

2009 Berenice Abbott Prize
Honorable Mention

Jamie Johnson

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Artist Statement: "Homeless Children"

Often times we find our passion when we least expect. As a struggling actress, I turned to photography to nourish my body and soul; it was a hobby I had enjoyed throughout my life. Then one day I photographed some children and my world changed. With my lens I captured the purest of images, children full of hope and innocence, playfulness and pain. I had found my calling. Five years ago, a request by a foundation in Los Angeles to photograph the homeless families of our city, deepened my passion. More than 15,000 children in Los Angeles are homeless and I soon found myself walking the streets with my camera and capturing the lives of these "forgotten people".

Yet despite the despair and horrendous conditions under which these children live everyday, another emotion emerged in the photographs; the sense of hope that is carried like a seed in all of us. It was time to give these children a name and tell their stories. Soon we became friends. One day I notice Chili has disappeared and I ask about her, hoping she has found a new and safe home. Or sweet Daniel whose mother greets me warmly one day and is confused another day as she watches her son run to me with a recognition that her drugged mind can not comprehend. And then there is Carla, my beautiful Carla. I have watched her grow from a child to a budding teen and wonder what her future holds. I'm excited every time I go downtown to see all my little friends, hear about their lives and see how they have grown.

My curiosity grew and I knew I wanted more. In the midst of the melting pot of LA I watched families of diverse cultures share similarities: their love of family, their desire to protect, and the honor they felt by the sincere and heartfelt images of their lives. I want to continue to chronicle people's stories with my photographs. I want people to know about these beautiful children and the joy, hope, and innocence they still have within despite their situations.

As well as the beautiful children of Los Angeles, I have expanded my dreams of photographing children of all countries and life styles. I have recently photographed the children from the rural villages in the jungles of Laos and

orphanges of Cambodia to the slums of Bangkok and most recently the children who live in the dumps in Mexico.

My work can be seen in several galleries thru The United States and Europe. My "Portraits of Skid Row, thru the eyes of the Children" series has won several awards this year and has been shown at The Fowler Museum in Los Angeles this past May 2009. I hope to continue my journey and share my photographs with the world.