

# interfacing



22 photographs by john fraser

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22 photographs

by John Fraser

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My thanks to all whose images appear here.

Findlay Muir scanned the pics. Rob Stevenson formatted the book.

*Interfacing* is for Scott MacDougall and Andrea Johnson.

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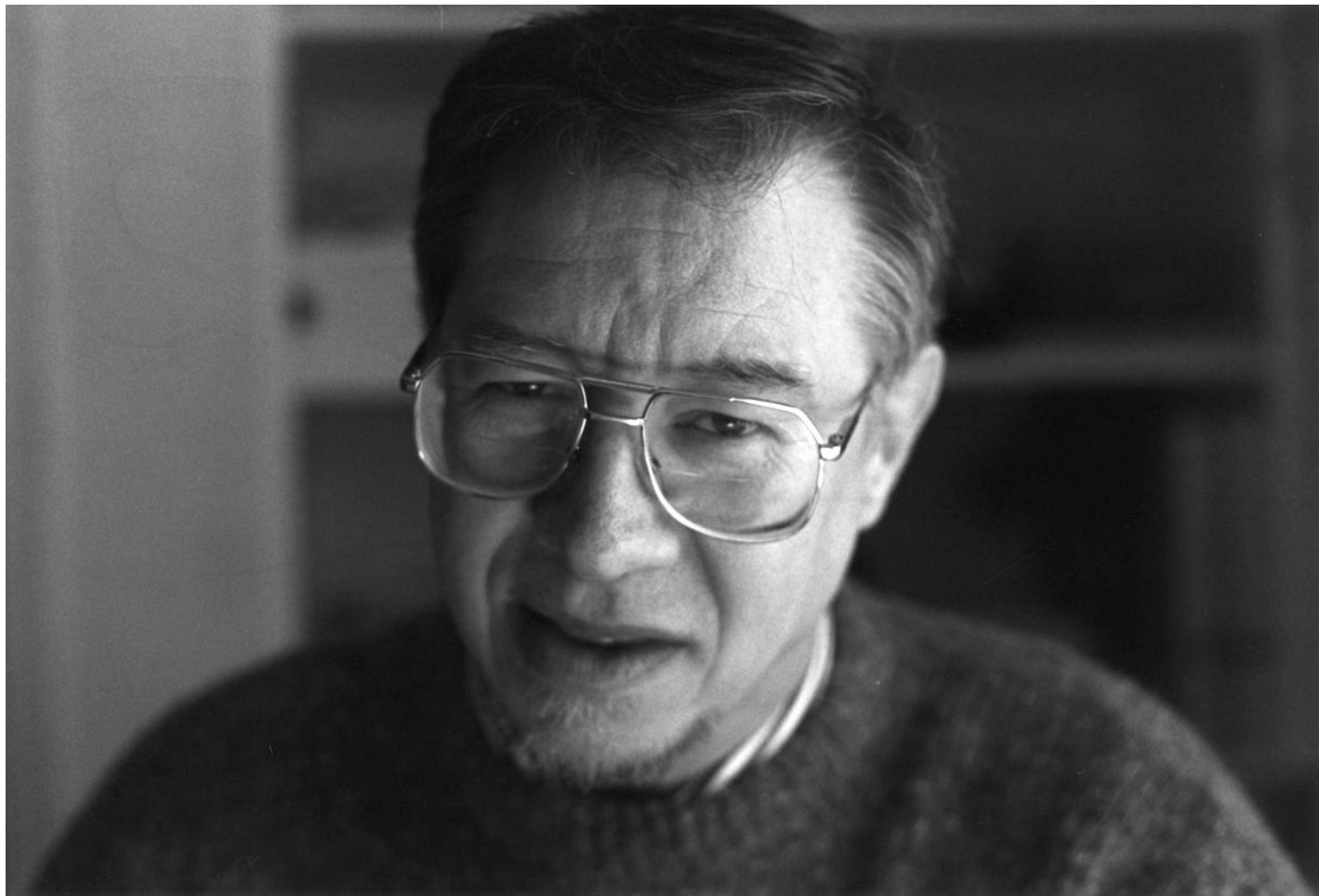
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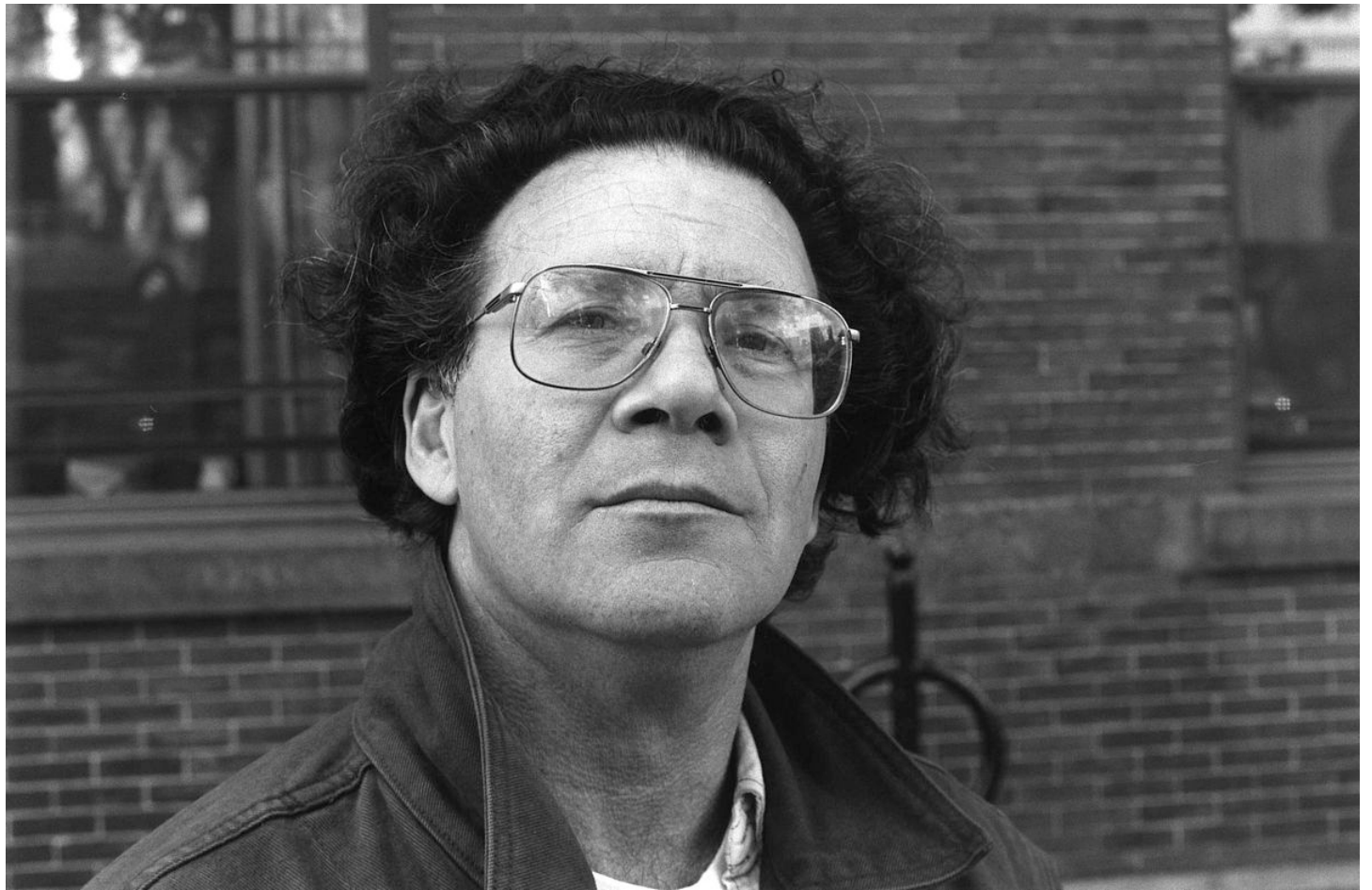




