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# PHOTO DISTRICT NEWS

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## Taking The Long View

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Introduction  
by Jacqueline Tobin

Most news photographers set a fast and frenzied pace, trying to meet deadlines and make headlines. Gone is the golden era of photojournalism when magazines from *Life* to *Geo* devoted most of their pages to in-depth photo-essays emerging from lengthy periods of documentation and research.

But even though photojournalism's golden era may be gone, there is still present a group of photographers who believe in the notion of long-term documentary photo projects—projects which require a deeply personal and lengthy involvement from the photographer. This year for its photojournalism issue, *PDN* has focused on five from this group, photographers whose main motivation seems to be their devotion to their work, which, in financial terms, is performed mostly without reward.

These five photographers—David Katzenstein, Archie Lieberman, Dennis Mosner,

Chris Rainier and Lonny Shavelson—call themselves “documentary” photographers because they feel that photojournalism only scratches the surface. All are independent workers; none of them are affiliated with any major agency or are part of any magazine staff. They fund their work mainly through grants and, if their plea for grants are denied, they use their own money to finance their work.

Thus, their “projects” take on personal meaning. They aren't trying to meet some editor's deadline. “This type of photography takes time and is philosophical,” says Rainier of his documentary approach to photojournalism. This is perhaps why Rainier focuses on documenting vanishing cultures and landscapes. His photographs are designed to “create a sense of empathy for humanity.”

“When I look at a topic that the media is dealing with, I sometimes see holes,” says Shavelson. Shavelson works on filling these

holes with human feeling. The subject tells the story, Shavelson acts as the intermediary. He likes to go beyond the surface and evoke emotions, not statistics.

Katzenstein, too, becomes personally involved with his subjects, with the people and places he visits. Intrigued by indigenous cultures, he now spends most of his time documenting them.

For Mosner, the “cop photographer,” as well as for Lieberman, who spent 35 years of his life documenting a farm family's growth, personal fulfillment comes from knowing that he can become deeply involved with what he's working on.

In showcasing these five men's work, *PDN* hopes to celebrate the common link that bonds them, and to prove to the cynics of the photography world that there is still plenty more to photojournalism than getting a better shot than the next guy at the latest photo op.

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*Photo Opportunities*

# Heartland Odyssey

by Peggy Wolff



All Photos © Archie Lieberman

"Farm Boy" series: Bill Hammer being measured by his mom.



Bill Hammer all grown up.

Beyond the cities and past the suburbs, where commuter trains run out of track and news travels person to person, lies Jo Daviess County, in the northwest corner of Illinois. There is one stoplight, no interstate highway, just rutted dirt roads that crisscross the land today as they did the German, English, and Scottish homesteads that were settled a century ago. Where Illinois meets Iowa and Wisconsin at the Mississippi River, corn is king. One drive through the remote hilly farmland gives you a whiff of the agrarian ideal.

Back in 1954, photographer Archie Lieberman visited Jo Daviess County on a magazine assignment to photograph Janet Hammer, a teenage girl who had won a Singer sewing contest. He became intrigued with farm life. It reminded him of his own experiences living on a farm in Wisconsin during the Depression. For the next 20 years, between assignments for *Look*, *Life*, and other magazines, he returned regularly to photograph the Hammer family, particularly Janet's 13-year old brother Bill, who became the centerpiece for Lieberman's book *Farm Boy* (Abrams, 1974).

In his prologue, Lieberman describes his wonder. "I felt I was entering a storybook scene—Brigadoon, Camelot and the Biblical Canaan all



Hammer and son Jim share a quiet moment in the barn.

at once. I met the family and felt an immediate comfort with them. I made my pictures, ate delicious food and witnessed their joyful appreciation of their way of life and the loving kindness they showed each other." Later, in summer, when Lieberman went back to visit, "Billy had grown almost a whole head taller and his joy of life had increased proportionately. I made a picture of him walking alongside his father, who was driving the tractor. That struck off an idea: one day I would make a picture of Billy and his son—of course he had to have a son—in the same way. And so began this project." The twenty-year study of a boy growing to manhood on the farm portrays what is great, what is simple, what is pure, and what is beautiful about America.

