farting in public. This was the beginning of elitist insider art, cutting out anyone who did not have the proper education to understand the nuances of the statement being made. To a plumber this was just a urinal to be pissed in. To the bad boys this was pissing on society. For the new academy this pissotière was pure yellow gold.

European Nordic Dada had a stronger, more poignant political message, which spoke to a larger audience, and was specifically attacking their own government and the industrial capitalists connected to the war machine. They were protesting the devastation the war caused by and to their own people.

Similarly, now after the Second, the Dada were commenting on the First World War, Boris wanted these same people exposed, but he also wanted to go further and have the whole population take responsibility for its role in the social insanity of the Nazis. A parallel example of the message Boris was attempting to get out occurred in what happened when Patton and his army liberated the Buchenwald concentration camp. Patton made the whole population of Weimar, which neighbored Buchenwald, walk slowly through the camp, and witness firsthand the evil that, even if had not participated in directly, allowed to take place on their doorstep.

No question Boris suffered in making this art, but most of his suffering arose from the way his art was completely rejected by society. Someday a person of strength, power, and vision is going to come across Boris's art, be deeply moved and will act to put it out in the world more fully than I can.

That is my dream for all of these great artists I have worked to keep alive. If the movie will help viewers get a glimpse into these lives and start to open up an audience of inquiring minds, then, hopefully, finally, some serious creative people and academics will start digging into the work of these original thinkers. It should also give viewers some impression of the scope and depth of the archives. I just wish someone in the movie business would see the film and get a peek into how talented these 3 filmmakers, Ben Solomon, Dan Levin, and Jenner Furst, are. Just possibly that someone will extend a helping hand and give these struggling filmmakers the support they need to carry on. This would be a way to help the next generation coming up.

ALIFE

IT HAS BEEN MY CONNECTION with this younger generation that's allowed some of who I am to flower. They represent the bright side of gentrification since, as this happens, new people are moving in.

One particular connection began one night as I was walking down Orchard, between Houston and Stanton. It was late. I noticed the security gate up on a store. A group of young people, 1 woman and 3 guys, were putting the finishing touches on some kind of establishment. Pale green rectangles of masonite, about 10" x 13", were hanging on this wall. There must have been 300 of them. Every one had black-ink graffiti tags on them. I wouldn't be exaggerating to say I was quite intrigued.

"Hey. What's up?" this guy -- I soon learn he's Rob Cristofaro -- said, coming over. He introduced me to Tony Arcabascio, Arnaud De Le Colle, and Tammy Brainard. They are opening a shoe store called **ALIFE**. They were all cool and friendly. I asked about the tags.

These were tags of different graffiti artists they knew. Besides being a shoe store, their space would show art connected to the street. I thought, "Wow, finally someone getting the idea of the beauty and importance of the tag." They had a product they were involved in making and were showing art. I loved the idea. In many ways, it was parallel to what I had been doing since 1985. The Wall of Fame, the Hall of Fame, the caps, and the art exhibitions, and the publishing. I was hooked. aLife was connected to outlaw street life. I was a serious admirer and supporter of what they were doing.

The major difference between our businesses was where we were in the cycle of globalization. As I mentioned, when Reagan became president, there was this move towards globalization, which translated into the outsourcing of employment, both jobs requiring skilled labor, like x-ray readers and bank workers, which moved to countries like India, and those jobs in factory work, which went to countries that could reliably produce a consistent product, like sneakers, and had a supply of cheap labor. These last two factors were found in nations like Taiwan. When Elsa and I started manufacturing our own baseball caps, it was not possible to get the caps made in NYC. All the NYC companies were either going bankrupt and out of business. We were in no position to explore this new world of foreign companies and trying to get our caps made overseas. Instead we made them ourselves. We went to going-out-of-business auctions and purchased the sewing machines we needed for producing the caps.

Jump ahead 20 years. By the time aLife shows up, there are well-worn pathways to overseas manufactures that can produce sneakers. aLife is safe for a few years, but only until the next stage of globalization hits NYC. By 2002, the giant international corporations, like Excell, were buying huge tracts of the L.E.S. 2 international companies bought most of aLife's block on Orchard Street,

demolished most of the buildings, and started to put up 2 skyscraper luxury hotels. Because Elsa and I own our building, we are able to remain here, in spite of the overwhelming threat of this new real estate globalization (fueled by companies from around the world) that is steam-rolling through. However, aLife is sharp and they survived the first cut.

Over the years, aLife has spearheaded a mini-L.E.S. cultural renaissance. It was in their store, at their events, or side-streams of them, where I met amazing people, such as CLAW, Nico Ponce de Leon Dios, Dash Snow, Kunle Martin, Carl Carlucci, Cheryl Dunn, and Aaron Bonderoff as well as so many others. aLife designed Mass Appeal, a magazine, and they did a story on the Front Door and the Wall Of Fame. In another issue, they did a feature on my dope bag collection. They put one of my caps in the SoHo Deitch Gallery exhibition, and asked Elsa and I to design an embroidered jacket back for a fashion show, which ended up featured in Barneys' window. They created a very culturally rich environment, in which I found lots to learn and experience.

Out of this mix, Aaron Bondaroff came up with this brilliant idea of opening a store called aNYthing- a NY thing. Between aNYthing and aLife I met and was impressed by more young people: Joey SEMZ, Free Simon, Dan Colon, Agathe Snow, Ann Appar, Ann Binlot, Kathy Grayson, Patrick Griffin, Michael Nevin, Kathy Lo, and Julia Dippelhofer among them. I heard great music from groups like the Virgins, A.R.E. Weapons, and the Mod Rockets.

Aaron, like the aLife people used to be, is community minded, shares and has a bold approach to his form of creation and a fertile imagination. He is the first person I've met who can get on any level. He published my Seven Letter Word Drawings (SLWD). A beautifully bound, limited-edition book, with over 100 images. He is now doing this Front Door book. And he put me in an art show in the Colette store in Paris.

Aaron connects with someone who has some power and the imagination to understand Aaron's special talents. He is the ultimate insider, with leadership abilities. Luckily, he's social and his ideas are close enough for many people to get them. On top of that it, he has the drawing power to collect people around him (like Nick, Poppie, and Raphael) who can help pull off his ideas.

Through Aaron, the Downtown Don, I meet Kathy Grayson, who ended up doing an excellent article on my photographs for Michael Nevin's *Journal*. There she makes the point that even in an eccentric place like the L.E.S., where anything is expected and everything goes, I am seen as a weirdo. Probably true.

I live in my head (to a large degree), without being connected to many in the straight world, surviving by my faith in who I am, what I've done, and what further I want to achieve.

CREDO

IF I HAD TO GIVE MY CREDO, I would put it something like the following:

I do what I do because I have the will to do what I do.

I do what I do because it is the only thing I can do.

I do what I do because of my belief in who I am.

I do what I do because I was not made to do anything else.

I do this work because I am obsessed and driven to follow this path.

I have been chosen to do this work. I did not choose it.

This work is bigger than I am.

One concept that keeps my nose to the grindstone is that I see documenting the people of this neighborhood as a duty. I addressed a people from the L.E.S. to give them a history and a monument.

I believe if I hang in there long enough someone will come forward, someone who gets what the whole project, from art to archives (photos and videos), caps, ephemera, and the mystical side. The mystical is a whole other discussion.

Perhaps, in the way I have been explaining things, it seems easy, easy to be an outsider, with little recognition from the establishment, as long as one gets tons of respect from the community, as I do. But, tell you the truth, there are times I wish I could do something else, something more socially acceptable, something more publicly accessible, something that had some kind of positive thumbs-up recognition attached to it from the culture directors of society, something that gave us monetary return, something that had some kind of social status attached to it.

A critic might say I don't have the skills or facility to do such socially acceptable work, even if I turned my hand to it. I wouldn't agree with that, but, in any case, I am not one to change horses and give up my personal odyssey. I have stubbornly followed a task of great ethical depth. My art and documentary work springs from and constantly interact with my community.

30 years on the job, this one job, means that not only I myself have sunk roots in the soil of this urban tangle, but my art and documents have formed an intimate link, so that the people, the streets, and my work form an indissoluble whole in a way seldom seen outside the purest folk art.

To craft this type of output, I have obeyed certain self-imposed regulations. I want to be as honest as I can be to who I am, to those I am trying to represent, which is all meant to be a part of the struggle to make the art. Honesty to vision, self and others is working towards a form of perfection, truth and self identify that is never reached, but that is a part of what I am trying to do with my art. I work to be morally responsible to the values that I believe in, which include the ideal of offering service to humanity, especially to those on the outside and the forgotten ones,

but doing so by working directly with those in my own vicinity in need, and I don't mean only physical need but also in their need for recognition and respect.

To put it in a nutshell, I have my own commandments, 10 of them.

1. Never forget one's roots.
2. Never give up.
3. Never give in.
4. Never stop working.
5. Never forget the struggle.
6. Keep the faith
7. Stay true to your inner vision
8. Don't compromise your character or values
9. Be proud of who you are and where you came from
10. Help those who need it

As I said before, I have steered clear of criminal activity, not only because that is a misleading and spiritless way to live, but because, more pragmatically speaking, if one is going to challenge the system, especially as an individual without a large posse or group of defending lawyers or direct access to the system, then one has to know one is not made vulnerable by an indiscretion.

As I see it, you cannot be on point if you're are hiding involvement in illegalities. Otherwise, you find yourself caught up in contradictions. For instance, with one mind you are going toward a positive action, say exposing a cop who is abusing his power, with the other concealing your own misdeeds from the cop.

There is no time for such a split mindset, for moments of action are fast-moving, demanding clarity of intent and consciousness. If you have that unified direction that comes from moral probity, you will not hesitate. That's important. A moment of hesitation can cost you the shot. Fighting police brutality on the street with a camera takes self confidence, self-assurance, and a focused point of view.

Confidence is hard to pin down, and basically describable as a view of self and situation. Let's talk about its appearance in a circumstance that most people try to avoid, but that seems inevitable if you are at all involved in bucking the system, being arrested.

Confidence here does not mean a blind belief in oneself as being able to finesse every situation. Rather it means being clear in the head about one's purpose and (equally important) having some knowledge and mental self preparation for the likely consequences of one's actions.

Anyone involved in social activism, such as going to a protest, should be ready to face the common outcome of such interventions. You can be arrested or beaten up. If you are beaten up, it usually means that afterwards you are arrested for assaulting a police officer, resisting ar-

rest, disorderly conduct, obstructing governmental administration or put on the list as involved in antisocial behavior.

Being arrested changes the equation. Now the system is involved. You are thrown into the criminal court system, which may follow with a civil trial. You are now a center of interest to the system with all of the interlocking possibilities that this opens you up to: investigations, interrogations, depositions and trials, lawyers, and so on.

Note this distinction. Yes, you can be drunk on the street and yell and scream obscenities at the cops, during a street confrontation between them and a crowd. However, going for capturing a video record of police abusing their power in these pressured circumstance is completely different. Usually, to see what is going on, you will be on the frontline and within an arm's length of the action, and sometimes you can even become the action. If I may elaborate on this theme a little further, when you are serious about doing something to help resolve the problems associated with abuse of power, you must be willing to carry your proof or accusation to the furthest point you possibly can, whether that is registering a CCRB (Civilian Complaint Review Board) complaint, going to police Internal Affairs, filing a civil lawsuit or a criminal complaint, or getting involved in a police departmental trial. I have done all of these actions. One must have a belief in oneself to go all the way.

DOCUMENTING POLICE BRUTALITY VS. STREET ANTHROPOLOGY

ONE ACTIVITY THAT I AM PROUD OF is documenting police brutality with a video camera. On the night of August 6/7, 1988, I caught on video the police wilding out on the streets of the L.E.S., a critical evening for me, when I changed focus from artistic freedom to a probing of what freedom means on the streets. My investigating different forms of creativity gave way to a concentration on politics and police. The 3'33" video I made that night got the events that unfurled classified as a police riot, and, as I've already noted, had vast repercussions within the police department, including a chief's forced retirement, moving the captain out of the area, indictments of some cops and the firing of others. I had to hold up my head, for I was swimming in some very hot water indeed.

Let me tell you something. With all of the people society thinks are deadly and dangerous, such as drug dealers and thieves, in this community, over all the years of documenting these people I never had any problems. Then, there's the good guys, the cops. At their hands, I was knocked unconscious, had teeth knocked out, was called a scumbag, my character and motivations were lied about, and I got arrested a bunch of times.

Truth is that is that is the price you pay if you head

to the front line of the action, with the vow made in your heart that you are not going to make any compromise in what you are doing. It is the price of the ticket. You cannot play serious football without getting a few injuries. It is what it is.

At that time, after documenting the August 6th – 7th 1988 police riot, I had a raging passion to let the world know, not only what happened, but that one possesses a civil right to document police brutality. My case was something of a breakthrough. It was the first time that the handheld video camera had a public advocate who was willing to stand up and get the message out about its usefulness in recording abuses of authority. I got that message into numerous media, including mainstream newspapers, magazines, TV (all the local NYC news channels, plus CNN), university lectures, books, and video screenings. The appearance most people remember is when I was on Oprah Winfrey and held up my camera while saying, "Little Brother is watching Big Brother."

In sum, the voice and the camera can be a powerful tool, and I was trying to make clear to those who needed to hear that the camera can act as a defense system. A member of the NYC Black Panther Party gave me credit for their beginning to rely on the video camera as a means of protection during marches and at protests. Cop Watch got started, also relying on the camera as one necessary means to report on police abuses. The camcorder revolution had started.

I can say being radical with a camera is not the way to find an art career, or to be socially acceptable in the hierarchy of the art world. It is a way to find a form of truth in art. But it is much more socially and financially rewarding matching a painting with someone's couch, which has no consequences, has no backlash. It is pleasing to the eye. Makes people happy.

By contrast, fighting abuse of power, class struggle with a camera, as I call it, is a battle that never ends. There is no end, no finish line. It is endless. It carries emotional consequences, has an accumulative draining effect on one's emotions. There is the possibility of burnout. Depression. Few really appreciate a radical, thinking all radicals are cynical nay-sayers, whom, in the case of fighting law enforcement abuses, are out to vilify the police because of unconscious, unresolved issues.

It can be lonely, and it may seem like I am anti-social, but I do what I believe is right. And I stick to it.

In the L.E.S., one often sees ten-days' wonders. Young radicals used to come to this neighborhood because things were relatively lawless. To these fly-by-nights, the L.E.S. represented Bohemia and freedom of self expression. These passionate, rebellious youth used the inner city as a place to go wild, shout, grieve, destroy, menace, and be political. However, once the running sap of youth began to ebb, the radical kid decides he or she has to "find him/herself" and "get real." Now, it's time to say goodbye to the ghetto and go back home to safety and a career. They have

sown their wild oats and now it's time to forget working to improve society or breaking new ground in art. The world of big money and sell-out beckons.

But, let me say another word about the idea that someone fighting police brutality is simply out to vilify cops because of a psychic shortcoming of one's own. This couldn't be further from the truth, in my case and those with which I am familiar. We video makers are not stalking cops. Videoing police misconduct usually takes place during public protests or out-of-control arrest situations. You (as a filmer) do not hate the police. You are against abuse of power and social injustice, the loss of civil rights. I should also bring up a different circumstance. That occurs, not when you are at a protest, but when you are simply documenting the police doing an action of investigating a crime. There your point of view is different from the above. You are making a time-and-place document, creating a reference point for the future. As a street anthropologist, you can look back over arrest and investigation documentation to see changes over time. The procedures will change, the uniforms will change, the set-ups will be different. This kind of documentation is more objective, unemotional, straightforward. There is nothing to prove or wrongdoing to discover, unless, of course, there is an obvious secondary agenda unfolding before your eyes.

In such documentary efforts, you might say I was acting as a documentary journalist. However, in other circumstances, such as at marches or demos where there is likely to be law enforcement abuse, I no longer take this objective role. I am on the side of the little guy, against those who have more and are trying to victimize the ones who have less.

I do not hate cops. I hate abuse of power. Cops are people too, are usually following orders that they have no control over, and they, too, can be victims of a corrupt situation. Cops are only workers.

ON BEING A COP

I REMEMBER LISTENING to a conversation with Chief Julian, NYPD. He spoke of the climate in his precinct during the Koch administration when corruption was rampant. In those days, the bad guys ruled the precinct and set low standards for other cops to follow. These evil cops were often bullies, who made it impossible for the good cop to do the right thing. The rule was go along to get along. If you didn't play by the (distorted) rules of a corrupt precinct, you would be ostracized, victimized, and isolated. Remember also that being a cop can involve going into dangerous situations, where the backup of those you work with can be crucial to your survival. So, to keep on the right side of your brother officers, when the whole precinct is operating on corrupt principles, might mean going against your value system.

