



Gathered Leaves

Alec Soth

| 2004 |

Sleeping by the Mississippi



Peter's Houseboat, Winona, Minnesota

"During the slow process of setting up the 8x10 camera, I would sometimes ask the people I photographed to write down their dreams. 'My dream is running water' wrote

Peter, who has lived on a Mississippi River houseboat for over twenty years."

Charles, Vasa, Minnesota

This photograph was taken on the roof of Charles's house, next to a glass room he calls his cockpit.



Charles Lindbergh's Boyhood Bed, Little Falls, Minnesota

"In his autobiographical story *The Spirit of St. Louis* (1953), Charles Lindbergh tells that from his bed he watched the clouds in the sky and already dreamed of reaching them

by plane. 'Then, I would ride on the wind and be part of the sky'."



Sheila, Leech Lake Indian Reservation, Minnesota

"Sheila, the pastor's daughter at the Ball Club Assembly of God, a Pentecostal Church on reservation land, agreed to let me photograph her only if I accompanied the picture

with the following text: 'If you don't have Jesus in your life, you are truly missing out on a blessing. He will set you free; accept him today'."



Buena Vista, Iowa

"I recently visited the cross/telephone pole and the leg is now fixed."



Kym, Polish Palace, Minneapolis, Minnesota

"I interviewed Kym for a couple of hours. I learned that she is a 32-year-old divorced mother of baby twins. She owns a day care center, lives with her boyfriend, dreams of being on television and has a brother in prison. (...) I asked Kym about her favourite travel destination. She told me that she had only traveled once, with her ex-husband. 'We went to New Orleans' she said. 'It was great, we drank on Bourbon Street and toured the cemeteries. The cemeteries there are so amazing. But it was sad we took all these pictures and then left our camera on the bus. I don't have any pictures from that trip'."



Ste. Genevieve, Missouri

"It was rare that I photographed the Mississippi, and when I did, it was usually backwater."



Fort Jefferson Memorial Cross, Wickliffe, Kentucky

"Ballard County convicts Terry, Keith, William and Randy (left to right) were working at a rest stop overlooking the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Keith's dream was to someday own and operate his own pilot school."



Cape Girardeau, Missouri

"This photo inspired the cover of the first photobook *Sleeping by the Mississippi*. The wall reveals the footprints of absent frames."



Sunshine, Memphis, Tennessee

"After taking this picture at a motel on Elvis Presley Boulevard, I later returned to Memphis to give Sunshine a copy. She told me that her real name is Monique. She was twenty-one years old. I asked if I could take another picture, this time in less revealing clothing. Monique explained that all her nice clothes were back in Atlanta. She had run away from home at fourteen after the birth of her son, whom she had left with her parents. She has been Sunshine ever since."



Helena, Arkansas

"This mattress reminded me of Huck Finn's raft." Referencing Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.



Mother and Daughter, Davenport, Iowa

"My dream is to be a RN', wrote Aja. Her mother, Julie, said that she had given up dreaming a long time ago."



Johnny Cash's Boyhood Home, Dyess, Arkansas

"Johnny Cash was born in rural, south-central Arkansas in February of 1932. (...) In 1936, the Cash family was one of 600 chosen to relocate to northeast Arkansas to reclaim swampland. This project was known as the Dyess Colonization Scheme. When he was four, Johnny joined his family to work and sing, in the cotton fields. (...) His family was evacuated from the farm after a flood in 1937. This is memorialized in his 1959 song, *Five Feet High and Rising*: *We couldn't see much good in the flood waters when they were causing us to have to leave home, but when the water went down, we found that it had washed a load of rich black bottom dirt across our land. The following year we had the best crop we'd ever had.*"



Joshua, Angola State Prison, Louisiana

"A teardrop tattoo has several meanings, but is usually a sign that an inmate has killed someone. Joshua (prisoner #429972) is serving a forty-year sentence for murder."



Bonnie (with a photograph of an angel), Port Gibson, Mississippi

"During the Civil War, Grant spared Port Gibson, declaring it 'too beautiful to burn'. Many believe that it wasn't beauty that saved Port Gibson, but the number of churches. With a population of only 1800, Port Gibson is home to eleven grand and historic churches. Faith Tabernacle Pentecostal Church is not counted among those eleven. The church is located in a trailer next door to the home of Brother M. C. Tyler, a former country-western singer. After a Thursday evening Bible study, M. C. and his wife Bonnie invited me over for coffee. Bonnie read to me a passage from *Revelations 21:8*."