There are pictures of horses romping through the glowing whites of winter; of Mildred, the family matriarch, marking her son's height in paint on the barn door; of Bill Jr. trying to fit into his father's footprints; and of the Chevy pickup truck which, when Bill Jr. turned 18, had "& Son" added to "Willis A. Hammer" on the side door.

"In a lot of ways," says the photojournalist, "what you do is dictated by the seasons. There's an order to it and that comforts me." To supplement the photographs, Lieberman has selected clips of dialogue from hours of tape-recorded conversation of the Hammer family looking back over 20 years.

"What I really like about it is when you're alone," says the farm boy of the book's title, "like when you spray corn. You're by yourself and you're just constantly looking at a beautiful

picture. You get a little worried or frustrated when you don't think you're going to get a crop. But you have to work the land because it's what you got. The land only does what you do to it. If you don't take care of it, it won't take care of you. You've got to like it. Just like the animals. If you want to go out and beat your cows and be cruel to them, they won't give very much milk."

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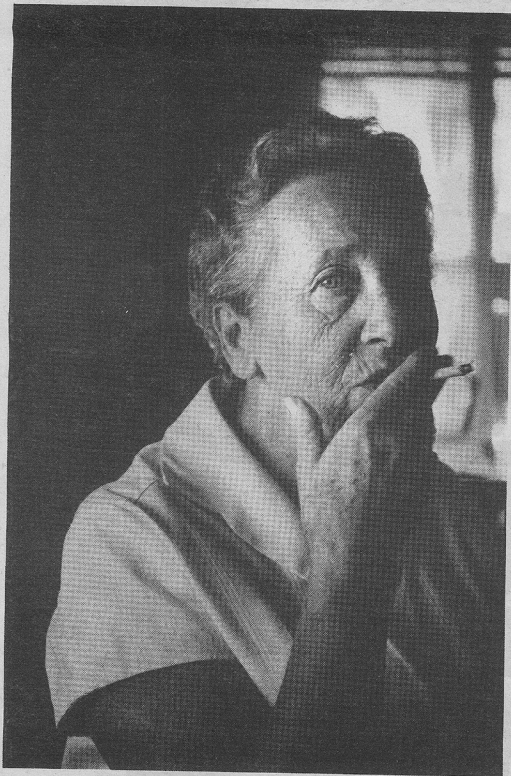
*Farm Boy* is as much a family documentary album as it is a photo essay about the hardships, like the bite of winter, that the farmer endures. The book begins when Bill is 13, and old enough to shoulder some of the farm responsibilities. The pictures bring you through his courtship, marriage, and the birth of his son, Jim. Eventually Bill buys farmland adjacent to the home place.

Lieberman, who delights in earning his living through long-term projects, will be coming out with his sequel to *Farm Boy* this year. *Neighbors*, photographed over a 15-year time span, will be published along with the edited *Farm Boy*. Together they comprise a 35-year study of the farm family, the changes, their neighbors, all wound around the true life story of a boy who grows up to embrace his father's ways.

The photographer now lives on a farm in

Scales Mound, Illinois, which he had bought in 1972. During the next decade, the farm was his part-time home; suburban Evanston was his other one. In 1983, he moved to the rural community to have daily involvement. "The kind of photography I do, you just do it." His own style of picture storytelling evolved out of 120 assignments while on staff at *Look Magazine*, also, a fine arts education at Chicago's Institute of Design, where he studied with Buckminster Fuller, Maholy-Nagy, Archipenko, Harry Callahan, and Aaron Siskind. These days, he finances his long-term projects through corporate work, including annual reports, and special editorial for *Land's End Catalogue*. The work that is closest to his heart is that which compresses time and witnesses change. In *The Israelies* (Quadrangle, 1965), a book which won The Chicago Book Clinic and the national Fifty Best Books award, Lieberman roamed around for four months photographing the people and the land. "It came about in 1960, when I was sent to Israel by Black Star to do commercial photographs. After the assignment I thought maybe I should try and be on my own and see how it is and just roam around." He also went back ten years after that and shot many of the same subjects.

Despite the obvious emotion he puts into it, Lieberman denies that his work is creative. "I don't even use the word *creative*. That's too powerful a word. Whatever power created this world, that's creative. I think what man does is discover those things through a series of experiments and put them together in a new fashion. The secret is to look outward, not inward." ■



Feydzia, Lieberman's Israeli landlady, in 1960 (left) and ten years later.