As a general rule, it is the bullies and the corrupt

who have the biggest mouths and are the most abusive. Maybe, it's because they realize in their hearts that what they are doing is culpable and they might be held accountable at some point. They realize, then, it's safer for them if everyone in the precinct is corrupt, so that no one dares to speak out. This kind of person wants everyone to be dirty. They will lie and get others to lie. It's a sad state of affairs, as lying corrupts one's head. It is bad if a regular person gets caught lying in a serious manner. It's like the crime of the century. A cop lies and it is business as usual.

Aside from the police getting drawn into wrong-doing when they work in a corrupt station, they are also sometimes insecure with their own authority. This can manifest in the need to control you and everything that is happening on the street. I've been in one-to-ones where the cop has the feeling he is not being listened to and that I'm going out of my way to challenge his authority. In that situation, the cop turned the nothing situation into a drama. The cop is now at the stage of saying, "You better listen to me," which has now taken precedence over the original point of discussion. This need for a feeling of control and a listen-to-me attitude is always a problem. You may be legally documenting an event and the officer's need to control interferes with you doing your job. It is always a personal choice how far you want to push the cop's irrational behavior, an on-the-ground decision you have to make, no matter how legal what you are doing.

THE ECONOMAKIS AFFAIR

I'VE ALREADY TALKED about burnout and how draining the effort of being a defender of the people can be. I have dedicated 20 years to the struggle, not a bad contribution. I have a serious section of historical images in the archive. I've been feeling that maybe it's time to hang up my spurs, and stop all the hard riding I've been doing in the cause of people's justice. I'm getting too old for this, I'd think. Then, like a jab in the eye, up pops another conflict.

Take the unbelievable case of Alistair Economakis, wealthy heir to a Greek shipping company, and N.Y.C. real estate tycoon, who purchased 45-47 East 3rd Street. Once he bought this 6-story, rent stabilized building that had two, ground-floor store fronts, and 15 families, he moved to effect a mass eviction of everyone in the building. Some of the families lived there for decades. Young adults had grown up in that building.

But, isn't there a law against such actions? Well, there is a rule that a new owner has the right to evict people from apartments that he or she is going to use if the owner sets up residence in the building. In the average case, the new landlord will evict people from one apartment. But Economakis, his wife and 2 infant children say they need the whole building for their own private mansion. After all he needs a floor (four apartments) for himself and his lovely wife to lounge around on, a floor for the babies, a

gym, a library, a corner for the nanny, the cat needs space, and they need a bathtub big enough to swim in.

I guess it's part of this new ideal world (for the super-rich) being engineered by people like Bloomberg, our billionaire mayor, President Bush, and those of their ilk. For them, the Economakis family has every legal, moral, and ethical right to evict all the tenants. The law says that a landlord can take over a space, evict the tenants, rent stabilized or not, for his own use. Okay, fine, a space, an apartment, but never before has a landlord been so greedy and power mad as to think of a taking over a 2 address, 6-story tenement, as one space for himself. The arrogance, sense of self-importance and entitlement, which allows you the right to crush anyone without wealth beneath your boots is, to say the least, overwhelming.

And, the fact is, there is no dissent all the way up that the chain of authority, including at the highest court in the State of NY. All the authorities agree that Economakis can take the whole building for his own personal use and throw everyone onto the street.

You can see that laws are flexible, a concept, a point of view, a grouping of words, and like any concept, point of view, or grouping of words, they can be moved around and interpreted in different ways.

Where the law stated that a landlord was allowed to take some of the building for his own personal use, no one, previously, thought this gave him the right to empty a 6-story building. But, now it is found that it only takes the demands of one person, as long as he is well-heeled enough to afford a creative, fast-talking, expensive lawyer (one without a conscience, of course) and the words and concepts of the law can be twisted into a new point of view. Come to think of it, when the next overreaching billionaire comes along, he may buy a whole block and dump the residents, saying he needs every building for his family, hangers-on, servants, and pet menagerie. But, to return to the present case, I want to note that: Yes, it may be The Law, but in my world, what Economakis is doing is morally and ethically wrong, PERIOD.

Let's lay it on the line. Economakis is breaking up families, throwing people into the street, making people homeless; as well as setting a precedent, which will light the way for others (in the millionaire's club) to follow. Economakis has found a way to legally steal people homes, their sense of security and well-being, a way to clear out thousands. The Economakis way is legal, gentlemanly.

He has the support of the law, the system, the protection of the police. He joins Marie Antoinette in saying, "Let Them Eat Cake." Well, if he can join Antoinette, I can join the L.E.S. activist John Penley, who called a demonstration using the poster, which read, "They Say Let Them Eat Cake. We Say Let Them Eat Shit."

Look at this billionaire's sense of entitlement and his self-importance, based on ME vs. anyone other than me, or, to put it more honestly, his de facto statement, "Your family can go live in a homeless shelter, for all I care, be-

cause my cat needs a place to wash her toenails." Do you see the difference between the morals of the righteous billionaires, and those of the people in my world?

To think that Mayor Mike, and all of the other powerful in this city, by their silence, are allowing this tragedy to prevail. To think that the mother of his wife, Catherine Economakis, is a Dean of Urban Studies at Columbia University. It makes you wonder what values are being taught at this high-priced Ivy League University. But, maybe, though I don't know this, it's like the case I mentioned with William Casey. I noted that the think tank Casey founded operated with the same lying and high-and-mighty treachery that also characterized the CIA, which Casey once headed. I wonder if the heartless twisting of the law so as to carry out dirty real estate deals that Economakis makes use of is not also found in some of the (much-deplored by Harlem residents) land grabs Columbia has made in its neighborhood.

It also makes me wonder that on the outrageousness of this destructive-to-humanity greed, we hear no comment from Sheldon Silver our local "most powerful democrat in the state" assemblyman. We do see the thumbs up from our billionaire mayor Bloomberg. Like ya right, let's keep Bloomberg in power and give him a 3rd term because he is the only who can fix the economy- sure his rich friends' economy. No, I say, "Kick the bums out of office."

NOTES ON ANOTHER REAL ESTATE SCAM

FUNNY, I brought up Columbia University's notorious displacement of the poor in its upper Manhattan neighborhood. As I said, not being from that area, I don't know the details on that one, but closer to home, it turns out, another top-flight university is involved in dirty dealings. And it's taking place on the same 3rd Street block as the Economakis grab!

A landlord, built a near-skyscraper luxury apartment building, which had numerous legal issues. For one, it broke the zoning laws by going up too many floors for a residential street. In doing so, the landlord lied about permits as well as violated several other laws. The community, along with the local city councilwoman, the state assembly representative, the borough president, and others raised a hue and cry. Then, suddenly sweeps in "Swiftly the Lawyer" to the landlord's rescue. He discovered a "loop-hole" in the law big enough to drive a truck through. The landlord made the whole thing legal by renting the space as a dorm, to NY Law School. He did so because the same laws don't apply to university residences as apply to normal dwelling places, so that legally he could build higher than he could if this were simply a residential dwelling. It's the law of so-called "community usage." Right. NY Law School is not even in the neighborhood.

I was outraged by this latest shoddy means of ruining the neighborhood, and I sent letters to all the professors

at the NY Law School, asking them if they thought using their school to destroy a neighborhood by building this monster on the block was ethical and whether it would send the right message to their students. Never got a response. Makes me wonder what kind of ethics and law courses are being taught at this university. I had hoped they were teaching about justice, but I suspect they emphasize, instead, how to sell your legal expertise to the highest bidder.

WHERE'S THE FIRE?

ONE MORE INCIDENT pulled me back to documenting the struggle at a point when I was nearly burned out. Let me tell you the story. Back in the days, we had a community telephone tree. Something happening (such as the police trying to illegally evict a squat), then a list of people would be called. Many of the people called would drop what they were doing and would show up, because they knew the party had started: evictions, fires, riots, and arrests. A neighborhood defense team would be on the case. We were like the Minutemen of the past. That tree is still used today to a lesser extent.

So, in June 2008 I got a call from a neighbor telling me about the fire department showing up on Ludlow, ladder going up to the roof. Elsa and I rushed over to see for ourselves what was going on. It turned out was just a small stove fire. Since I was there, I thought I'd collect some fire department pictures. I wouldn't be interfering with them doing their jobs since there was no emergency, the street wasn't blocked, there was no frozen zone and no police line. The street was open, people were walking up and down, one kid passing through looking and bouncing a basketball. Businesses were open. The problem seemed to have already been solved, with firemen gathering their equipment, leaving or just standing around talking.

So, walking up the block comes this police sergeant. He tells me, only me, to move off the block. I ask politely where I can stand. He says at the end of the block. I was thinking this was an unlawful order. I saw this as targeting me. So, I went on with my photographing and got arrested. Elsa is there, and like so many times before, she photographed the incident.

I tell you I was pissed off. A critic might say, "Clayton, why make a federal case out of this? Couldn't you have just moved on? You weren't documenting police brutality. There was no issue involved." But that's where my critic would be wrong. There is an important issue here.

A major part of my struggle has been about the rights of an individual to take pictures on the street. The street belongs to the people. The corporations and government can have cameras everywhere: buses, subways, elevators, street corners, parks, inside the buildings, outside the buildings, in police cars and so on. Why can't the people have the same right?

It's not a privilege. It's what freedom is all about. You sacrifice your freedom of thought by giving up each right, small or large. Soon you are on the street and you think twice about taking a photo, and maybe you don't take it.

I remember meeting a Russian filmmaker, who talked to me about the collapse of Communism, which had already happened at that time. She talked about being free, but what she was really struggling with was freeing up her mind. She still felt she was always watched, always had to consider what she was doing, in both public and private, in case prying eyes or ears were around. I don't want to live that way. I don't want to lose my actual freedoms or my sense of freedom.

Over the years, I have observed that documenting the fire department is completely different than filming police. Firemen are not concentrating on you; they are focused on the job. They are used to working in chaos, moving around all kinds of people and obstacles, not that you ever want to get in the way. They are real heroes, because every situation they face has the potential of being life threatening. Can you even contemplate how, when everyone was running out of the WTC, they were running in? Recall what a large percentage of the department was killed on 9/11.

I've seen this repeatedly. They run towards danger. They climb up a ladder, which can be almost vertical and several stories high, wearing heavy protective clothing, which makes it difficult to move around in, further being weighed down by equipment in one hand and draped over shoulders. The work may involve heavy-duty construction, manual labor. And once the fire is out, there is a feeling of purpose fulfilled and accomplishment. Because the job action involves coordinated efforts to save lives and property, there is such a need for the whole team to be on the same page at the same time. The fact that they spend so much time together at the firehouse, sharing the cooking and taking care of each other, seems to produce a positive disposition. They also always garner an upbeat response from the community. People are happy to see the fire department show up. Firemen save lives and property. All I can say is I am a true admirer of their bravery. Without question, I love, respect and support the fire department.

ON CRIME (ESPECIALLY DRUGS)

OF COURSE I HAVE gotten more cops in trouble with the video camera than probably anyone else in the protest world, so lies have been used to try and neutralize me. As to people outside the law, I am not dealing with them about criminal schemes. I am approaching them as neighbors, people in the community, people I photograph. I am looking to document their good side, not their criminal side.

In the inner city, cops are authorities and they have the power. Criminals have the society against them. They have the police and all the justice system after them. Cops

have little oversight. It is necessary to make sure that their power is not abused.

Let me add that, other than videoing cases when those in power, who are expected to not be involved in crime, but who I have caught abusing their power, I do not document crimes. Perhaps, if I was passing a bank robbery in progress, I would put my video recorder on my shoulder and catch the action, but I do not work for the police. I am not a criminal either and don't associate with criminal activity, but I don't want anything of mine to be used as evidence against any individual, unless, it were an extreme case, such as catching a pedophile or something along that line. Using the tapes against those who have the government and the power of the system over others is a different story.

Why is a criminal lifestyle a fact of life in the inner city? It is not the individual poverty that is the problem. The people living here are just as ethical and as good as people who live anywhere. It is the choices and opportunities that people have as options. Generally, there is no police department to call about the drug dealing or crime on your block, since most calls you make will be ignored or, when the cops show up, everyone is seen as, if not a criminal, then an undesirable. And you see things like a police car driving down the block when the drug dealing is going on right in the open, like nothing is wrong. Or the cops are known to deal with the situation by using excessive force. Or, as in the 1980s, the NYPD had numerous corrupt cops involved in the drug trade. With all these circumstances, drug dealing or other criminal activities appear as viable options.

Believe me, this was not TV Land in the old days. There was no need for all this specialized spying equipment that is portrayed on cop's shows. Ask the child in grade one who deals drugs on his block and chances are the kid will know everything there is to know about the local trade. There was no mystery to what is going on. Dealers would be openly hawking their products. The drugs had brand names on the packages, which signified a specific buying location.

(Ironically enough, I saw that the Seattle musician in the band Smashing Pumpkins (which was on tour and playing in New York) knew he could buy heroin on 3rd Street and Ave C. He may not have known that the brand name was Red Rum, but any number of the thousands of junkies buying heroin the area knew could have told him that.)

Let me make another point about why getting a job in the drug trade may have been attractive to an L.E.S. resident. He or she might notice that, without the penalties that could accrue to a L.E.S. user, well-off people were taking drugs like mad in the 1980s.

I talked to a young kid who had the following experience. He was hip and was able to get into hot clubs, for example, the uptown Studio 54, where he was star struck and dazzled by the number of recognizable, powerful

people with social status and money, wandering around the club. He noted the open and obvious drug dealing and consumption going on in plain sight. He'd seen similar behavior in some dives in the hood, only difference was that these were the people looked up to by the media, talked about as role models, and seen on TV or in the movies. These were the pillars of society, a whole cross-section, all consuming drugs like there was no tomorrow and, more significantly, as if they were legal. Perhaps they were, he thought, for a certain echelon of society, since these people never suffered any legal consequences. Their hotspots were sanctuaries for open drug dealing and consumption, as well as for people having sex in public. For God's sake, one of the main symbols of Studio 54 was the man in the moon with an animated cocaine spoon.

Another kid I knew from the L.E.S. was a messenger on Wall Street. Cocaine was fashionable and it snowed cocaine during the Reagan era. All the expensive fashion accessories, the gold spoon and the 100 dollar bill were to be used to do the blow. These people were also protected. It seemed they had free rein to break any law they wanted to.

I mean, books were published lovingly chronicling the club scene, showing people breaking all kinds of laws. It meant nothing. These people were wealthy and connected so everyone smiled. Add to that the seemingly never-ending news and fashion reports about Hollywood, which talked about all the drugs available in that world. The impression was that the privileged, the rich, the famous, the jet set had immunity from arrest and prosecution. The laws were made to be broken by, and only by, those at the top.

The police problem was downtown. If the police get caught dealing drugs they may get fired, but no jail time. The legal system is separate and not equal. Power and money change the equation.

So, here's the disconnect. What the elite were doing drug-wise, which seemed not very dissimilar to what users were doing in the hood, somehow it was different, accepted and never penalized. The one equalizer, though, was the fact that the rich and famous could also OD and die.

While the young men I've mentioned were confused by seeing how the elite's drug use was tolerated while its sale and consumption in the L.E.S., while often let slide, could also lead to heavy jail time, they did know how negative drugs can be. This, too, was part of their experience, probably in a more upfront way than ever faced the elite. They witnessed the death and devastation surrounding the business of drugs, and saw people arrested and sent up for long prison terms. On all sides, they observed AIDS from needle sharing, the breakdown of character, the shootings and stabbings, and the breakup of families. They could see what happened to those who began to depend on drugs, the loss of self because of addiction, the desperate need for more, stealing, how much money it took to

get straight. They saw what happened when a dealer or addict got caught, how people are treated in court, in jail, and in other parts of the justice system. These were the lessons easily understood. But the money that could be made was always tempting.