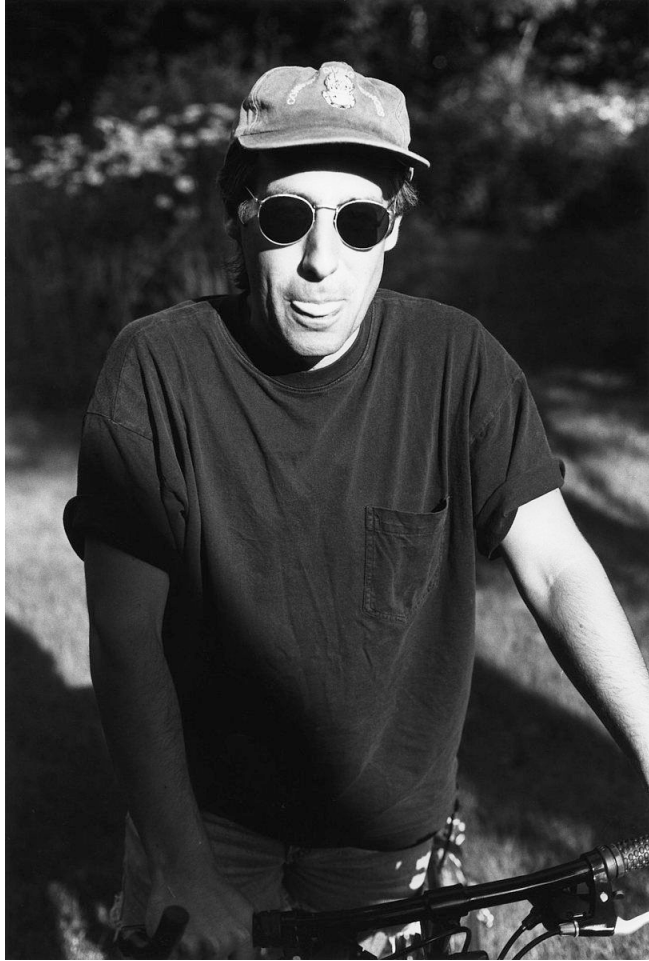








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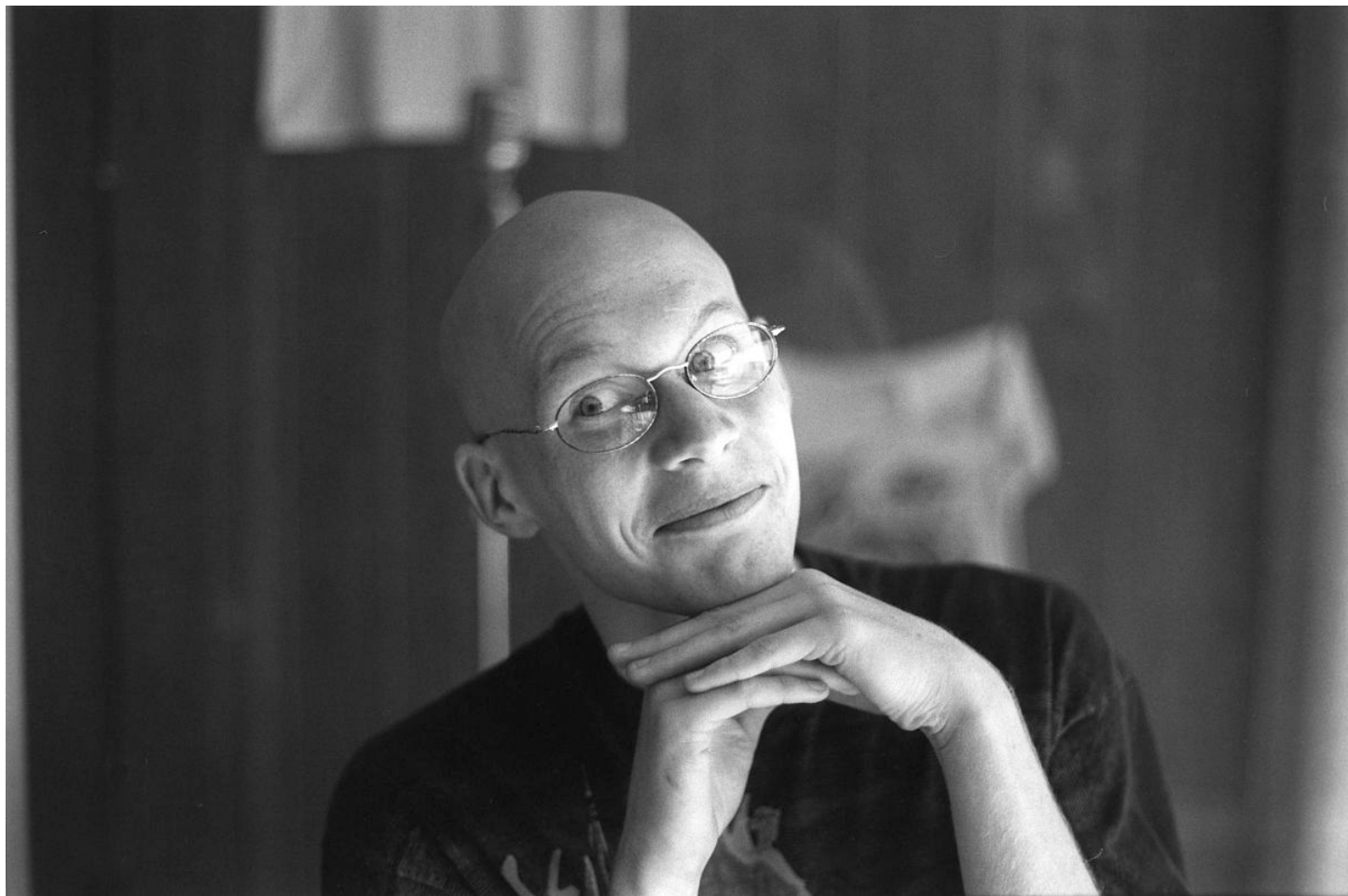