Reverend Cecil and Felicia, Saint Louis

"Reverend Cecil has been preaching on the corner of Delmar and Kingshighway in St. Louis since recovering from a stroke in 1981."



The Farm, Angola State Prison, Louisiana

"In 1880, Confederate Major Samuel James purchased an eight thousand acre plantation called Angola (named after the area in Africa where his former slaves came from). He began housing Louisiana inmates in what used to be the old slave quarters. Angola State Prison has since grown to contain 5100 inmates and 1500 correction officers. Surrounded on three sides by the Mississippi River, the prison maintains 18,000 acres of prime farmland. Most inmates work forty hours a week producing corn, soybeans and beef."



Adelyn, Ash Wednesday, New Orleans, Louisiana

"The day after Mardi Gras, Ash Wednesday, I went to St. Louis Cathedral in the French Quarter. The Cathedral is the oldest in the United States. Don Almonaster y

Roxas gave it as a gift to the city after the Parish Church was burned in the Great Fire of 1788. Outside of the Cathedral, I found Adelyn. Her full name, she said, is Adelyn de Vhartreuse Kocake Shockadelica. I asked her what she would be giving up for Lent. 'I'm not even Catholic,' she laughed, 'these are cigarette ashes'."



Holt Cemetery, New Orleans, Louisiana

"Unlike the aboveground tombs for which New Orleans is famous, Holt Cemetery is anything but grand. Located behind a community college parking lot, many of the plots belong to the homeless and anonymous."



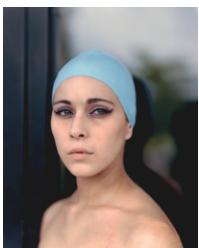
Venice, Louisiana

"Venice is the furthest south you can travel the Mississippi by car. But it may not be accessible much longer. The massive levees built to prevent flooding along the Mississippi have robbed the Louisiana coast of

precious sediments. (...) As the river meets the Gulf, a region emerges called 'the dead zone.' Primarily created by polluted runoff from mid-western farmland, the area is described as a desert within an ocean. In an area the size of New Jersey, plants and fish are unable to sustain life. As a consequence, the Cajun, Vietnamese, and Houmas Indian villages which depend on these resources are slowly disappearing."

| 2006 |

Niagara



Misty

"This picture of Misty became one of my best known photos. If I did it again, I would move this picture from the endnotes to here (with the other photographs in the series)."



Falls #26

"This is my most popular picture in 'Niagara'. It was taken in the most popular place to photograph the falls."



Michele and James

"A famous photographer recently berated me for the picture of Michelle and James. She called it mean, but I've always seen it as tender. Some of the nudes I left out of the book are much tougher."



The Flechs

"This picture of the Flechs was taken right after Aaron and Michelle were married at the Quality Motel Love Chapel. There was no photographer. The only guests were children from previous marriages."

| 2008-2021 |

A Pound of Pictures



Quan Am Monastery, Memphis, Tennessee

"Before taking this picture, I met with William Eggleston's son, Winston. He told me that his dad has never encountered feelings of self-doubt. Perhaps attention is the opposite of neuroticism. Photography doesn't just force me to leave the house, it forces me to leave my head (briefly)."



Camera Club, Washington, Pennsylvania

"Tonight we went to the Washington Camera Club in Pennsylvania. They've been active since 1935. The meeting started at 7 p.m. atomic time. The chairman, Dan Halulko, counted down the seconds until the critiques started. Each member was allowed to show four prints on a special lighted easel that a club member made in the 80's. The responses to the pictures were gentle words of encouragement. The hardest critique was a suggestion to crop out a stick."



Ames, Iowa

"What I'm trying to do with my photography is get past the public display – the façade – and poke around in the basement. The family portrait in the living room – no blinks, all smiles – is fine, but I want to see

the box of pictures in the basement that didn't make it into the album. People assume that the Lincoln bust was taken at the beginning of the project. It was actually the final picture. I bought it as present to myself for finishing the project."



Niagara Falls, Ontario

"I spent a lot of time at this spot while shooting 'Niagara'. Back then, before cell phones, people would often ask me to take a picture of them in front of the falls."