VARIOUS DRUG CLEANUP CAMPAIGNS

THE OPEN DRUG DEALING on the streets of NYC was a phenomenon that was recognized (and deplored) worldwide. In the first term of Mayor Koch, in the early 1980s, there was a push to clean up the trafficking in an effort called Operation Pressure Point. This program put hundreds of people in jail, getting rid of the obvious, in-your-face dealing and, without really curtailing the trade, made the business more low key. You no longer saw long lines of people standing on the street waiting to buy drugs. You stopped seeing large crowds of dealers congregated in one area as addicts swarmed around, waiting to buy, as you used to see in places like Sara Delano Roosevelt Park. The operation also cleaned out a number of shooting galleries. Now, by getting trafficking off the streets and so making the neighborhood safer (at least on the surface), it became ripe for investment in the fallow real estate market. However, that development was interrupted by the 1988 Tompkins Square Park Police Riot, which made it obvious ranking cops had zero authority over their underlings, who openly disobeyed orders, covering their badges with tape, or removing their badges, or exchanging badges so they couldn't be identified when they went on head-banging sprees. The riot made it clear that the cops were undisciplined, and that small cells of rogue cops could follow their own private agendas.

Mayor Koch had always been hands off the police department and, as the Tompkins riot demonstrated, the police were hands off with discipline of patrolmen.

Then Dinkins is elected Mayor. Possibly because he is Black, but, for whatever reason, he expresses the no longer open secret, saying police brutality exists, and it is a civil rights problem. Dinkins goes on to imply that there is a connection between the open drug markets and the police brutality.

Dinkins worked according to these equations. You cannot control the city if you cannot control the streets. You cannot control the streets if the cops are corrupt and engaged in criminal activity. Starting from this analysis, he formed the Mollen Commission. The Mollen Commission, led by retired Judge Mollen, broke wide open the police drug/corruption scandal.

Meanwhile, parallel to cleaning up the corruption, was putting an end to independent precinct control, in which each separate station house ran itself. He moved to a top-down, paramilitary model, with all precincts controlled and answerable to the top brass. As the department was getting cleaned up, Mayor Dinkins hired

hundreds more cops, who would be socialized to the new organization and perspective in the department.

It took from 1988 to 1992 for the NYPD to become a razor-sharp, paramilitary organization. If in 1988 the cops could not close 10 ½ acre Tompkins Square Park, by 2001, on the day of 9/11, they closed the whole city in 2 hours, including bridges, airports, tunnels, and city streets, in the process stopping the ferries, buses, and subways.

I documented the NYPD reorganization, which included, in its course, a number of riots. After Dinkins, came Giuliani, who took over a well-armed, well-disciplined, army of cops, which could now be employed in the next critical step in cleaning up drugs and crime in the neighborhood, so as to speed the pace of gentrification.

Soon after getting elected, Giuliani named Bratton police commissioner. The new commissioner partnered with Detective Jack Maple, making him Deputy Commissioner. These two understood the idea that if you clean up visible petty street crime, get rid of the corner dealers and public nuisances, like the squeegee guys, the image of the city will improve. The criminals, homeless, and, most importantly, any poorer residents could be pushed to outer boroughs, and middle-class people will psychologically feel safer in the L.E.S. All of Manhattan will slowly transform into a place where people will want to invest. It was the Broken Windows theory. This was the new agenda.

Giuliani had been a federal prosecutor and understood the NYPD. When he attacked the NYC street drug dealers, he did not use just the NYPD (which even with all the changes Dinkins instituted, he did not want to completely rely on). Giuliani formed a three-tier task force, employing federal, state and city police departments, all, of course, with high-ranking oversight.

By Giuliani's second term, the old L.E.S. ghetto was no more.

You can almost draw a line through history between when the old L.E.S. world ended, and the new gentrified world became a reality. The constant, slow-moving push, over many decades, to gentrify the L.E.S. had finally come to fruition. From my vantage point of documenting so much of this change, I saw the demarcation line, as if I were walking on the beach and noting the shift between wet and dry, illustrated by a change in color-tone, marking, for me, the final line in the sand showing where the end of that long L.E.S. wave finally stopped. Just as the muse left Paris after WW2, the muse is probably now in China. Welcome to American Montmartre, a tourist attraction neighborhood where you can walk the deserted paths of now-departed, inspired creators.

When I take some community photographs I think of them as period pieces, that, when looked at 50 years from now, viewers will be intrigued by all the differences in the community, the changes in population, architecture, style, dress, procedures and so on. These photos are for history.

THE L.E.S. AS A CALDRON OF CREATIVITY: GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

THE OLD L.E.S. had always been a mixed bag, filled with both poor immigrants and Bohemians. It sheltered, in turn, or simultaneously: the Irish, Dutch, Jews, Polish, Ukrainians, Russians, Blacks, Italians, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Bangladeshis, Chinese, and Japanese, among others. All these groups, when they moved on, left behind a definable footprint of their culture. Until recently, when you walked the streets, you would note the Polish meat market cheek by jowl with the Jewish deli, Chinese takeout, Japanese sushi place, Bangladeshis sweet store, Black jazz club, Italian pizza parlor, Puerto Rican rice and beans restaurant, places selling Dominican rum, the Russian baths, the store where you could buy Ukrainian Easter eggs, and Irish pubs. All that's more or less gone. Almost any recognizable connection to these ethnic pasts has been homogenized out of existence.

Cheap rent, which was essential to the working-class immigrants, also sustained a creative community that went on and changed the world of visual thinking (and other worlds). Pollack, Rothko, Newman, Charlie Parker, Charlie Mingus, CBGB's, Fillmore East, and so many other creative people, as well as, venues, went through years of struggle before they were discovered and adopted into the pantheon. The creative types could endure all those tough years because they found low-priced digs, eateries and bars, that meant they could work on their art without too much interruption in having to make a living.

The people and venues I just mentioned are just a few links in the L.E.S.'s chain of the endless struggle, made up of both those who did receive and those, equally as significant, who still have not gotten the appreciation they deserve for their commitment and cultural contribution. Links in this chain include (among those still around) Jonas Mekas, Aaron Beal, The Living Theater, La Mama, Millennium Film Workshop, Theater for the New City, and ABC No Rio. Then we have the ones who have disappeared, such as Boris Lurie, the Rivington School, Adam Purple's Garden, Toda Con Nada, House of Candles, Collective: Unconscious, and so on.

I'm not sure -- now that the Bohemian neighborhood has been eliminated and with it the support structures that helped artists of all types get by in tough times -- how the youth of today are going to be able to hang on long enough to find an audience or person who not only gets what they are doing, but can help secure their contributions.

Think, for a moment. In the 1960s Lou Reed rented a loft on Ludlow Street for \$38 a month. He had the opportunity to work his way through all his fits and starts, his problems, his insecurities, his addictions, his gender confusion, and yet, after all of these obstacles had been worked through so they could be rendered in artistic form,

he could become Lou Reed. The new luxury building on Houston and Ludlow rents studio apartments for \$3,000. Hmm, I wonder if Lou could still be Lou paying this kind of rent? Come to think of it, how long could Pollack, with his empty pockets and his drinking habit, last before he was thrown out and made homeless? Or would he quickly come to the inevitable conclusion, "Man, I am wasting my time and little bit of money doing these stupid drip canvases."

One thing that powered the artistic renaissance in the Lower East Side were the remnants left behind by each of these immigrant or cultural groups. Yet, to get to the bottom line, that was not the chief cause of the major streams of creativity that continually poured from these streets. There was one ingredient that had the greatest impact on this creative center of gravity, which attracted and nurtured most of the people who helped change the history of America, such as, to add to the list above, Jack Smith, Harry Smith, Charlie Parker, Charles Mingus, Emma Goldman, Houdini, Allen Ginsberg, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Allen Ginsberg, Barnett Newman, Flo Kennedy, Boris Lurie, George Burns, Amiri Baraka, Miguel Pinero, Judith Malina, Rav. Moshe Feinstein, Dorothy Day, WeeGee, and Jacob Riis. I mentioned it before. It was cheap rent.

If rent and most other things were cheap in the area, then, as it turned out, one needed very little money to survive. That was the ticket to artistic freedom.

In the late '70s and early '80s there were any number of places one could get a 99 cent breakfast, 2 eggs cooked to your idea of perfection, hash browns, toast, 3 choices of bread, and an unlimited number of coffee refills, plus a glass of orange juice. As to entertainment, there were a number of clubs, in which the bridge and tunnel paid the operating fuel while the inspired locals created the magical energy, performing in bands, skits, poetry readings, or taking pictures.

There were plenty of cheap clothing places for any style, from vintage to job-lot type places. There were remainder shops selling last year's designer outfits and secondhand stores, with a variety of clothes, ranging from conservative business to frumpy housewife. Local designers selling Goth and hippie wear. You could even unearth the local avant-garde shops, from which the defining images taken by Madonna and David Bowie were taken. Fabric for the original Klaus Nomi outfits. There were hideaways that carried the London to NYC underground look for aspiring punks, and skinheads. Or you could go to Army surplus for the utilitarian military garment. And, if you were the average Bohemian, you would mix and match from all the venues.

I'm talking a lot about the clothing scene, because, as I brought out before, I made caps for a while. It was a small storefront baseball cap maker, who also embroidered names on sports jackets, that I persuaded to embroider my designs around the baseball cap. Thus the cre-

ation of the Clayton Cap. Cheap rents also made viable many small, eccentric businesses, that cannot live in high rent areas.

MY PART IN A NOBLE, IF LOST BATTLE: COMMUNITY ADVOCATES AGAINST GENTRIFIERS

THESE COMMENTS ABOUT the viability of L.E.S. as a Bohemian enclave have been a bit of a digression from my story about the (so called) clean up of the L.E.S., which, while eliminating much of the visible criminal activity, also ended up pushing out many of the poor people, as well as, the creative types. It was this second result that led many in the community, myself included, to fight certain aspects of the various police anti-drug programs.

On the surface it may seem unbelievable to readers that there were opposing sides in this effort to clean up the city. But those of us in the opposition did want drugs cleared off the streets and crime lowered. We wanted our community to be safe. This was not what the fight was about. It was over who got the neighborhood after it was made whole.

The way the deck was being stacked, it seemed the answer was the community was being fixed up for the gentry. We wanted the community to be for the groups of people it had always taken in, the poor and the artistic fringe.

The '88 Police Riot certainly was a wake-up call to community advocates. Because, given the way police would beat anyone indiscriminately, including neighborhood residents who were passing by, it was obvious that the cops hated everyone in this community. We were not THEM.

This night there was no discrimination in who was clubbed senseless: restaurant managers inside their place of work, visitors, woman of all ages, anyone on the street of the L.E.S. The authority's attitude was nakedly revealed. This was a night of authorized police rage against a defenseless community.

This landmark explosion, which for a few weeks took over all the local news, became known as the August 6/7 1988 Tompkins Square Park Police Riot. Once sections of my 3'33 videotape made their way into the media, my life changed.

I did not want to give up my original material, because I was afraid I would lose the rights to it, once it became evidence, government property. That would be it. I would lose control and possession of what I had created.

I was and am an artist, with an artist's way of looking at what he or she has made. This was my art, I felt, and the original belonged to me. Because I took this stance, I was arrested, found in contempt of court and sent to jail for 90 days. After a 10-day hunger strike and a talk with my lawyers: Lynn Stewart, Bill Kunstler, and Ron Kuby, I

agreed with them and we made a deal with the court. The original belonged to me and they could get a first generation copy.

In the end I was right to take precautions. They screwed up their copy and lost ½ an hour of tape. I let them copy it again, but only at a public place. During this struggle, I dealt with many radical lawyers, including Alton Maddox, C Vernon Mason, and legal expert Al Sharpton. The most hardcore and best people I had defend me, and also support me were Lynn Stewart, Alton Maddox, Al Sharpton and much to everyone's surprise Sarah Jones, a Legal Aid lawyer who was strategic and very effective at dealing with the system.

This riot tape made even an idiot realize that there was something wrong with the NYPD. What else could you think when you saw police acting the part of a criminal gang, wilding out of control and beating up anyone they came across on the streets of the L.E.S. Here's a dialogue with a cop caught on my tape

Civilian: I thought the streets were free.

Cop: They are not free tonight

Another cop: Get out of here. Go home. Get out of here.

The streets referred to in this short dialogue are over a block away from the park. Realistically speaking, the cops could have closed the park, held the park, and it would have been over. They would have more than likely won the night. The Park is dark, there are few entrances, once the cops starting kicking people out there there was no reason to be in the park. There were lots of cops and horses. Protesters would know getting caught in a dark park would be stupid. They would have had to abandon the terrain to the police.

But under the bright street lights is best for public eyes, that is, if the cops, instead of really wanting to control the park, wanted to imprint a message on the collective thought of the community that the cops were in charge.

A number of very obvious incidents of police brutality were exposed on my tape, which I will call the TSPPR (Tompkins Square Park Police Riot) tape. Such as the Ave. A and 6th Street bicycle knock down, in which a cyclist got clobbered. I caught quite a few of these demented moments. I was the money shot person for just about all the fines and compensations the city paid out, in that my video showed the cop's clearly and violently violating people's rights.

At one point I was told by a reliable source in the city, that the city had paid out more than \$2.2 million in relation to police abuses that night. I know 3 for-sure \$300,000 paydays. You could say they got the gold, I got the shaft. In that they got money based on what was shown on my tape, while I was now of the road of repeatedly getting arrested and roughed up for making the tape and trying to maintain my rights to it.

Cops can get away with a lot, but if they cost the city money, someone has to pay. A clear videotape of the in-

cident is a real asset as evidence in many of these court cases, both criminal and civil.

I don't think the police were too happy about this state of affairs, and I became a street target for cops. Keep this in mind. Police brutality, although never justified, is a fact of life. What made the TSPPR tape so damaging, so incriminating for the ranking officers, was not the cops beating up the innocent, but the obvious fact that the officers had no authority over their subordinates. Moreover, the higher ups not only had no control, they had no plan. One of the most critical shots in the tape is the white shirts (police brass) trying unsuccessfully to stop the blue shirts (patrolmen) from randomly running off on their own wild-gang agendas.

39,000 cops in NYC and no control. No order. No one in charge. Not a pretty picture. The riot tape made visible that there were trained teams of cops who rat pack. These teams have a coordinated, practiced set of actions, which had obviously evolved totally outside of the authority structure in the department.

You see, the Police Riot made many of us political. Elsa and I joined the fight to make the community a better place for its current (not future yuppie) residents. Many of us got involved in fighting police brutality, fighting for homes for the homeless, fighting against the takeover of buildings like the Christadora, which had always been a space that served the public good and was turned into an expensive private residence. We fought against the building of Red Square, the first new expensive high-rise in our purview, carrying a statue of Lenin and a clock that didn't tell time. The symbols appeared to mock the radical past of the neighborhood, which, apparently didn't know what time it was. However, contrary to what this and other developers might have liked, we refused to get with the rich people's program.

After 1988, I became prominent in the anti-gentrification movement. I fought back using my camera, my documentation, Elsa always at my side.

During the Koch administration hundreds of people who had lived in SROs (Single Room Occupancies) were dumped into the street and the hotels were turned into expensive coops. The streets of the city were filled with people sleeping in every conceivable nook and cranny. The shelter system was over-crowded. In them, the communicable secondary diseases associated with AIDS were rampant because of people's low immune systems; TB was being spread at epidemic rates; the places were inhuman and had draconian rules and regulations.

The L.E.S. radical movement worked to get the homeless off the sidewalks to set up camp in Tompkins Square Park, which would make the problem, to which the government turned a blind eye, more noticeable. This Tent City homeless camp was impossible to ignore. It got plenty of news including international media coverage. We may not have had the wealth and power of the system, but we were a formidable force that gave out as many black eyes

as we received.

We felt change was a-coming. We did not see using the park as a Tent City a solution for the homeless crises, we saw it as a way to force the city to deal with all of the people on the streets.

Sadly there is no heaven on earth, especially when the forces against you are fluid and respond in their own defensive ways. Once you fix one problem, you trade it for another. But that's progress. In the end, many homeless people from the streets died. But a number found housing in squats, some got apartments.

I documented these times. We started out trying to find ways to house the homeless, which eventually led to squat wars, when some homeless took up residence, with others, in abandoned buildings. This culminated when, to drive out one group, cops brought in a tank and machine guns, put sharpshooters on the roofs, and used hundreds of troops to evict 4 buildings on 13th Street.

We did save a number of the squats, which became private residences. That's a move I was in favor of, as I believe that everyone should own his or her own home. These struggles went on for over a decade.

The most intense time was 1988 through 1992, then it was on again and off again. It is interesting to note that the established Left was against us, because NYC was a Democratic party city. This is to say that the Democrats were in control of all the housing agencies that funneled money into various (scanty) tenement rehabilitation programs. So all the abandoned buildings in the neighborhood were considered their turf, not to be interfered with by the homeless or those desperate to get a roof over their head.