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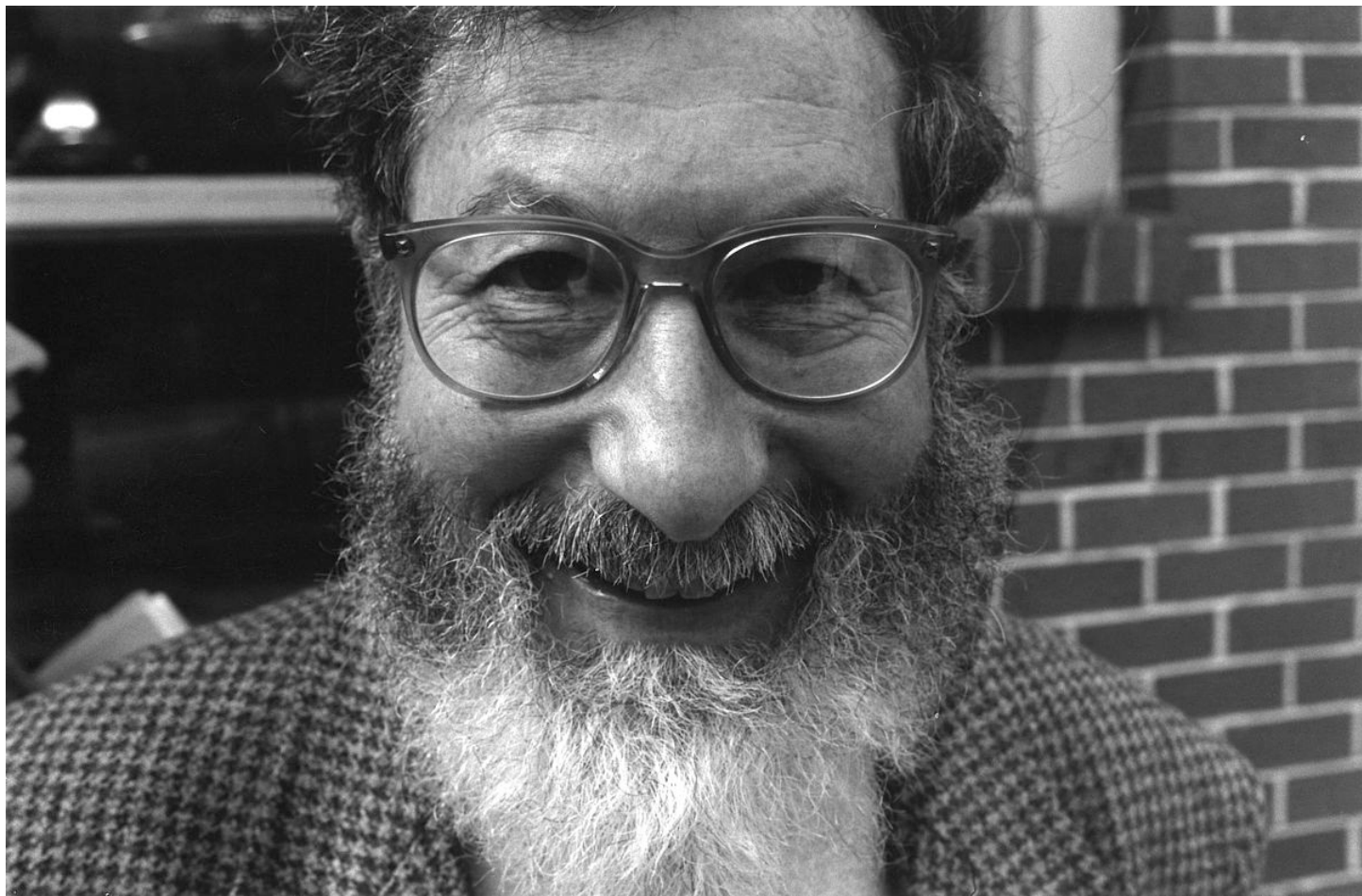
