

Stephen Johnson: Captions for Prints

Mum relaxes in a caravan in Wales.

My mother Louise Johnson relaxes in a rented holiday Caravan in North Wales (Likely near Rhyl) in perhaps 1977 or 1978. Cindy the family dog beside her.

Mum was born in 1928 and died in 2019. Even when relaxing she could multitask: smoking, petting the dog and undergoing beauty treatment all at the same time.

I was 16 or 17 when I took the picture.

(A2 print colour)

Birchalls Butchers

A Saturday morning in approx. 1976/7. I had just been trained to use a loaned Rollicord twin lens reflex camera from the photo department at the Gamble Institute. My tutor said to "go out and photograph something". I chose to capture life on the streets and this popular butcher seemed like a suitable subject.

It is a completely common place picture of something that it's still possible to take today, there is still a queue for the pies at lunchtime. With time the clothes and people become more interesting.

A few years ago, someone commented on a Facebook page that St. Helens in the 1970s was "wonderfully clean and litter free", memory can be unreliable as this photo helps show.

I was 15 or 16 when I took the picture.

(A2 print B&W)

Isolation 2

Upset on a Saturday night at the Arboretum club in Nottingham.

I was at Trent Polytechnic on a 3 year course in Photography and film. For one of my final year projects I recorded the very active social scene in the city.

People were out to enjoy themselves but I recognised that things were not quite that straightforward and I wanted to show the stresses and isolation that can be present for some people in social situations.

I heard a commotion and saw this girl run away from her group, she was upset and her friend was trying to comfort her. I don't know how I managed to frame and focus the camera as it was over very quickly.

Using high speed film in dim conditions was tricky but the grain and film halation effect from the bright light seems to add to the drama.

I was 21 when I took the picture.

(A2 print B&W)

Stephen Johnson (Statement and bio)

My Passion is Photography, I have been involved with it deeply since I was 15, some 46 years ago.

I began by recording life around me, in my classrooms at school, on the streets of St.Helens, I photographed the everyday, the commonplace, the reality.

I had to leave St.Helens to progress in what I wanted to do. Firstly, a three year course in Photography at Trent Polytechnic in Nottingham and then work in London.

After college I left behind my documentary work and got deeply involved in the then emerging stock photography industry. I was happy to sell my photographic soul in order to gain the riches that came from the successful conceptual images I produced.

I have been involved in digital imaging since 1990 when I was trained on Silicon Graphics computers running software that predated Photoshop. I knew every trick to make an image into something it was not but there came a point where this became too dishonest.

I turned to help other smaller photolibraries and professional photographers make the transition from film to digital and was fortunate to work with people who were leaders in their field, I was keen to retain the true photographic representation for them and my retouching work and teaching became ethical.

My understanding of the digital process right through to the printing press brought in clients like the BBC and the Natural History Museum.

In retrospect I can see that St.Helens grounded me in reality. By being honest with photography its possible to see the true nature of the world. All three images presented here come from my early work capturing something real in front of the camera.

Its easy to be arrogant and lay claim to your talents and achievements but I know now that without the help and support I had in those formative years in St.Helens I would not have been able to do the work that I have.

My St. Helens was made up of a series of people and institutions who were generous with their time and nature. I am forever grateful for their help:

Fellow Cowley boys pupil Ian Griffiths: his wonderful looking Zenith B camera originally got me keen but it was also him getting us into Saturday morning photography classes at the Gamble Institute that helped the most (we were too young to qualify but Ian managed to persuade the staff there to allow us in). It was fun sharing the hobby with Ian and we learned together.

The staff at the Gamble Institute in the photo department, so kind and informative. They helped me develop a portfolio that got me into college without having to do a foundation year first. Also the people in the Central Library there who brought heavy piles of old photo magazines up from storage for me to read.

Mr Ross and Mr Bagley at Cowley Boys school that allowed Ian and myself to use an old previously abandoned darkroom there and helped us with permission to skip playing Rugby so we could take

pictures in sports periods.

The guys at “Kamera” in town who put up with us lurking in the back of their shop till all the customers were served , they shared their knowledge of cameras and photography for hours.

Mr White at Whites Chemist on North Road who helped me with advice and old discounted darkroom items, a real gentle man.

The town itself. We grew up poor in a time of change, no luxury, distractions, or pretentions. Day to day life was in the raw but thanks to local funding of the arts there were possibilities...

History:

1997 - Present Day:

CEO Copyrightimage Ltd

www.copyrightimage.com

Client: BBC

Ethical colour grading and image prep on books for their flagship Wildlife series with David Attenborough (Frozen Planet, Green Planet, Wild Isles etc)

Client: The Natural History Museum

External Imaging advisor on “Wildlife Photographer of the Year” Competition, Ethical colour grading and file preparation for their Wildlife books

Clients: Disney Nature, Netflix

Ethical colour grading, integrating Ultra high definition video grabs for publication, PR to support their wildlife films.

As well as offering ethical retouching services I help train others to use Photoshop, Lightroom and other software to enable them to manage their photographic workflow and get better results in less time.

1995-1997

Imaging consultant for Getty Images, (due diligence work on Photo Disc in the US etc)

Technical support and training for Creative Imaging department.

Supply conceptual stock images for Getty Images to license

1990-1995

Help setup then manage the first creative digital imaging department at **Tony Stone Images**.

1987-1990

Full time self employed stock photographer specialising in conceptual images for licensing through Tony Stone Images.

1984-1987

Joined then managed the darkroom team at **Tony Stone Images**, started to become a supplier of conceptual stock images to the library, the Company grew overseas and won a Queens award for exports.

1980-1984

3 year course in visual communications film and photography at Trent Polytechnic.

1975 – 1980

Joined Cowley boys school in the 3rd year after leaving Central Modern.

You can see more of my images of St.Helens and other places at www.stephenjohnson.co.uk