I think because of the NYC Democratic Party adamant opposition to the squats that, even those who generally standing up for the rights of all people, such as the Pacifica station WBAI-FM radio personality Amy Goodman, were nowhere to be found. The same could be said for liberal artists, such as Leon Golub. He was doing imaginary paintings of South American military movements that he had never touched, felt or seen. These riots were a few blocks from his house.

We were a ragtag radical protest movement fighting for the rights of the least respected people in our society. It was not sexy like doing flashy theatrical protesting Starbucks. We were coming up from the earth and we were dark, dangerous and formidable. We gave as good as we got. We scared the shit out of the system.

The goal, as I've said, was to preserve the neighborhood for the immigrants, the poor, the creative, and others who had long lived here. As it turned out, we were right in our speculation about why the neighborhood was being cleaned up. Once all the so-called undesirables had been arrested or driven away, the corners swept clean, the squeegee guys removed from the busy intersections, there was a new public perception that the L.E.S. was safe, and even its shady past gave it a hip, imaginary dangerous edge.

In poured NYU students, upper middle-class invest-

ment and management companies. Where I live, between Houston and Delancey, became an entertainment zone. The bodegas and small businesses were replaced by bars and expensive eateries, out of touch with and too pricy to be patronized by the traditional community people. Laws regulating where a bar could or could not be were thrown out the window. Ludlow, in the '80s used to have one bar, Max Fish. Now there are bars side by side down the block, and more are coming.

(Let me mention that a lot of us got fed up with this. Elsa Rensaa, Marcia Lemmon, and myself were thrown out and banned from the 7th Precinct Community Council for asking questions related to all of the illegal problems associated with this bar nuisance. It seemed weird that cops didn't want any objections made to places that must cause them problems, with all the drunkenness, noise, and fighting, but they were standing up for these bars.)

The next major step in gentrification came after 9:11. Now our world changed even more. The L.E.S. saw the massive invasion of the international real-estate investors. The Villager on Aug 30, 2006 reported that Extell, teamed with The Carlyle Group, purchased 17 buildings for 72 million dollars. There was an explosion of cookie-cutter, corporate coffee shops like Starbucks and Dunkin Donuts as well as the fast-food emporiums like MacDonal-d's, San Loco, Taco Bell and KFC. Also pushing in were establishments like Fed-Ex and Kinko's. They all did their part in driving out the small, family-owned businesses.

A NOTEWORTHY MOMENT DURING THE WAR BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND REAL ESTATE

IT'S BEEN A LONG PROCESS. It took years to go from the creative years, with low rents and small businesses flourishing to the time of corporate takeover. In the past, there was always some uncontrollable force coming along to undo any upwardly mobile change that the elite were trying to foist on the neighborhood as an investor's idea of progress. This negative force saved the area again and again.

There was the 1929 stock-market crash, that derailed some plans, then the 1930s depression and the 40's World War II, diverting energies. In the 1950s Puerto Ricans began pouring in, the next generation of poor immigrants that filled the L.E.S. and made it another densely populated, over crowded ghetto unpalatable to the intentions of lifestyle and status of the well-heeled. With the '60s came race riots, and all the drugs and drug addicts connected to the Vietnam war. In the 1970s, we saw the implementation of Senator Moynahan's idea of planned shrinkage, which I alluded to in the discussion of Peter Missing. This was a strategy for getting the poor to move out of the inner city, by cutting back on public services, like the fire and police departments, sanitation and street

repairs. This dangerous approach to inner city communi-ties, mostly people of color, it was hoped would make the ghetto uncivilized enough, as well as, make it too danger-ous and unlivable, prompting an exodus. With this tactic in place, crime exploded and as many people who could escape from this war zone did.

By 1979, this neighborhood had hit the absolute end of the freefall. Up from the ashes of this flattened, lifeless economy and devastated community rose another innova-tive burst of inspired energy. This emergent inspired life force, which was born in the poor areas like Harlem, the Bronx and the L.E.S., influenced anything that bordered the creative, from CBGBs and all of its musical contribu-tions, on to the Soho art scene, break dancing, Wild Style graffiti, the East Village art scene, New Wave Cinema, films of Transgression, clubs, the Rivington School, ABC No Rio, Adam Purple's Garden of Eden, the Clayton Cap, Manic Panic, Pat Fields, summed up by a whole new gen-eration of theater and dance people expanding the out-side edge beyond the limit of the previous generations' imagination.

At this point, let's note that at almost every level, tied into the L.E.S. economy, in all of its parts, whether it is the creative community, the local residents, the schools, the police, the landlords, almost everything related to money, it was all somehow connected to the drug trade. In the L.E.S. in the 1980s drugs were the largest business, the trade with the most employees. Drugs got police protec-tion, varying with the jurisdiction, with one exception, though. The Grand Street section of the community was immune and independent from the drug trade. In any case, everywhere else, police protection was a flourishing industry.

This new (drug) business climate resulted in part the creation of the East Village art scene. Patti Astor, and her Fun Gallery, gets frequently mentioned as starting the East Village art scene. Here's how the inception of the scene is described in a piece in New York Magazine: "One day in 1981, through a doorway under the stoop, I noticed Patti Astor rolling paint over dingy walls, in a space I had long imagined the lair of elderly former concentration-camp guards—the only conceivable background of my landlord's maintenance hires."⁴

This East Village scene only lasted through the '80s. By 1987, in Soho it became less expensive to rent commer-cial property. There had been factories in many of these buildings, occupying spaces, such as lofts with plenty of widows, that were ideal for galleries. Rent was cheaper, spaces were large, there was already a well recognized commercial art gallery scene, so the EV art scene, which could afford to move, got gobbled up by SoHo.

⁴ nymag.com/nymetro/arts/features/10557/index1.html

LOOKING BACK

WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED that the cleaned-up streets would be so sterile, homogenized, filled with corporation franchises, transient students, and high prices? In the 1980s I discovered that one man's war zone can be an artist's TAZ, Temporary Autonomous Zone, a place of absolute freedom where anything goes, any idea can be explored, any creative impulse followed. It's where far-out concepts were everywhere and many seemed worth investigating. If you thought it, do it, seemed to be the way to live. The margins of outside edge were only held back by one's sense of self, one's ethical stance, and the limitations of one's imagination and technical ability to make happen what came into one's head.

By the late '90s gentrification had swallowed the TAZ and severely wounded the muse. Then came 9:11, and a new generation of repressive conservative thinking based on so-called national security, which has the look and smell of a new form of police state, which, without mercy, silenced the muse. No more Bohemia, no more ghetto, no more slum, no more neighborhood, the Land of Milk and Honey for immigrants, the Magical Kingdom for artists, the inspirational cauldron, dead-end streets, dead-end kids, Lower East Side, Loisaida. Gone, baby, gone.

We are "privileged" to witness one of the greatest changes the L.E.S. has ever gone through. I have documented what I see as the end of a 150-year run. This next phase of gentrification means we have turned a corner, that was never before possible to turn. We can never to go back.

On June 15, 1904, a fire led to the sinking of the General Slocum Ferry, which was the disaster where 1,021 passengers perished out of the original 1,358 on board⁵. The passengers were mostly woman and children. This tragedy caused an obscene amount of pain to the German immigrants. There was a large male, Lutheran, German exodus, which went from the L.E.S. to Yorkville, because people couldn't bear the memories associated with the neighborhood. The loss of the Germans had a devastating impact on the L.E.S.

After a while, though, this loss was made up and the people that left were replaced with another group who were ethnically and religiously a little different, but still basically following the same economic path and working for an attempted integration into the system, so in many ways they were interchangeable with the group that left. This new, last transformation represents a much greater change, a sea of change, far greater than what happened when the Germans left. It is altering the whole structure, changing every facet of the old hood, from the most minute detail to the largest arrangements, down to the people on the street. The individual landlord has been replaced by management companies sometimes connected to international investment firms. The heights of the build-

ing, under Bloomberg's new zoning laws, have gone from the normal 6 stories of the tenements to opulent high-rise apartments and luxury hotels pushing skyward for 27 stories.

Gentrification has stabilized an economic change, a shift from the lower class to the upper middle class and rich, who have forced them out. So, there is a change in life styles, dress codes, yearly income, types of services available, corresponding to the replacement of the working-class residents and artists.

One sad aspect of this is that NYU has spread its greedy, cold, hard, business-only tentacles and laid claim to the land by planting a number of skyscraper dorms far from the campus, then filled them with transient students.

We have gone from very few banks on the whole L.E.S. – why would poor people need such places -- to more banks than bodegas. We have gone from a time when people did not call the cops, because they would never bother to come or the bother they caused once they did show up wasn't worth the trouble, to it being common to call the police over anything and police response time is now comparable to that on the rich Upper East Side.

The skyscrapers stick like spears out of the ground, like remnants of a lost battle.

Remembering the community is important. So much came before those who are here now. So much of the greatness of the America cultural contribution of the 20th century was connected to the L.E.S., a place of immigrants struggling to survive economically and artists seeking to survive the deadness of American mass culture. Cheap rent sustained a creative community that changed the world of culture and visual thinking. Doors of perception were opened.

Those teeming immigrant ghetto tenements, jammed and over-crowded, nurtured the minds with the capability to explore mental universes undreamt of before. Out of this slum came greatness. I wonder what kind of cultural or social contribution is going to come out of the Economakis tenement/mansion? Perhaps, contribution is the wrong measure of assessment of the new Money Kings. They can be more validly assessed according to how much damage such a person is able to inflict on our society?

MY TESTAMENT

I HAVE BEEN ON THE TRAIL for many decades. The L.E.S. has been the only place I have been able to feel comfortable as a human being and find a place I could call home. But, it has come to pass that I still have not found that place where I artistically fit in (since the L.E.S., as far as it was a caring, nurturing community, has been torn apart) or met the person who gets what I am up to.

Take just one part, the photo/video documentation.

⁵ newyorkhistory.info/Hell-Gate/General-Slocum.html

At this point I believe I have accumulated the largest photo & video archive ever taken by one person. No question that some of my more public work has had an impact on the system. But that section is only the tip of the iceberg. There are hundreds of thousands of photos and a couple of thousand hours of video.

I have built an archive, so that those who came after could see who was here before. I love those people in the pictures. And I could prove that they were here, which is an excellent solution to the idea of existence.

During my very years of documenting the streets and people of the L.E.S., which I loved so deeply, my environment, the focus of my archives, transformed into something else, something alien.

Since I am getting older, not about to move, I have developed my own creative style and artistic point of view, but the creative community has moved on. I have a major archive, so I thought it was time to start looking backwards, and arranging things. But before I got started getting my archives in order. I got fixated on the idea of saving history by making anthologies. I knew that so much of the L.E.S. was disappearing, and what was before would never be again. I thought by doing things like putting overlapping essays on the well-known players with the not-so-famous, I was giving as many opportunities as possible for what is important, but not-as-mainstream, a place to be recognized. A safe haven to be saved in. I paired, in *Captured*, for instance, Jim Jarmusch, a well-known director in the art film world, with Tom Jarmusch, his brother, appreciated in the avant-garde world, where he screens in places like the Millennium Film Workshop. Tom is much less well publicly known.

I got into making books and finished the first two anthologies in the series: *Captured* a film/video history of the lower east side and *Resistance* a radical political and social history of the lower east side. To make these anthologies I collect many different articles on one subject. I gather as much information as I can and save it in a book. *Seven Stories* is the publisher of the books. Each book is has been about 600 pages in length, featuring an amazing cross-section of authors, from the well-known to the obscure, from a Harvard professor to a homeless person, an anarchist and a police chief.

I am not trying to prove anything or push any one perspective or a political point of view. I am trying to gather the players, the people who have made some kind of contribution and collect them in one place. Each theme is an umbrella under which to shelter like-minded souls, ideas, and information.

Maybe, my perspective, my all-inclusive view, stems partly from my photography. As I mentioned earlier, taking photos at an event gives you a reason to be there other than just mingling. Taking pictures stops you from thinking about yourself while giving you a position in the social environment. Also photographing lets you meet just about everyone. And the meeting is not uptight, because

the person you meet for the first time can see what you are doing. You then have communicated in a meaningful way with them. It is always best to be on point when doing this, by the way. Drinking impairs your functioning.

Al Orensanz said, "Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine and Wee-Gee produced iconic moments in the life of the struggling proletarians of a 'neo-realistic' texture, kind of [like] Roberto Rossellini or Pietro Germi. Clayton's images are more cinema verite, and film noir. His pictures are not journalistic but activist."

Like the Wall of Fame, activism is just another part of my art and the archives. A noticeable part, but still only a section. The front door photos are a pleasure and make people happy.

This is my documentary work. Another part of my art is about pure imagination, with a mystical component. I appreciate creative ideas and am not bound by trying to fit my art into one basket. I create both reportorial and otherworldly images, all flowing from the same creative river that once ran so deep in the Lower East Side.

A WINDOW TO THE SOUL OF A NEIGHBORHOOD

**Monica
Uszerowicz**

FORMER LOWER EAST SIDE RESIDENT Tribby was a mainstay in Clayton Patterson's gallery window during the length of his adolescence. In a New York City completely transformed – at what seems like the fastest rate yet, given the shifting economy and the possibility of a third Bloomberg term – Tribby's story is especially poignant. It's one that is at risk of being erased; it is not just an anecdote but also a piece of the city's memoir. Clayton's interview of Tribby is part of a larger project to document and, in effect, save the history of the neighborhood in which he's lived for thirty years. Tribby is shown in the first and final shots of the documentary about Clayton, *Captured*: "In the documentary they – Ben Solomon, Dan Levin and Jennifer Furst – made about me, you're at the beginning of the movie and you're at the end of the movie," Clayton tells Tribby. "You encapsulate it."

Arguably, Tribby helps to encapsulate all of the history Clayton has documented – his visual sandwiching of the film is a metaphor for his importance as a figure. Like Clayton, Tribby was born and lived elsewhere before he moved to the Lower East Side: born in Puerto Rico in 1976, he came to the city as a toddler and stayed for five years before his eventual return to Puerto Rico and back. His first years in New York proved difficult; Tribby was shot as a young child.

"It happened when I was five years old. I was going to Pitt Street Pool," he explains. "It was me, my brother Omar, my mom, her friend and her friend's kid. We were walking toward Avenue D and I was holding my mom's hand. I felt like...I felt like I got hit with a baseball bat. The moment it happened, I was watching these kids playing and I really thought they'd thrown a bat at me. I ended up staying in the hospital for nineteen days." The bullet was intended for his mother, a heroin-dealer at the time; her death would've been exchanged for five bundles of heroin. Upon her return from the emergency room, she found out who shot her son and "business was taken care of, L.E.S.-style. I wanted to know what happened with that, because I didn't really have the details at the time. She passed away, so it doesn't really matter anymore, but I wanted to know."

The minimal police involvement and overtone of secrecy regarding the incident were common issues in the

neighborhood at the time. Clayton and his partner, Elsa, witnessed a shooting their first night on Essex Street in 1983: "Eventually, the cops showed up, took the body away and that was it," says Clayton – still stunned decades later. "It was late and we didn't have a phone and couldn't really do anything about it. It was like in the mid-80s, when Tony, this local Essex Street drug dealer, had two other dealers chase him and shoot him on Rivington and Essex. We got him into a limo – there was this Dominican limo service – and took him to the Bellevue emergency room. A nurse and I had to throw him on the gurney." Clayton had his camera at the time, but didn't think to document the event because of what appeared to be minimal damage. "There was nothing dramatic about it – just a little cigarette-burn-sized bullet hole close to his heart. All the bleeding was internal. I tried to take some photos when the doctors finally got to him, but one of them threw me out. I only got one shot."

It is unfortunate that the differences between the city and the island didn't make Puerto Rico a safer place for Tribby. When his mother was arrested, he returned to Bayamón, where he lived with his grandmother in the projects. He describes the experience there sullenly, almost removed from it: "My father was always in jail. And that was the life out there – it was me helping my grandmother to read and write, helping her to find my father. When he wasn't in prison, he was out somewhere, getting high. When she passed away, Omar and I ended up going into this group home. But group homes there weren't like the group homes here, where you have a few kids, a family. It was like Spofford, the juvenile detention center. There were over a hundred kids."