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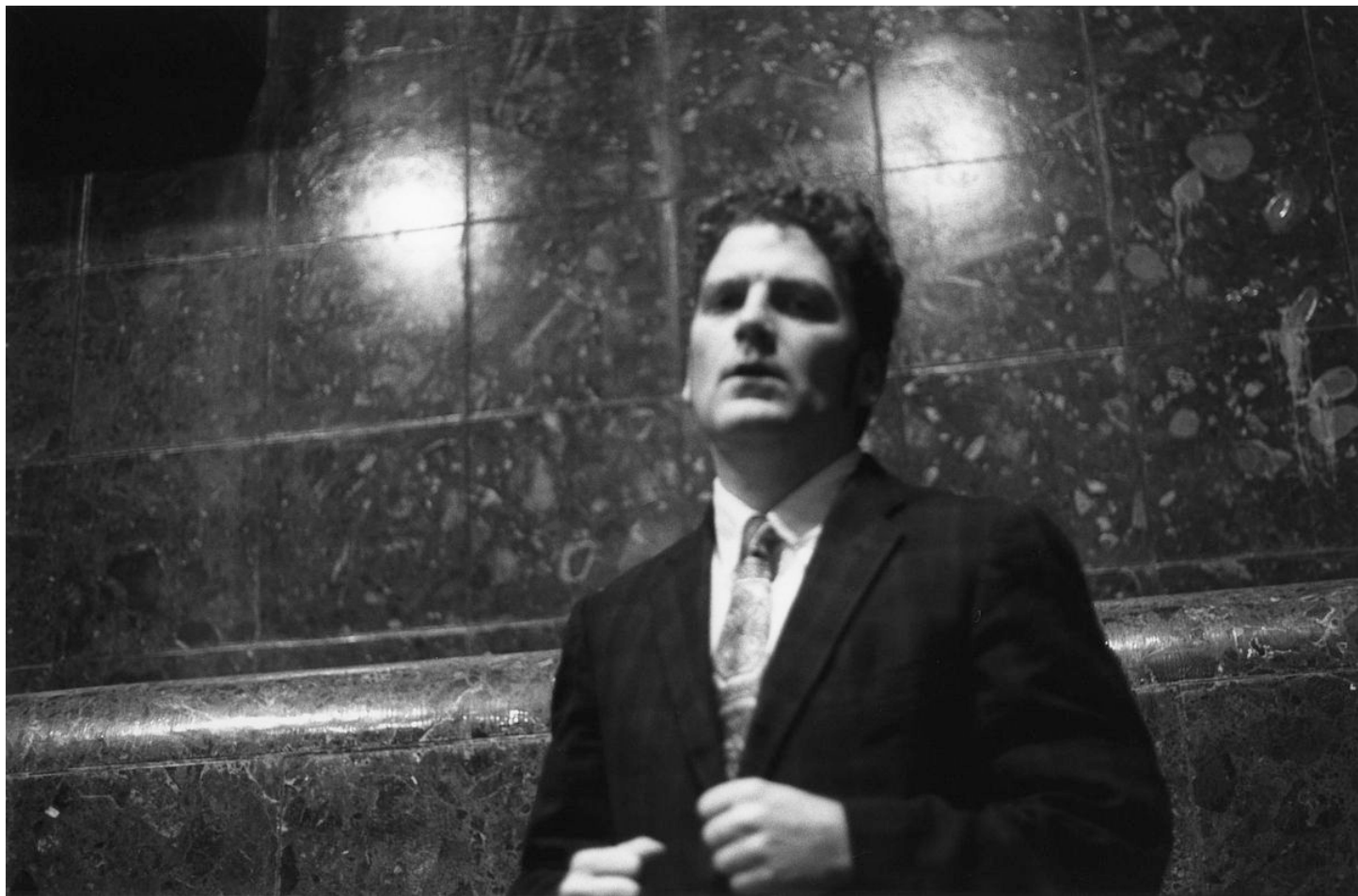