Tim and Vanessa's collection of photographs, Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania

"November 9, 2019. While perusing eBay last month, I kept coming across a seller in Eastern PA that sold photographs by the pound. After writing to them to ask if I could visit, they invited me to stay at their home. I declined but wish I hadn't. Tim and Vanessa Stewart were two of the kindest people I've ever met in my travels. There are a hundred compelling stories in their house (...), but I came for the pictures – the hundreds of thousands of pictures. I spent a full day and only made it through about forty thousand."



Stuart, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

"For the last few months Stuart had been attending a nearby Vietnamese Buddhist Temple. 'I've nearly died twice. Some people feel bad for me, but I wouldn't change my experience for anything. I learned that nothing can be controlled except yourself. I don't force things. I stay open to everything'."



Carmen. Williams, Arizona

"Carmen is as mysterious to me as any stranger I photograph on my travels. Last night she shouted in her sleep: 'Get out of here!'."



Calian and Keslea. Lincoln's Tomb. Springfield, Illinois

"On their daily walks across town, Calian and Keslea always take the longer route through the cemetery, often barefoot. 'It keeps us connected to The Great Spirit,' Calian said.

On this trip, Calian had found a tiny turtle that she was carrying home in an empty water bottle."

| 2012-2014 |

Songbook



Lil' Jay J and the Spiritual Boys.

Rochester, New York

"In 2012 I worked on a group project with other Magnum photographers in Rochester, NY. The name of this band was Lil' Jay J and the Spiritual Boys."



Jan. Saratoga Race Course. Saratoga Springs, New York

"I'm kind of homeless and living in my truck. It's a 1995 Grand Cherokee with a V8, so it costs a lot to put gas in it. I'm working with my boyfriend and

his son, and we're trying to save up enough to get our own place. They let us come and look for bottles and cans after the last race. Earlier this week we made \$31.70." Jan.



Magic Castle Inns and Suites. Kissimmee, Florida

I can see a steeple surrounded by people, oh how real it all starts to seem. Just as the choir is singing, my alarm starts ringing.

Sammy Cahn, *It's The Same Old Dream*, 1947.

"In 2012 I worked on another group project with Magnum in Florida. I focused on motels near Disneyworld where nearly-homeless families were living. In 2017, a film starring Willem Dafoe, 'The Florida Project' was shot at this motel."



Miss Model contestants.

Cleveland, Ohio

Alexandra (pageant founder), Alexis, LaShonda et Molly, Miss Model contestants. Cleveland, Ohio.

"Alexandra says she first had the idea for her pageant when she was 11 years old. 'The show is centered around women, success, being comfortable with yourself, fulfilling your dreams, and using entertainment to communicate a positive message. (...) The pageant mascot is Mist the Unicorn,' Alexandra says. 'He represents unity and diversity (...)'"



Execution. Huntsville Prison.

Huntsville, Texas

"On December 3rd, as the State of Texas executed 43-year-old Jerry Martin of the 2007 murder of Huntsville prison guard Susan Canfiels,

hundreds of uniformed Correctional Officers, flanked by a riderless horse, stood in silent rows just outside the walls of the 164-year-old penitentiary. 'There'll be no tears tonight,' a rifle-toting guard had told me earlier in the day. 'This guy killed one of our own.' After the execution the victim's husband said, 'This is a great day, and justice has been done. Thank God we live in a State where capital murder exists and that punishment exists'."



Bil. Sandusky, Ohio

88-year-old Bil ("My mother said she couldn't pronounce the other L"). Dance N Swing. Sandusky, Ohio. "My people were Baptists, so we never went to dances. I also never

smoked or drank. When I was overseas during World War II I used to trade my cigarettes for chocolate bars. Though I didn't dance, I was always infatuated with Latin music. One night in the late 40's I went out to see a band and this girl came over and asked me to dance. I told her I didn't know how, and she handed me a card for an Arthur Murray studio. I stopped into the place the next week, took my first dance steps at the age of 28, and have been dancing ever since."



Dave and Trish. Denver, Colorado

I dim all the lights and I sink in my chair, The smoke from my cigarette climbs through the air, The walls in my room fade away in the gloom. And I'm deep in a dream of you ... Eddie Delange, Deep In A Dream, 1938.

A year later, Alec Soth received an email from Trish announcing that David had died brutally two weeks earlier. She wanted to know if it was possible to send her the photos he had taken of them that day. "At this point, photos and memories are all we have left of David - although they won't fill the void that I now have in my heart, it would be great to be able to memorialize him through Alec's art. His photo was beautiful and truly captured the essence of David's very being."