To blame the group home in Puerto Rico for the violence the two brothers would later experience is arbitrary and unnecessary. It is Clayton's belief that drug corruption in the country is partly to blame for the more localized problems that happened in the Lower East Side, such as the high rate of imprisonment: "Your mother came here, young, with two kids; she didn't even have an education. When Reagan came into power during the Iran-Contra era, it snowed cocaine in America. We started finding out that all these people from politically and socially connected places, from Wall Street to Studio 54, were doing drugs,

and they experienced no problems. Yet people from the Lower East Side, from the neighborhoods that made up the fabric of New York, were getting thrown in jail. Under Rockefeller laws, some of them were put away for life. I see it as similar to this Bloomberg corruption – buying your way into being the mayor of NYC for another term. Everything is so corrupt. It is part of the reason America is crashing.”

Clayton pauses after speaking so hurriedly; he is reflecting on the connection between the history of the city he loves so much and the current state of economic and political affairs. “The bailout right now is important, but it’s bailing out the rich. I wish the billions of dollars made on Wall Street were put to better use. There’s people who owe two or three months of mortgage payments and they’re about to touch the street. There are people in shelters, waiting for a house. Can they be bailed out? Again, this history I’m trying to preserve is righteous, on one level.”

Addressing Tribby, he says, “This is the lifestyle you were brought up in, it’s who you are. And my question is, how much did the government or other people have to do with putting all these drugs in the Lower East Side that got you into that lifestyle? Rich people grow up in nice neighborhoods, and they head to Harvard or Yale because that is the nature of the neighborhood. The nature of the neighborhood down here – it was a lot of drugs. Your whole life was involved with it – your mother, your father. And your mother didn’t grow up in some rich family that was tied to some heroin connection.” Furthermore, Tribby’s past hinders him from moving on; as he explains, “They make it so difficult for people with a criminal history – like myself. I can’t get housing; I can’t even get assistance with housing. And people don’t want to employ me. So, what’s my solution, you know what I mean? They don’t really give you much to work with. But I want to turn my experience into something positive, help younger kids get through that, guide them through the potholes you can fall into.”

The reasoning behind Tribby’s first imprisonment had less to do with drugs than with the general neighborhood crime upon which Clayton commented. “I went to Riker’s Island for a gun charge when I was seventeen,” Tribby explains. I had a warrant out for me, for a stolen car, and then got caught in Coney Island with a gun.” Drugs would later play a significant role in the life of the whole neighborhood and in Tribby’s own. “I started doing drugs when I was young,” he recalls. “Smoking weed at eleven, doing coke at thirteen. Heroin came later; I started at seventeen. I was introduced to it when I started dealing it down on Rivington. Body Bag was the first dope I dealt. That was some strong dope. It killed a lot of people.”

“How many people do you think controlled the drug trade?” asks Clayton. “I was told recently that one Dominican guy owned all the coke spots.” Tribby shakes his head: “I know Dominicans that owned coke spots down by Avenue C, Eighth Street, that area. And I know a lot of

different people owned the dope spots, too. Body Bag and all that shit – that had two owners. Poison and 911 Express were owned by another guy.”

During the drug trade, Tribby witnessed no direct police involvement – he never saw them buying or selling. But he does remember his first moment dealing with police corruption: “I did hear about the cops being involved in drugs, but didn’t see it. The pay-offs, the police giving us drugs and shit like that – I wasn’t in that era. But once, when I was arrested, I had 3,000 dollars on me plus four bundles. They took it all. I go to court, and the 3,000 dollars was never reported.”

Recalling another episode, Tribby seems disgusted. “One time, I was walking down the block, and I had seen this guy that looked funny. I knew he was working with the cops. He had headphones on, but they weren’t headphones, they were like microphone communication things or some shit. He was eating sunflower seeds, and I looked at him and was like, ‘Wow.’ He turned around. If he’d been listening to music, he wouldn’t have heard what I said. He said, ‘What you said?’ And I was like, ‘Yo, I know you. You’re down with the police.’ He wanted to fight me, and I turned around and saw another guy with a vest. They ran up on me, arrested me, saying I did a sale. I had no money, no drugs, nothing. One officer was like, ‘I don’t know why you opened your mouth.’ He felt so bad that he called my parole officer and told him the truth. But I still had to go through all of the bullshit at Riker’s Island for two weeks, you know what I mean? If the dude didn’t call my parole officer, or if my parole officer wasn’t alright with it, he could’ve said ‘Hold him.’ They could’ve railroaded my ass. Just to show you, man.”

Tribby did eventually return to Riker’s Island to spend a longer period of time. It is Tribby’s brother, though, who has spent nearly his entire life in prison. “Since he was eleven,” Tribby confirms. “One time it was for thirteen days; another time, twenty-eight days.” Following the interview, Clayton and Tribby visited Omar at the Great Meadow Correctional Facility in Comstock, New York, where Clayton learned that Omar is labeled “Mafia.” There, he is the leader of his own crew, the Latin King Bad Boys, and of a subdivision of his “family,” PRM the Puerto Rican Mafia. Though Tribby is no longer “into that lifestyle at all,” he and Omar are former members of the Ñeta – Never Ever Tolerate Abuse – a Puerto Rican prison association of which their father was once a part.

An anxious desire to come home is making Omar’s last few months in prison difficult. During a prison yard fight, his face was slashed; the darkness and the quick nature of the fight rendered his attacker invisible – yet Omar is not concerned. The accused has asked Omar to testify for him, but to do so would open Omar to potentially dangerous questioning concerning a person he knows nothing about. He wants to sit out the rest of his time in a neutral manner, avoiding his earlier experiences in jail. When Tribby discusses his brother’s time “in the box,” his eyes

cloud over; he seems diligently opposed to the idea of it.

“The box,” he says, “is where you go when they isolate you from the population. They feel that you don’t deserve to live with the other inmates. You’re locked down for twenty-three hours a day, and you’re given an hour of recreation, in a little fucking cage that’s part of the cell. Basically, it’s a zoo.” He swallows. “He spent four years in the box. It’s extra hard for him, because he can’t read or write. Like everybody else, he has to maintain some type of routine, some type of schedule. He won’t even sit down on his bed until a certain hour – he’s militant through this shit. On Thursdays, he’ll wash all his sheets in the toilet. He breaks down the time, trying to keep it sane. He’s just more desperate to come home.”

Understandably, more involvement with the system – even if it was just answering questions about a person who cut his face – is something Omar would like to prevent. Inside prison, even gang life is different. Clayton and Tribby’s discussion diverges for a moment from street stories to Blueboy. “Remember LA2?” Clayton asks. “There’s this parallel story about two young Puerto Rican kids growing up on the Lower East Side – like you and your brother. LA2 meets Keith Haring, gets involved in a life of art but doesn’t end up getting the fame he justifiably earned. Then after his difficult art world experience, he tries to get his life back together and marries an older Puerto Rican woman from the L.E.S. His new wife has a son that’s LA2’s age and he’s in prison for murder. He’s the guy that killed Larry Davis in jail.”

The **LATIN KINGS** of Chicago, another prison/street association, and the Ñeta found a safe space for themselves in New York City; says Tribby, “You know, Hispanic people were able to say ‘Let’s start something.’ Somebody from another city, like Chicago, came over here and said, ‘I’m a Latin King, I think we should start it here.’” It may have been the abuse of power by other groups that helped to influence the start of the **CRIPS** and the **BLOODS**, traditionally West Coast gangs, in New York, but the length of time they’ve existed throughout the country makes such nuances unimportant. Blueboy, LA2’s stepson, is one of the leaders of the Crips in New York state and someone with whom Tribby and his brother are familiar. “In the State prison system, he’s famous,” states Tribby. “He’s one of the heads of the Crips; he’s no joke. He is a serious legend up there.” Omar – Mafia – confirmed that Blueboy is originally from the Lower East Side. “I’ve got mad respect for him,” he told Clayton.

Clayton saw the creative potential in some of the local residents involved with gangs and associations. “In order to do something artistic, which I see as positive – and I have faith in these guys’ artistic talents – I got a mural going on an outside of a squatted building called Glasshouse, on Avenue D and 10th Street. We – the Satan Sinner Nomads, a street gang, some Latin Kings and I – took over the wall, which was over a hundred feet long. Sergio, who used to write DAST, was the lead artist from

the Latin Kings. **COCHISE** is the president of the **SATAN SINNER NOMADS**; I got him into painting and he is a fabulous artist. Unfortunately, he has been locked up since 1992. I brought Bert Hemphill by – rest in peace – a significant player at the Folk Art Museum, who ended up buying a couple of Cochise’s works. Later, I documented Sergio and a few of the **LATIN KINGS** painting a mural in the project courtyards at Avenue C and 3rd.”

The window, though – the Hall of Fame – is one of Clayton’s best-loved legacies. He photographed nearly everyone in the neighborhood, posting the images to the front window of his Essex Street gallery and frequently replacing them with new ones. The story of the Hall of Fame is the story of the Lower East Side: “The Lower was lovely in the early days,” Tribby remembers. “Wow. It was a little out of control. It was really out of control. A lot of money, a lot of dope, a lot of drugs out there, man. It was loose in that sense, but it was...I don’t know...alive. It was more alive than it is now. And I remember that a lot of people used to look forward to seeing the window, making sure you were up, you know what I mean? Every week, you used to change the wall up. That was like the trend – always coming up to get on the wall.”

“You know what’s really amazing, and what nobody figures out?” asks Clayton. He is excited recalling this fact; indeed he is right that few people are even aware of it now: “Do you know most of those people in the window ran the streets of the Lower East Side? And that went from 14th Street to the Brooklyn Bridge. It had people from almost every street, from all over the projects, from different posses. I am sure that there is no other collection like this.”

“It was like a tag,” Tribby compares. “You wanna throw your shit up. I wasn’t really into the tagging thing; I know a lot of people who died in that tagging game. But it was similar to that. You tag, you wanna see your shit up. And that’s how the wall was, you know what I mean? You take pictures to see your shit up: ‘Let’s pass through, let’s see who’s in the pictures.’ That’s how it was, man. I was always on the wall. Anytime I was home, I was on that wall, all the time. You got my little brothers when they were kids, too – all the way ‘til the time they were grown. You documented a lot of people, man.” Like Tribby, Omar wanted to see himself in the window, too – he made it his mission to be there. Clayton remembers, “In those early photos, Tribby with his double teardrop tattoo on his cheek bone and Omar with his two on each cheek were some of the first teardrop tattoos in the window.”

Tribby adds, “Really, you got my whole family. Even my moms, my pops...My real pops. It’s funny. It was definitely the Lower – You got the whole Lower East Side.” Tribby and Clayton laugh when they discuss Clayton’s technique for making the neighborhood kids smile for photos: “Instead of saying ‘cheese,’ they’d say ‘pussy,’” explains Clayton. “Young guys have to laugh at that. By capturing the best part of everybody, I didn’t make one person look

tougher than the other. In this way, there was no beef. Nobody came by and broke the window or threatened me. It was an honorable spot.”

“A neutral spot,” agrees Triby. “It was a family spot. It was everything. People didn’t just come with their crews. They came with their girlfriends, their parents.”

Even more emotionally and historically significant is Clayton’s primary reason for attempting to give the window its deserved recognition, a point Triby mentioned. “It documents the population that was here,” Clayton says. “There were so many people who didn’t have pictures of their moms, their dads, their brothers, their sisters, their grandmothers – and that’s what the window represents. It’s really incredible. If you go through the pictures, it’s shocking how many people are no longer here.” Triby, days before the interview, went through the boxes of photos himself: “It’s shocking how many I people I grew up with in those pictures...It’s shocking how many of them have died.”

Truly, Clayton’s photographic archives are a documentation of personal lives and stories that wouldn’t exist otherwise; collectively, the people in the photos are part of a substantial story. Clayton adds, “People don’t get it, but this is really rich. It’s certainly bigger than me. It’s a whole neighborhood; it’s all of us.” Above where the Hall of Fame used to be, inside the gallery’s storefront, there is an Elegua painting Clayton dedicated to Omar – you can tell by the four tattooed teardrops on his cheeks – indicating the gallery’s changes and the growth of the people once featured in the photos.

“Now,” says Triby, “the Lower East Side is just an expensive place people like me, or people who don’t really have that much, can’t afford, man. I cannot live on the Lower anymore. I’m forced to live in Queens.”

Clayton’s current mission is trying to find people – people like Triby and others interested in telling their stories – “because we want to save that history. We still have access to something very rich. And it should be saved. So, we’re also looking for writers – we’re looking for people who want to help us get this history out. That’s our ambition: to get this out as history.” To give the neighborhood a history would be to give its former inhabitants a future. It would flesh out and enrich a rapidly changing New York City, a city that’s been both conducive and treacherous to cultural history. An entire culture, neighborhood and era exist almost solely in Clayton’s archives, an indication of the power of combined art and altruism. “We want to build the history that already exists,” he says, “to create something substantial out of these memories.”

LIFE IN THE HOOD

Clayton Patterson
interview with
Angel Ortiz
aka **LA2 &**
Pete "Junior"
Vazquez
transcribed by
Monica Uszerowicz

ANGEL ORTIZ LA2.

I met Clayton in '86. I never even knew that Clayton lived in Keith's building, 325 Broome Street, and that he was the manager of the place.

Clayton had the graffiti door at 161 Essex Street. He had a billboard in his storefront window where he used to hang his pictures. People walked by and you could look through the window. And I used to walk around and see different crews tags up on the door. I was a graffiti writer—I tagged up on the door, too. So I came by, I see all the kids. He used to take pictures of the kids in the neighborhood. You know, girls, guys. He used to switch it – I don't know, every month or something. He would put up new pictures, take out the old ones. So when you walked through the neighborhood, you'd notice some of your friends. So I was curious; I wanted to know why he was doing that.

So one day, I was looking at the pictures; I saw one of my friends in the pictures. So I was like – I came by, I'd seen it, and then I knocked on the door, but he wasn't here. Then a couple days went by and I caught him. He said he was the guy that was taking pictures, and he was doing what he always does. He took a picture. He was like another Andy Warhol, 'cause Andy Warhol always had his camera. Wherever he goes. I was like, "Why you always gotta camera?"

I saw the kids happy in the neighborhood. I was like, Yo, why are all these guys happy that this guy's taking their pictures, you know what I'm saying? These guys – I'd never seen them smile and they're over here smiling because this guy's taking their pictures. I was like, Come on, I thought you were a gangster or something.

He took pictures of everybody: homeless people, gangsters, drug-dealers, girls, everybody. He didn't discriminate. Everybody was welcome to take a picture and it was something nice. I liked it. It was something new because I never saw none of these kids in my neighborhood be happy when they were showing their faces – taking these pictures. And I was like, you know what? Let me go meet him. And I met him. And ever since, I've been cool with him. He does his thing. He told me he's an artist and things like that; I told him I'm a graffiti writer. And I became friends with him, you know? Just another kid in the neighborhood. I guess me and him – there ain't too many

of us left out of those pictures that he took, out of those kids. Like I said, that was in the early '80s. A lot of those kids are gone. But he's still here, at the same spot. And he's true to his game, you know; he's always got a camera – that's his specialty. I just became friends with him.

Out of the whole neighborhood, I knew...I know when I was doing my tags, when I was tagging up in the neighborhood, it was easier to get over, like to put the signature on the wall without people complaining. These days, the whole thing has changed. These days, it's even harder to do graffiti on the streets. Plus, we're always under surveillance. There are cameras everywhere, you know what I'm saying? So you write on somebody's gate, somebody takes the picture to document it, and things like that.

The whole neighborhood changed when the Twin Towers came down. When those two twin towers came down, I was at home. I was hearing it on the news, and was like, you know what, let me go to my – I ran to my roof, 'cause back in the day, you could hang out on the roof. From the roof you could see the whole building – the whole area, the Twin Towers. And when the Twin Towers came down, the whole neighborhood just changed after that. Everybody went through their own little depression. I had one of my friends ...I know a couple people that got very scared. I got a lot of white friends, and they got very scared. I went up to one of my white friends and he said "Oh, I'm scared, I gotta leave this country." I said, "Where are you gonna go?" Everybody was in a panic mode. And I was like, come on – I wasn't scared; I don't know why.