**VIII**





**IX**







## ***Interfacing: Afterword***

In 1995, I received a certificate congratulating me, with a banner headline, on having won ten million dollars. I suspected that this could be a bit of a bother, and anyway the simple skills question would probably be about astrophysics or the World Series in the 1920s. But I felt a bit frisky and decided to treat myself to a cheap new camera, my used Leica IIIg having been stolen twenty years earlier.

Cheap didn't look so good close to, though, and Gary Myers at Reid Sweets sold me a lovely Canon EOS Rebel, self focusing and so light that you could shoot one-handed. Since I'd been away from photography for years, I didn't expect much. But on our first outing, it caught a sparrow in flight across a sunlit lawn, and since Carsand-Mosher, our best photography store, had excellent darkroom facilities in its basement, I carried on shooting, shooting, shooting for the next few years.

But I'd missed the fine print saying that if my name were randomly selected from among a zillion others, they'd look forward to giving me that thrilling news.

All the photographs here, except for the first one in section VII, were taken locally, and the individuals knew who I was. Some hadn't seen me with a camera before. But there was no ironizing. I wasn't taking pictures whose point I wouldn't have wanted to explain to the subjects. They included a couple of poets, two photographers, an artist, a moviemaker, a film crew, a peace activist, a short-story writer, and the vastly knowledgeable proprietor of a jazz and blues record store.

But what you have here isn't about identities; it's about being photographed. It's faces and the language of faces, so essential to so many of the photos and movies—*Casablanca*, *The Wild Bunch*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, etc.—that one never wearies of.

Most of the pics were singles. My own experience was that what mattered was the pounce. No move-a-little-to-the-left please, with your eye to the viewfinder, while the face before you freezes. And the Canon wasn't rapid fire, which I wouldn't have wanted anyway.

There are few women here because I knew few women well enough to thrust a lens in their faces. This was not a documentary project.

I'm particularly pleased by the pic of the movie crew, with every face good, amused by an oldster standing out in the roadway ignoring traffic, where I did take a number of shots.

The lens was the basic 50mm workhorse with no distortion. I didn't crop.

2016

## About the photographer

JOHN FRASER was born in North London in 1928, went to a country grammar school, did two years clerking in the RAF, read English at Oxford, taught school for two years in Israel, and was invited by Mike and Norma Zwerin to stay with them in Forest Hills while he went to Columbia. In 1961, after getting a PhD at the University of Minnesota, he and artist Carol Hoorn Fraser (1930–1991), who had married him in 1956 while she was working on an MFA and taking top prizes at juried shows, moved to Nova Scotia, where he taught for thirty years.

At Minnesota, thanks to Carol's Art Department contacts, he acquired the rudiments of small camera photography. He used the Photography Department's darkroom. Jerry Liebling and Allen Downs occasionally glanced at prints of his. He gained the friendship of Robert Eugene Wilcox, that man of total humorous integrity who ended his life after an operation took photography away from him. Irwin Klein, also dying tragically, was a fellow graduate student, but they spoke only occasionally, and never about photography. Ben Klein's *Irwin Klein and the New Settlers* (2016) is a lovely memorial to him, created with heroic persistence.

Fraser became acquainted there with the work of Strand, Weston, Evans, Lange, Frank, and, thrillingly, Atget. Cartier-Bresson, Bill Brandt, and movie stills he had encountered already. Later on he looked at lots of work by others, thanks to Harvey Zucker's wonderful SoHo bookstore A Photographer's Place.

Downs and Liebling used a shot of his to accompany a *New York Times Magazine* piece about their satirical brief documentary *Pow Wow* showing the University marching band practicing in the rain. Jerry invited him to bring his used Leica to a slaughterhouse shoot that fell through at the time. Later, his “Atget and the City” (1968) “brought a new level of scholarship to the discussion of Atget’s work” (John Szarkowski, MOMA). *The Yale Review* published his “Photography and the City.” Several of his handmade Throwaway Books are in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

He gave up photography at the end of the Sixties because of the demands of an academic career. Twenty-five years later, acquiring the lovely lightweight Canon EOS Rebel and being able to use the excellent Carsand-Mosher darkroom facilities gave him a new lease on photographic life for a few years.

Over time he took lots and lots of pics with insufficient content or botched form, and wasted acres of printing paper. But the 50mm lens meant that you couldn’t count on the camera to create an illusion of energy, and he didn’t crop or do fancy printing. Occasionally content and form came together, and the felt life was there that it was all about.

2016

## **In memoriam**

michael chisholm, 1958–1996

christopher drummond, 1932–2001

bob switzer, 1947?–2005