When that happened, I came back - I lived on 10th Street and Avenue C, and you could walk the FDR Drive because the cops had stopped all of the traffic. There were no cars on the road. I guess all those people that worked at Wall Street or whatever, they could take the FDR Drive and they could walk from the Seaport all the way to 10th Street. And when they came...I never had a camera, but I'd seen them. They had business suits, covered with the powder and everything. It was crazy. So when the Twin Towers came down, the whole neighborhood came down. Everything changed. The houses changed. It's like Wall Street now. It's expensive to live here. They've got all these buildings going up. It's incredible. I don't know who can afford these houses. My whole block – I live on

10th Street and C – I saw the whole Avenue C change. If you go from Houston and Avenue C all the way to 14th Street, those are all restaurants. All restaurants, restaurants, bar, bar, restaurant, bar, bar. And the funny thing is that these people are always talking about immigrants and stuff like that. And if you go to every single bar, every single restaurant, the ones cooking back there are the Mexicans. It's so funny. Just incredible.

All the way to Sixth Avenue – so many new buildings. Brand new buildings, hotels with penthouses. I don't even know how those people can get an apartment. They won't even lease it out to you; they SELL it to you for a year. They make a contract, a lease, for a year, and then if they don't like you, they get rid of you and sell it to somebody else to make more money. It's incredible; I've seen the whole neighborhood change like that. And forget about graffiti. People out here ain't even doing graffiti no-more. It's a shame; it's incredible. It changed – graffiti changed – when Mayor Koch... I remember when Keith went to city hall in the early 80's, maybe 82. Clayton's got the book. Keith said, "Yeah, I'm gonna go meet Mayor Koch; wanna tag along?" I was like, "I ain't going over there. I ain't got no business over there." So anyway, Keith went over there and he took a picture with Mayor Koch. And Mayor Koch hated graffiti – he was making all these people do commercials, anti-graffiti commercials, "don't do graffiti." When Mayor Koch was in... I didn't like Mayor Koch.

So Mayor Koch took the graffiti thing and wiped it all away before he left. He cleaned the whole thing up. No more tagging. On the subway - I don't know how they do that now. Right now, the only way we could do a subway car right now – this is how we do it – right now, we'd have to take our spraypaint, we'd go to the tunnel, we'd paint the subway – paint the car. And the only time we're gonna take a picture is when that subway comes out of that tunnel. When it comes out of that tunnel and it makes that one stop on 2nd Avenue, you better have your camera to take the picture. Because they're just gonna lock that whole train down and take it straight to the carwash. Just like that. That's the only way real graffiti writers do it. If you want to do graffiti and go to the train, that's the only way to do it. That's the only way we can do this, we can show you.

So, how I met Keith back in the days – I took him to the train yard to do graffiti on the train. I took him to the train yard with a whole bunch of kids, so he was happy. I said, we've gotta go through this gate, we've gotta walk, go in the train yard. And when you're in the train yard, you see this big steel right in front of you, all steel trains. So we were smoking a joint, and then he just panicked. He was like, "LA, get me out of here, I'm scared." I was like, "What are you talking about?" He's like, "Nah, I'm scared, you gotta get me out." I was like, "Yo, we came all the way from Manhattan to Brooklyn, we're over here, and now you're scared!?" He got paranoid. I told my friends, "I gotta go, he's freaking out, he's bugging, he's scared."

Took him outside and he was happy; he said, "That was a good experience. For now, I just wanna do the empty black paper posters used to hold the commercial spots in the subways." So he did the subways – draw on it like that. He felt it more safe. He wanted to be a graffiti writer, which he could not be. He was never a graffiti writer. He hung out with graffiti writers. He hung out with me; I was a graffiti writer. I introduced him to other graffiti writers. This was just a kid from Pennsylvania moving into New York, you know, and just wanting to blend in with the crowd, with what was happening. He was never a graffiti writer. Keith never did nothing that could make him say he was a graffiti writer.

Keith said "I wanna be a graffiti writer, but I want to do it my way." So he started doing it with the chalk on the subway thing. And he felt it safe, because people were on the platform, if cops come... At that time, the cops weren't messing too much with the chalk. You could draw on the empty commercial spots covered in blank black paper with white chalk paper. It's a hell of a paper, because I remember one time back in the '80s, I'd seen them; Keith would say, "Yo, they're putting up the paper –" they would rip it and put in that black piece of paper. He asked if he could have some blanks "Yo, can I get that piece of paper?" But they said nah, because they were accounted for. They were all going into a certain billboard. That's how Keith started doing the chalk thing all over. He felt it more safe, more comfortable.

See, when I went to the trains, I used to go – but when I went, I went with the best, the guys that were King of the Subways. You know, **QUICK, KING RICH HAZE, SOE, NE- RTW (ROLLING THUNDER WRITERS)**. These were top guys. So I was like, if I want to paint on the trains, and be King of the Train, it's easy to do that. But it's harder to do it in the streets. Because in the street, you gotta be going from block to block – Avenue A, Avenue B. Because down here, every block had drug dealers. So anyway, that's how the Lower East Side changed like that. It's crazy now.

THE LUIS ROSADOAKA BLUEBOY CASE

A conversation with Angel Ortiz, Pete Junior Vazquez-BlueBoy's Brother and Clayton

LA2: I was born in '66. I'm two months older than Luis Rosado. Wait up, wait up. If I was 16 years old in 1980... So... And he was 16... Yeah, '79, that's right about the time he started to get into trouble.

Enter JR Vazquez, Luis's brother, and another one of LA's stepsons:

"Well, you know, as the life goes on – in the streets – you've always got two roles to choose from. You've got a good role and you've got a bad role. And a lot of us that are minorities down here – we don't have too much to pick from. So we have to deal with what we have in the streets, in the society? Some of us go hanging out, some of us become cons, some of us become drug-dealers, some

In the Streets They Defend Larry Davis

By MICHEL MARRIOTT

In the grim streets of the South Bronx, Larry Davis has become so popular that there is a dance that carries his name.

Yesterday, reactions there to the verdict stood in as much contrast to the official condemnations as the streets themselves did to the distant glitter of Manhattan.

While a police official called the verdict "horrendous," three men huddled against the rain in a doorway of a housing project said they were surprised and pleased by it. In their world, they said, police officers more often seem like soldiers of fortune than peacekeepers. Mr. Davis, they said, simply got caught in the crossfire of police corruption and greed.

They had believed his claim that he was defending himself against a police assassination squad.

"Cops Were Coming to Kill Him"

"He was working with the cops and was going to blow the whistle," said a square-jawed man who would identify himself only as K.J. "The cops were coming to kill him."

"He was like a rat with his back against the wall. He jumped and bit them in the face."

All agreed that Mr. Davis should be freed, although some, all black and deeply cynical about a black man's chances for justice in the city's courts, believed he would be treated fairly.

Many responses in the Claremont Village neighborhood where the shooting took place were similar.

Doubts About Police Verdict

In a church a few blocks from K.J. and friends, a 55-year-old maintenance man spoke openly about his doubts about the police version of what happened when six officers were wounded in a shootout with Mr. Davis.

of us become...others. My brother became the other. He always dressed nice...always had new sneakers – Adidas. His things were Adidas, Timberlands, Clarks, all types of different shoes... The problem was over disrespect, an argument, and one thing led to another. It just went from one extreme to the highest. In 1979...one disrespects the other in one way or another – whatever it was.”

What it was: they had a block party on 5th Street. They were playing music in the schoolyard at at Public School 15. Everybody dancing and things like that – young kids, smoking pot, drinking. Luis Rosado was in the same spot, so these guy...Back in the day, they had a crew, TWB: The Wild Boys. So, while he's in the park just minding his own business with his girlfriend and his young child – his girlfriend was pregnant at the time. – out of nowhere, the guy just started to bump into Luis Rosado and...You know how people bump into people to get into...That's how the argument started. Over a little bump like that. And then the thing happened. The guy, I think, he pulled out a gun first on Luis, and said, "Yo, let's start walking this way." So then he kicked him in the butt or whatever. When Luis had an opportunity to maneuver himself and get a head start – because it was crowded, somebody pulls that out on you, walking you, escorting you out of the park, and then there are people coming into the park. There's a lot of traffic going in and out. So, while he got a chance, he just had a quick moment and Luis Rosado left. And the guy just started shooting in the air and stuff like that. The party was over. And then Luis must've gone and got his part. He lived around the neighborhood, not too far. He went to 3rd Street to one of the family members' houses, where he had a stash. The parents probably didn't even know he had a gun. So he came back and he shot the guy dead. Killed him. That's it. The thing about that time in the Lower East Side, if you pulled out a gun, you use it. A lot of people pull out guns, they don't use it. So he pulled out the gun, and said, "Yo, you let this guy get away.”

Luis survived about five, six months in the streets. We always kept on moving him. The cops came, he got tired of running. The police officers arresting his family members, arresting his mom and things like that. A sixteen-year-old kid, you know what I'm saying? He 'fessed up – he took the crime. He got tired. He said, "You know, what, I did it. Sixteen years old. Let's go." Turned himself in. Had that lawyer, Lynne Stewart.

JUNIOR: *I wasn't impressed. She...When my mother got her, it was just a lot of talking. I remember the day, because I was there when he got sentenced, with my moms and my family. I remember, "Oh, don't worry about it, we can appeal it." But the judge wasn't having it. The judge sentenced him with no remorse. For us, we suffered because he's three years, my brother tried, but it was to no avail.*

Luis ends up getting Twenty-five to life.

We knew the other family. There's an animosity behind what happened, but we – we were the innocent ones,

we weren't involved, there's no remorse, it's one kid to another kid. And back then, that time, you didn't go after the family. There was a code. Now, there's no code.

His parents knew what part he played. You know parents tell children, "Stay home," advice and everything. So, he played a role. Plus, everybody in the Lower East Side knew each other. That's how it was back in the day. You walk down the street – if I was behaving bad, another person's parents would kick me in the butt or say something like, "I saw your son hanging out." When something happened, everybody knew why it happened, who did it, and why they did it, how it started and things like that. It takes two to tango.

Back in the days, everybody had a gun. Remember they had the Hell's Angels on 3rd Street, they had the New Comers over here by 12th street. They had all these motorcycles, all these things happening, too. All these crazy guys, you know? It was the Wild Wild West over here. To the kids in the neighborhood these were our role models? There were gangs like the **KATO NUNCHUKS. THE HITMEN. THE ALLEN BOYS...**In the '80s, everything was happening. Every project had a little crew... Baruch my houses had **CBS- CANN'T BE STOPPED.** Smith had **SB-SMITH BOYS. ALLEN PROJECT-ALLEN BOYS.**

Luis has been locked up in the max twenty-six, almost twenty-seven years already, and a lot of those inmates don't get mail, don't get postcards. And I've been there, too; I've been incarcerated when I was doing my little stupid thing, not thinking. And that's how it is. I go twice a month to see him.

Thank God we use spraypaint – that's my weapon. Spraypaint and markers.

The '80s, I was going through my own little thing. I was doing my artwork with Keith all the way to '86. Then in '86, Keith went in another direction. Keith, on February 16th, 1990, died of an illness related to AIDS. In the early '90s, all these things happening - I was used to doing my artwork and selling paintings with Keith. There's still some of the major pieces that Keith and I collaborated on in the Foundation's collection that's never been sold. These pieces show up in museum shows, but they do not have my name as an artist on them- they only say Keith Haring. This is wrong. Keith was suppose to leave me something in the Foundation- never happened. That door never opened again.

The money wasn't coming in the early '90s. In '92, '94 that's when I did my bit upstate. After having all this success, thinking I'm going to be...So in the early '90s, you know, I got into a little trouble. I sold heroin – not even selling heroin, my friend was selling heroin, and I was steering. So, just for steering, they would charge you as a sale, too. I thought maybe it was a kick in the ass and then you go. No, you're charged with selling a bag of heroin. So I did, like, two years or whatever. I did the program. And I came out, and I just continued my art. I said, you know what, even though I'm not making that much money and

Keith Haring's got his art thing going on, I could still sell my artwork. So I started selling my paintings, for 100 dollars, making money here and there. Just giving my artwork away – but, hey, it made me more aggressive, more hungry, and now I'm making more, and I'm doing better. So I'm not giving them anymore, selling them for 100 dollars. Now I sell them for a better price, 3-or-4000 dollars.

I met a woman, I had my child, named Jacob. But then I broke up with that relationship. So, I went to the family court, started paying child support. When I was working, I'd pay the child support. When I couldn't pay, it'd add up and then I'd pay it again – thank God. It's a learning experience, that's what I'm going through. And I am paying my child support.

I knew Junior – Pete – as a kid. Around '96, my mom was getting sick with diabetes.

So I'm going through all these little things and I met Rosa. I knew Rosa for a long time. That's my wife, my girlfriend, my best friend, my psychiatrist, the one that keeps me alive. Anyway, I met her and I was going through these little stages. This was like in '96, '97. We're going together thirteen years, on April 19th.

It was a long relationship. I would come there – and I was still on my mission, getting high and everything – and she would constantly give me the right direction. Or she would tell me, “you go this way, you go that way.” And it was a learning experience. It was an intervention call... Like when somebody sees all the negative things that you're doing and they just try to help you out. Because I had a lot of friends like that. I had friends like Clayton, Paul Kostabi – they knew how the routine was: “LA2, you're fucking up.” They always try to show me the right way, but it was up to me to take it. And it took awhile before I could get everything... With all these people that were helping me... Like a full hand...

So, anyway, that's how it became a relationship with Rosa. I moved in... three years ago. I knew her son, I met all her kids and everything. But it took me, like, three years to build the courage to go see Luis. You know, I just didn't want to go just like that. Even though he already knew me. I would talk to him on the phone. Even though we are the same age, I am his stepfather. So we built the relationship like that. And then I started visiting him. I got my I.D. – it is hard to get a New York state I.D. You've got to go through a lot of things. Once I got my picture I.D., I started seeing him, we became friends. And I just gave him unconditional love.

I never saw or met him when I was doing the graffiti back in the early '80s, because I was doing one thing and he was doing his thing. So even in the streets, we were on different paths. But from then on, I just started giving him support to this day. And he's a good kid, and a smart kid – it's just that the D.O.C., the Department of Corrections, ate him up at an early age.

Eventually I got in contact with his mom, we became friends, and that's how I became a part of Luis Rosado's

life.

At sixteen, Luis was tried as an adult. they sent him straight to the max. Every state max there is, he's been there. So, you know, that's his life story. But he's a real good guy.

He did twenty-six years. October of '08, he went to the Board of Shawangunk. He got hit with two years. That was his first board in twenty-six years. He did twenty-six years before he went to see his first board and they gave him two more years?

This was in Shawangunk Correctional Facility¹ a little bit upstate. It's a new facility where they have all these inmates. They try to make a quick program, so they put all the murderers...everybody in jail for whatever they're doing. They've got pedophiles, murderers and everybody. And, in jail, other inmates – been going on for centuries and centuries, I guess – they say other inmates don't like other inmates that molest children, so you know what I'm saying?

Okay. And then...But...So what is it in between those two years...That was just October, because he had a bunch of cases against him. In the system, you're gonna get cases.

Let me tell you something. He got a hearing out of tickets and everything. Remember, he was an adolescent – sixteen years old. A lot of inmates, they do twenty-five years and they're nice and quiet. He got all these tickets. It came out in The NY Post.

JUNIOR: *His rep precedes him...In jail, you either do or you don't. And he's a "do." If you ask anybody in the system if they know who Blueboy is...he gets mad respect. And he's not going to let his reputation or his pride on this deceive him. He's gonna stand up high and do what he's gotta do to maintain living in there. Because, you know what? In jail, it's a jungle. He ain't going nowhere. It's a jungle. You either survive or you get fed to the dogs. He's a survivor. He's got a rep.*

I'm his stepfather, I'm his best friend and everything. When I first met him – it took me three years to get in contact with him – that side of the jail part, I don't pay mind to. My focus – supporting him and calling him by his real name, Luis.

I want to answer about the reputation that Luis got. If people know him as “Blueboy” and glorify that, he's Blueboy. He's a notorious person. Everybody in jail – all over the facilities – knows about him. Because he's a man and he's a straight shooter. You show him respect, he'll show you respect. But all that rape shit, calling, “Yo, suck my dick,” the way they do in jail, he don't play that shit.

That's real disrespectful. The Crips, the Bloods, every gang there knows who he is. Every top gangster, or whatever, from every gang, knows who he is. And everybody knows that when he does something, he does it for respect, and that's why people respect him. If you wanna play the jail life – that gangster shit – don't play it with him. Because everybody knows that. He's not doing it for

FROM WIKIPEDIA.

ORG: Shawangunk Correctional Facility is a maximum security prison for males located in Ulster County, New York in the United States. The prison was constructed in 1983 to expand the maximum security capabilities of the state prison system and was located near the existing Wallkill Correctional Facility, a medium security prison. The co-location was designed so that services by both facilities could be shared, thus reducing the costs of each prison. The new prison opened in 1985 and was fully operational by 1986. The prison is also one of the few in the system with a sex offender program. Occupational training is provided in the category of building maintenance with specific training in carpentry, electricity and plumbing.

reputation or nothing. Because, before that, the D.O.C. ate him up.

He ain't going nowhere. So he stabbed people – of course you gotta stab people, that's part of the system. Anything he did, other people did. He killed somebody in jail – he's not the first person that killed somebody in jail. But he did it! That's part of history. That's part of life. And he handled that. He puts an "H" – I Handled that, I Hold that. He did it. He's not the first one that killed somebody or the last one.

JUNIOR: *I'm a strong believer that you can't put any time on your destiny. Destiny's gonna come regardless. You say, "You got two years to the board," but you don't know what's gonna happen within those two years. So, as a man that's been raised behind the concrete jungle wall, he's gotta justify for himself. He's gotta be a man to himself. Before he is a friend to you or anybody, he's gotta be friends to himself. And, you know what, that's why my brother is my brother. Because he's a realist.*

He's not the type of person to say, "Yo, just because I laugh with you, that doesn't make you a friend of mine." You gotta gain his trust. Just like everything. And in jail, you don't have friends. Anybody that laughs with you – that doesn't make them your friend. So you gotta have... You have to be on point. That's it in other words. Because if you're not on point, you get swallowed up. In a minute. Because you're not in there doing...judging a beauty pageant. You're in there doing hard time because of what you did. It caused you to do that. And my brother's not saying, "Look at me, boohoo, I'm in jail." My brother's saying, "Hey, I'm in jail and this is what I did. I just want this information to get out." And he's not asking for any miracles – if it gets out, it gets out.

He's been part of the Crips for awhile. He is one of the top dogs. If someone is trying to cut him or things like that. There's no freebie with him. His ears and his eyes are always open. Just because he's sleeping, that don't mean his eyes are closed. He's been in the system. The system teaches you how to be an animal, too. What society doesn't realize is that we're not doing the time, so we don't know what's happening behind the wall 24-7. Now, certain people that been done time before, they understand the concept. See, while you're out here, in society, you're paying your bills, you're being a Regular Joe citizen. But while you're in jail, it becomes a whole different ballgame, you know. It's gotta be Survival of the Fittest. And if you don't, you get swallowed up. Just like in every society. The weak get cancelled out and the strong survive.

The Larry Davis story...In Shawangunk, the new facility...Larry Davis had a reputation, right? He had a reputation in the outside world. In the outside world, in the newspaper, everybody knew him because of his rep as an infamous cop shooter. But how he's been living in those twenty-five years – in the inside world, in the correctional facility – it's a whole different story. Once the media is over and the papers are over, it's only you there. You're

locked up in a cell.

The television show, American Gangster – Larry Davis's point of view is a so-called infamous cop shooter. But they don't know that he, himself, was just another inmate. In the film, all you see is Larry Davis making scenes with the correctional officer. Being dragged out, making no noise for other inmates. All he wanted to do was try to get his case involved. It was all a big scene. All of the conflicts he's having on that DVD are between the correctional officers and himself. It has nothing to do with the other inmates, or their position in jail...

He changed his name from Larry Davis to Adam Abdul Hakim, a Muslim name. Like everybody does. They go to jail, they become Muslim. In the beginning, Larry Davis faked that he had a back injury so he could sue the state and get over the system. In American Gangster, he showed his true colors after he stood up, got up, walked around.

JUNIOR: *He had no affiliations. He changed his name to a Muslim one so he could get, probably, better food portions. I don't know if Davis was affiliated; I haven't been with Larry Davis in jail to know. He could be in protective custody or whatever.*

As I heard it, from other individuals that were in jail and came out, Larry Davis was one of those jail gangsters. Those cell gangsters. Yelling. You know how they put you on a tier and they start yelling?

I'm going twice a month to visit Lois Rosado. His case is pending. We're waiting, still, to be called by the lawyer, and we're waiting to get all the information together so my brother can start trial. Right now, they gave Luis Rosado ten years in the hole.

He's going to court now. The trial hasn't come yet. Right now, they gave him ten years in the hole. So, the D.A. and the court system have got plenty of time to build their case. So, right now, he's building his case, trying to get the right lawyers, trying to get the paperwork. Right now, he's just there, in the hole. If they give him fifteen to life, he'd be finished. That means he would never see the street. But if we try to get him – he already got ten – if we try to get him like eight years. Because, remember, there's two sides of the story. Larry Davis hit him twice with a cane.

The story of the yard was: they had rec time. Luis Rosado was going to confront these two inmates that were pedophiles. They're in the yard. They've got a yard section where they hit the weights. In the yard, they've got the TV room and a little walkway. They're in the yard. Inmates are here, inmates are there, inmates are here. Luis Rosado is going to confront these two pedophiles. He's going to tell them, "Pack your shit, I don't like you. You've gotta pack your shit and leave." Larry Davis saw what was happening when Luis Rosado was confronting these two pedophiles. The two pedophiles are black; I just found out they were black, too. Larry Davis liked the pedophiles – they used to talk and everything. So, while Luis Rosado

was confronting them, Larry Davis hit him twice with a cane – he hit Luis Rosado in the yard with a cane. Luis Rosado gets in the yard – when you go to the yard, you know, inmates...You're hanging out with murderers, remember, so when you're in the yard, people got weapons.

And one thing about Luis Rosado, too. When he goes into trouble and has these fights...When he killed this person...When he did that, he does it knowing that, when the ambulance comes, there's going to be two people going to the same hospital. One's gonna be dead, one's gonna be alive. That's how he rolls. And that's what happened. Larry Davis hit him with the cane, Luis Rosado saw the blood dripping – You know how anybody is when they see blood. Their hair stands up on their back. He had a shank and he stabbed him twelve times. He killed him.

He killed him. And then the correctional officers came and told Luis – those correctional officers, remember, they're hillbillies. They've got their mother, their father, their uncle. Their mother's the judge, the father's the C.O., everybody does the paperwork. So the C.O. came and said "Drop the weapon." And Luis said, "You want the weapon? Here's the weapon." But the officer was freaking out, you know. He was...not even two years – I don't know how many years on the job. So then they got the S.W.A.T. team. That's when they get the Ninja Turtles, the guys with the big shit, and they tell Luis, "Put the weapon down." He put it down, gave him the handcuffs, and they're rock-and-roll, they took him out of jail. Just like that. The other two inmates, now they're under P.C. – protective custody. Because now the officer's gotta interview the other inmates in the yard – remember, there's a whole bunch of inmates, they've gotta get their statements, what they've seen and stuff like that. So now all that processing is going out. The officers gotta make a report for the inmates and things like that. So the two child molesters – where are they going? P.C. If shit would've happened – that's why Luis went to the yard, to tell them, "Yo, pack your shit and go to P.C." If this guy would've minded his business, he would've been involved. But things happen, instantly. One minute you're doing alright...That's how you're surviving in jail. That's a survival game. He didn't do it to become famous. Larry Davis should've minded his business. If Larry Davis would've minded his business, he probably would've been alive. So that's a true story. And on American Gangster, when they interview his cousins and things like that – they don't even know what happened. Luis Rosado didn't do it to get famous, get money or make a story. He ain't got no story, the cops didn't pay him. The only ones that go see him are his parents – his mother, me and his brother, and that's about it. He's still gonna live the way he lives.

And everybody in jail knows – they had the Muslims, the Latin Kings, the Crips, all those gangs – when shit happens, when you murder somebody and you're in those gangs, they have it read as "gangs fight gangs." "Muslims will fight the Latin Kings," you know...Nothing like that

happened. You know why? Because they knew where he was at. There wasn't no riots. If Larry Davis was a big Muslim guy, or if he was somebody big – the Muslims would say, "You know what," they know. Because in jail – cliques. Everybody's got their own cliques. Nothing broke out.

All the inmates from all the prisons, they found out Larry Davis was dead. "Why? Oh, he looked for it! Oh, he had a reason!" Gangs don't fight other gangs for no reason. He's in the Crips – so what, he's in the Crips? There were no riots. End of case. That was it. The party's over, he's doing the ten years and he's happy, because Davis should've minded his own business. I go over and I visit him in the box. They've got a special section for the box. You've got other inmates coming in. You've got Muslims; they'll be like, "Yo, what's up?" They know the routine. Where he's at, they've got other inmates. Anytime another inmate wants to see him, go and visit. You got beef with him, go visit. That's how it is. They've got officers that give him his...They've gotta be careful, too. Because they've got these young officers, C.O.s, that think they can do whatever they want. When they see Luis, he says, "Yo, you better read my record." Because they're slick, too, with their mouths – that's a family situation over there. But no wars, nothing broke out.

A Briefly Celebrated Fugitive Is Stabbed to Death in Prison

From Page B1

spite overwhelming evidence against him — his shotgun, handguns and fingerprints and eyewitness accounts — he was acquitted of attempting to murder nine police officers, including the six he wounded, in the shootout at 1231 Fulton Avenue, near 168th Street, in Morrisania.

Mr. Kanstler and Ms. Stewart claimed he acted in self-defense and that he had been singled out because he knew of corruption and drug-dealing in police precincts. No evidence to support police misconduct was offered by the defense. Mr. Davis was convicted of six counts of possessing weapons, however, and was nev-

More than 1,500 officers demonstrated after the verdict.

Detective Thomas McCarren, who had been shot in the mouth and neck and was the most grievously wounded of the six officers, was forced to retire as a result of his injuries. He could not be reached for comment on Thursday, but on the day of the verdict, he denounced the finding by the jury of 10 blacks and 2 Hispanics.

"I think the jury should be ashamed of themselves," he said. "It was a racist verdict. The day this happened, a bunch of good honest police officers went to lock up Larry Davis because he had killed people, and not for anything else."

Mr. Davis was sentenced to a



A HELLRAISER IN THE WINDOW

**Clayton
Patterson**
interview with
MARCO
transcribed by
Monica Uszerowicz

I GREW UP on Allen Street. My whole life – thirty-two years. This is pretty much all I know. I spent my whole life in that same building, same apartment. I have a daughter; she's five now. I work at the hotel; been there for eight years. I'm a union delegate there. I pretty much fight for motherfuckers - up there. I've been there for eight years. Everything's good, other than that.

I'm Dominican, baby, all day, but the whole crew I was with was Puerto Rican. Back in those days, Dominicans were coming up. But being that I was born and raised in New York, in the Lower East Side, I grew up with all Puerto Rican friends, 'cause there weren't too many Dominicans out here. Dominicans really started showing up in the late Eighties. I was already on the street in '85, '86, running around, ten years old and shit. Back in the days, the Lower East Side, to me, was just a drug-infested zone.

Most of the bodegas and businesses down here were Dominican. They were owned by one dude. His brother, they were twins, ended up killing him in the Dominican Republic. He ended up keeping all his fuckin' fortune. I don't think he was in the business. His brother was, I guess, over there, living good. But that is the story – it came out in the newspaper, actually. I was in prison when that shit came out. He owned the drug spots- the ones on Ludlow. The ones on Allen. The one on Eldridge. The ones on Stanton. He had one on First Avenue and Avenue A. There's a fuckin' big club there, a big bar with glass now – there used to be a store next to that. One on Clinton Street. All that shit was his. He ran all the bodega coke spots, he was big.

I feel like shit like that can't really happen these days. That's also something I think about, too, when I think about L.E.S. I was like a little kid, coming around here. All those spots don't really exist anymore. Weed spots, coke spots, like when I was a kid. You can't exist; you can't have a store out on the street. There are cops on the streets now. Everything changes. The game changes, the players stay the same. Then the players change, too. They go to jail. New guys step up. There's always gonna be a way, though. They just moved. There's no more corners, there's just phones. They went from beepers to phone. Delivery services.

The Puerto Ricans had the dope. I worked with the Puerto Ricans. There was more money there. There was

a lot of money in dope. A lot.

Growing up was cool. In 89, '88 I was 12 years old. I looked up to a lot of guys. You idolize a lot of negative shit. That's all you see: the cars, the jewelry, the clothes, the women. But I was into sports, though. I was actually good at a lot of sports. I was good at swimming, basketball, baseball, football. I had trophies for every one of them – all sports. I got sent to Norman Thomas to play basketball. And that first year, I fucked up and got into a fight in that school. It was a huge school. It was on 33rd and Park Avenue. It's got, like, ten floors. I had a big fight there with some kid and I got thrown out of there. I got sent to Manhattan High School, a school for dropouts. It's on 52nd Street. They tried to take my jacket and didn't succeed. I got thrown out of that fuckin' school. I was already in the streets, but like I told you, I was into sports and everything, so I was just one of those cool kids. I was from the street, but I wasn't fucking...in the street. About 1992, 1993, I just dropped out from then on.

I remember the **ALLEN BOYS** because I lived across the street from their hangout, MJ's. I used to be at MJ's, playing pool and all that. They ran dope in the Bronx, I mean, you had guys that ran out here, but they didn't run it.

There were gang-related shootings over blocks, you know, territory. It wasn't about drugs. Everybody used to sell drugs there. There were women – big-time women – who sold drugs there. Around there were gangs- the Allen Boys, the Hill, there was a whole bunch of fucking gangs in those days. I remember them leaving people for dead around there and shit. There would be a lot of shootouts. I lived right across the street; I'd see all that shit. There were a lot of shootouts with them. They made a lot of money, too, on dope. A lot of people sold on Eldridge Street. I mean, well yeah, the Allen Boys used to, but there were just so many of them. They were all young kids, coming up, making a lot of money. Chrystie Park turned to a crackhead park. Homeless and everything. But before crack was dope. You'd be walking by, and there would be all these people yelling out brands - like Smurf. The park was a mob scene. It seemed like hundreds of people were in the park. This was between Delancey and Houston.

There were dope fiends, back in those days. They used to shoot up across the street, right in Mr. Adam Purple's Garden on Forsyth Street. We used to be in there,

watching guys getting their dicks sucked by the hookers. We used to throw little rocks and bricks, because the garden was destroyed by the city by then. So we used to grab rocks and throw them at them. Or throw them at the junkies while they were shooting up.

Twice a day, morning and evening, between Delancey and Broome, the dealers used to take over the east side of the park. They took over the area where people would walk. There were the park benches, the inner play area was lower than the walkway, and the play area had a brick wall around it, which reached to about 3 feet above the walk area. They had lookouts at both ends of the park with sticks. They junkies would line up in a single file, which would go on for about 100 feet – all the way down to the end of the park. There'd be two dealers sitting on the park's brick fence with their backs to the playground area. And a steerer would get the junkies to come one at a time, sit on the bench. There were two dealers. First guy took the money and the second guy would give them the drugs, and then next. Cop and go cop and go the steerer would be yelling.

Yeah, there was a lot of money in those days. There would be lines. They'd have to keep motherfuckers in check in those days. In the lines you'd see a postman, a guy in a suit, some bums... and cops, too! The shit was all rigged. Drugs is politics. And I'm just playing the game, baby.

One day, I was playing basketball in the summertime. And one of my homeboys, Joey, and Marcus, were getting coked up. It was fucking, like, three o'clock in the afternoon. I was playing basketball. They were sniffing coke. I finished the game and I'm sitting down with them and they're putting this powder in their nose and I'm like, "What the fuck are you guys doing? What is that?" They were like, "This is not for you." Right when they said that, that shit triggered me even more to be more curious. So I was like, "I want it." I had money; I was not a broke kid. I didn't grow up poor or nothin' like that. I had money. So I went home, I got dressed, I took a shower. I remember this day. This was the first day I did coke. I went and I took a shower and came back down with money. And I got them to get me the coke. Right out of these guys' bodegas that I'm telling you about. So they get me the coke, and we start fucking getting coked up. And from that day on, it was just the streets. That's when I started sniffing coke, smoking weed.

In those days, back in the Ludlow days, the cops used to come. And when they would come, it would be a fucking raid. They're gonna jump out, they're taking six, seven motherfuckers. Straight up. In those days, there wasn't so many places to hide the dope. People would carry the fucking dope on them. So when they used to say "bajando," they would throw the fucking dope. Just in the street, away from them. And walk away from it and won't come back for like, hours. So me – as a kid and as working on

the other side – I would just walk through there and just find bundles of other peoples' shit.

I finished dropping out of school and everything was fucked up for me. So, since I wasn't home with my parents, and I was acting rebellious – I was in drug stage already as a teenager – my parents decided to send me to Dominican Republic for fucking three months. I had just been caught in a robbery charge. I was robbing Chinese dudes in the street. So I robbed a couple of Chinese dudes and I got arrested and my parents decided to send me to D.R. I get to D.R. and I start just causing havoc over there, in my aunt's house. I'm fighting guys in the street, just going crazy. In another country. When I get back, I have to go to court and they sentence me to five years probation. Now they want me to go to school and work. I didn't want to do neither.

I was sixteen, actually, fifteen. So I come back and I see Marcus and I see everybody, you know, doing good. So I'm saying to myself, "Let me get down with that." And right away, they said, "Fine, come on." As soon as I did that, that was it. That was all I needed. I was making money, I was good, with strong people. Very strong people in this area at that time. I felt good; that was it. I was selling drugs.

I was with Fern, with Eddie, with Marcus, Chapo, Joey, Jesus, Anthony, Miguel, C.D., Deck. We were deep, man. We were LSB. That's what we were reppin': the Ludlow Street Boys. Ludlow was good. Ludlow was like a dream, bro. You walk down there, you get whatever you want. Nobody fucked with you. The neighbors would be quiet, the "white people" would be great. They'd mind their business, they were friendly, they'd smoke a joint with us on the fuckin' step. They let us go into any fuckin' business, bar. We were teenagers here, going into fuckin' bars. And it was a different world, man.

I was never into graffiti, but we were spraypainting, **LSB "LUDLOW STREET BOYS,"** because we were from there, we were defending there.

The crew was not that much older than me, but they'd been doing it for years. I did it for – unfortunately – I was there with them for four years. And that's when they started getting investigated. That's what fucked me up. But I don't regret nothing, I'm good.

CP: *As a little background, I remember – probably '87 or something – Tony the hit (pill) seller, who worked on Essex Street. Tony worked for Raymond, but then went solo on Essex. One day, in the early afternoon, I see two brothers, both about 5'4" tall, both worked for Raymond, both running around the corner on Broome. Running as fast as their short legs would carry them. All of a sudden I hear "pop, pop, pop." They were running after Tony. Finally, by just before Rivington Street, Tony goes down in the middle of Essex Street. They head back towards Stanton. Tony is on the ground doubled over. Nobody showed up – no ambulance, no cops, no nothing. I asked a Dominican limo*

driver who knew Tony if we could take him to the hospital. He said, *No problem.*

So we got Tony into the limo and headed to Bellevue. You couldn't tell he had been shot. There was just a burnt hole about the size of the end of your finger hole in his white wool sweater. It just looked like a little cigarette burn in his sweater. He was turning all white. Saying, hurry, Papi, hurry. We got him into Bellevue. The driver took off. Tony passed out. All the bleeding was internal. Some hospital attendants and myself threw him on the gurney and, in the chaos, we rushed him into the operating room. I got one shot of him in the hospital when they were just starting to cut off all his garments. A team of medical workers all cutting his shirt, pants, shoes, everything. A doctor saw me with the camera – he flipped and then everybody went nuts and threw me out. Not a problem. I was out of there.

A few weeks later, Tony is back on the beat, only now he is working the Rivington side of the market. Tony was always pleasant to me. After his ordeal, he was super nice to me. Eventually he, like so many of the others, disappeared. After the shooting, the little guys were no longer around. A few months later, I saw them once by the Hat restaurant on on Ludlow. We looked at each other, but it was no big deal as nothing was going on. The last time I saw them they were working on about 12th and B. Raymond eventually took a drug bust, and took off for Puerto Rico. I hear he got caught and got major time. Raymond was also connected to a heroin brand called Black. Another long story. I have photos of all those guys. They were all in the window.

The only brand I sold was Hellraiser. Nobody had that but us. We were Stanton to Houston. K-90 was up the block. Ludlow between Houston and Stanton was Hellraiser.

I don't know where they got the name from. But the stamp was... We had a couple of stamps, though. We had one with "Hellraiser," the name. Then we had "Hellraiser" with the little demon, with the antennae. I forgot how else we did it. We'd switch it up. I'm pretty sure Clayton has a couple of sample stamped bags. The crew was like a family. We was pretty tight. It was ran pretty good, yeah.

I got busted in '95. Started in '91 and lasted till '95. I was 18 years old. I did my time as a man, like a champ. I did three years inside and five years outside, on parole. I maxed out, I'm good. I've been out of that trap for five years now. 2003, actually, I finished. I'm good. Fuck the feds.

It was scary in the beginning. It was fed. I was first at MCC (Metropolitan Correctional Center downtown Manhattan by Federal Court), right here. Eleven South. It was cool there. Met a couple of good dudes and shit. I was young. I was alright. Brown jumpsuits. They then sent you to Otisville, to a holdover prison. When I was in Otisville, I ran into Eddy. Not Eddy the snitch, Eddy my other boy, that was on the case also. He was already in-

side. They never gave him bail. So he was there; I ran into him. He kind of showed me the ropes and shit. But then after that, he came back down to MDC (Metropolitan Detention Center) – to Brooklyn – and I stayed in Otisville. From there, I fought my case and then got sentenced.

I went from there to Louisburg as a holdover. You know, you've gotta transfer from there. That's the penitentiary but they just hold you there, in the housing unit, to transfer you. And then from there, I went to Schuylkill. In Pennsylvania. Minersville, Pennsylvania. That's where I was locked up with Sal from Allen Boys. I was good in every prison I went to, man.

CP: *Different from the other Eddie who snitched out Mark Glass the landlord? Set the landlord up with the Feds and the city cops. . Eddie was not only snitching on people, but he was setting them up as well- working with the cops. Eddie set up Peewee and the landlord.*

Peewee was just a kid at the time. Eddie had Peewee hooked on heroin, then got him to try and burn down one of Mark's Clinton Street apartments. The cops faked a woman's death in the fire—and snagged the landlord and Peewee. Peewee did his prison time for attempted murder and arson, then was deported back to the Dominican Republic. His uncle on Ludlow just died. I got a picture of the uncle with his brother, and David another fixture on the block, into The Village. I called it the three amigos.

Eddie was on my case turned into a rat. He started working for the government. What the government made him do I don't know what. He got into some shit with this landlord, the Jewish guy. The Jewish guy told him to burn a building for him. The building was going to get burned, or was burning, I don't know. And they locked up the Jew guy.

CP: *Mark wanted a tenant out. And one of the things some sleazy landlords used to do was burning people out. And he really didn't like this woman at all – this was like, 132 Clinton. And, so, Eddy, knowing this landlord – well, they used to hide their dope in the mailboxes in one of his buildings. I don't know if the landlord was down with that or not. But, anyway, Eddy knew that this guy did some things on the side about getting rid of tenants. And then Eddie traded you guys and the landlords for his freedom.*

When I got out I wasn't shellshocked, but the Lower East Side changed a lot, but not too much. Now it's changed a lot.

WINDOW

I learned about the window when I was a little kids. You know P.S. 20. Just walking by the window, and just see-

ing everything. Just people you know. Guys in your class, your cousin. Somebody you knew was on that window. Especially from this Lower East Side. It was like a little fucking town.

Just take the photo right in front of the door. You would go-- "I know that motherfucker! I know you from the Ave.!" The window, that window meant something back in the day. Clayton, motherfuckers used to want to run into you so they could take a picture. You know? Like, "Take another one!" It was crazy. You definitely wanted to be on that window, man, if you were from here. I was actually in the window before I even hooked up with Hellraiser and everything else. Elementary school pictures. You got me up there, I'm pretty sure. To have your picture taken down here was a really big deal.

CP: *Bert, now in his 20's, married, kids, your neighbor, from grade one on till today I have taken his picture. He used to come down here with his father. His father died early, and was a famous musician. You know, the whole LES was different then, I think part of why the window projects is so important is because it shows the history of the people who were here. Some of the people grew up in the window. Bert is not the only one.*

Grown-ass man with kids! The only history of anything like this of anywhere on the Lower East Side that I know of. Sometimes the whole crew. So many from around here, everybody in Hellraiser. For the most part, people that were on the streets sort of ran the streets. They were part of the streets. A whole part of the window was mostly streets. Also people who lived in the street life.

CP: *When I go through the pictures, it's shocking how many people are no longer here. How many of those people have moved, or are dead? Or got AIDs or something? Or are in jail?*

They were the people. Putting the pictures in the window was about making people famous. The window was really a positive thing. And the other thing I tried to do with the window was always take people's best part. Make them smile, say "pussy," or whatever. And then everybody smiles and... I'd sell the pictures for two dollars each, or you'd have to trade something. A drawing, or... Then I would draw the Seven Letter Word Drawing made out of the word "Clayton". Often the drawing would be an original, it'd be different.

Flipping the bird, man. But yeah, we took a lot of nice pictures. We would buy the pictures back off of you..

CP: *I recently had a call, a sad call. Some kid from the Bronx. I knew his father. And his father was murdered down here. He wants to find out about his father, see the pictures, that whole thing. His father was in the Satan Sinners on Avenue D. It's amazing how many people don't*

even have pictures of their family. He found me because of a picture from a magazine. So when you go through the pictures, with some neighborhood people you see the people who are dead or in jail. Some people moved to the Bronx, some moved to Brooklyn, some to North Carolina, some people went to Puerto Rico or Pennsylvania or wherever. Some are married living in Brooklyn, others joined the military, but a lot of people are either locked down, dead, or wasted on drugs. Some of them turned into alcoholics - at least two of them that I know are street bums now. It is a weird thing to watch a bright, shiny kid grow up, and then you see him or her as a derelict or something. It really is a huge history.

It always bothered me how corrupt the drug business is. The British got the Chinese hooked on Opium and took advantage of them. No different than Eddie getting Peewee, a young kid, hooked on dope. Working with the cops, Eddie set Peewee up to start a fire to implicate a landlord in an arson. This certainly ruined Peewee's life. Or NYPD cops, working out of corrupt precincts involved in the drug business as was brought out in the Mollen Commission, a Government run investigation. Or how the privileged get to go to rehab and the locals go to jail. Drugs are just too corrupt. In America drugs are a form of madness - too many contradictions - too many lies - too much hidden money - too much human devastation - too many people in jail - too many jails - too much of our economy spent on locking people up - too much corruption- too much stupidity. Getting the drugs is not the problem so legalize them- take the prison system, the lies and the corruption out of the business.

In a culture like the Lower East Side it is not unusual to know someone who has been to jail, or is waiting to go to jail, or is in jail. In my book if a person has been to jail that is different than being a criminal. A criminal will rip you off, steal from you, be dishonest with you, do you harm, kill you. Otherwise these people are just neighbors, friends, people who have gotten caught up in the system or involved in a business that is somehow connected to the system. Drugs are not natural to LES - it takes many different international hands to eventually get the drugs into the streets of the LES.

It is curious how during the time of the Vietnam War heroin showed up in all the ghettos of America. The LES was flooded with dope. Like somehow living here amongst us are all these big hooked-up international businessmen. Then during the Iran-contra conflict all of a sudden it was snowing coke in America - coke wasn't traded on Wall Street, but it sure was used there. Funny how we ended up with all these bodega's that sold coke and not milk. Golly Mr. Giuliani how does that work? And I am sad to report that Marco got suckered back into the game, and is now back in jail. I hope not for a long time. He is a good neighbor.

A COMMUNITY IS MADE UP OF CONTINUOUSLY CROSSING CIRCLES

**Clayton
Patterson**
edited by
Elsa Rensaa

WHILE LIVING IN THIS COMMUNITY, I have crossed paths with most of the people mentioned in *Life in the Hood*— Keith Haring, LA2, Larry Davis, Lynn Stewart, Exavier Wardlaw. I lived at 325 Broome Street, the same building where Keith Haring lived. I was also the building manager, during which time I had use of the empty storefront studio space in the basement. I eventually gave it up as Keith acquired space. This is the space LA2 refers to as the Rat Studio, where he first started working with Keith.

In 1988, when I was sentenced to jail for contempt of court for not turning over my Tompkins Square Park Police Riot videotape to the DA, I was put in the Bronx House of Detention. I was held in the max prison system called Central Monitoring, which meant I had to have an officer, a captain or someone of higher ranking escort me whenever I went anywhere. When I went to court or back to the Bronx Detention Center, I was placed in a special, separate, individually locked cage in the prison bus. I had handcuffs and chains to my waist, as well as leg shackles. Or, I rode as a lone individual in a special security van. Sometimes, instead, I had two large federal marshals pick me up and escort me. Why all the drama? Who knows? My only crime was not giving them a videotape of the police riot.

I wanted to make sure that this police riot was dealt with in a serious way and that it would be investigated. So it cost me a little freedom, but I got the results that I was looking for - it cranked up the whole case in the media. Every news source covered this event and in a short time a chief was retired, the captain was moved from the precinct, six cops were criminally indicted, other cops were fired, many departmental disciplinary hearings went forward and so on.

The only other person in the Bronx House of Detention prison complex under Central Monitoring was Larry Davis. Larry Davis and I both had Lynn Stewart, Bill Kunstler, and Ron Kuby as a legal team. I went to one day of Larry Davis's cop-shooting trial in the Bronx. At that time you were allowed to bring cameras into the courthouse, but not tape or take photos without special permission from the judge. When I showed up in the courtroom, the judge got all anxious. He had a special hearing in his chambers with the lawyers, prosecutors and me. He

wanted to know what my connection to the case was. He examined my camera. I had documented a band called Mental Abuse and put their sticker on the outside of the camera. The judge questioned me about this name.

A friend, Exavier Wardlaw, who was a playwright, an activist and a squatter, wrote a play about Larry Davis and performed it at the Living Theater on 3rd Street and Ave C. When Exavier was doing research on the Larry Davis story, he found my name and that incident in the court transcripts. I am a supporter of the Living Theater and the creative freedom that they represent. Because of gentrification and the rising cost of rent, the Living Theater shut down the 3rd Street theater. That space then turned into a drug bodega where the cops, during a raid, shot some of the dealers.

What's better for a community - selling narcotics or having a theater? In the past, members of the Living Theater have been arrested and had shows shut down for some of their ideas and performances, and I was thrown in jail for taking pictures of a police riot. Angel Ortiz, "LA2," went the legitimate art route but has been robbed of his rightful place in history. Some of his own valuable art, pieces he did in collaboration with Keith, is locked up and impossible for him to get to through the legitimate Keith Haring Foundation. To survive this change in lifestyle - from an artist with a reputation and money to having nothing - pushed him into the neighborhood business, which was selling drugs. Society obviously thought drugs were better as there were dope spots on every block and a shortage of creative venues.

Angel Ortiz, LA2, came to me for help with his art problems. I got solid articles about him and his career problems into the *Village Voice*, the *Villager*, the *NY Times*, *NY Sun*, a German art magazine, and so on.

LA2 is the stepfather of Luis Rosado, a.k.a Blueboy. Because of my interest in the history of the LES, LA wants me to know Luis's history. Luis also had Lynn Stewart as a lawyer.

In 1986, Larry Davis became an infamous New Yorker. Davis was a drug dealer in the Morrisania section of the Bronx. The police version of the story stated that when they went to arrest Davis in connection to four murders in the Bronx, Davis shot his way out, wounding six cops, four of them seriously. This shootout became the record for the

most NYPD officers shot in a single shootout.

The Davis trial took place in the Bronx, where the inner city communities had little faith in the NYPD. The defense was built around generally accepted knowledge linking the NYPD with rampant corruption. The defense testified that several cops were in the drug business with Davis and were coming not to arrest but to kill him, as he had become a security problem. Davis was acquitted of shooting the cops and four drug dealers, but he was found guilty of six counts of criminal possession of guns, for which he was given a five-to-fifteen year prison sentence. Davis was eventually charged and acquitted for shooting a fifth drug dealer - but the sixth time, he was arrested for firing a gun through the door of a crackhouse, hitting and killing a person. Davis was given twenty-five to life for this crime.

Luis, "Blueboy," one of the highest ranking **CRIPS** in the NYS prison system, stabbed Davis 12 times with a homemade shank, killing him.

Living in a community like the LES, one has to realize that you always have to go around the block again. One should treat others with respect, because you are going to go around the block and to meet everyone again - at one time or another. Best to be friends rather than enemies. I document the community, so I try and stay neutral on the side of the community people - my people - my neighbors - my friends.

NY Times N.Y. / REGION February 21, 2008 "<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/02/21/the-death-of-larry-davis/?emc=eta1>" \t "_blank" City Room: The Death of Larry Davis By Sewell Chan

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