

# Joel Meyerowitz

## THOSE WERE THE DAYS

By Maggie Barrett



*Provincetown, 1977*

PROVINCETOWN, thrown out to sea on a spit of land that spirals back on itself, is a small seaside town whose geographically coiled energy has for generations attracted multitudes of fishermen, artists, shopkeepers, and tourists of every sexual persuasion and gender identification, their own coiled energy instinctively drawn here in search of release.

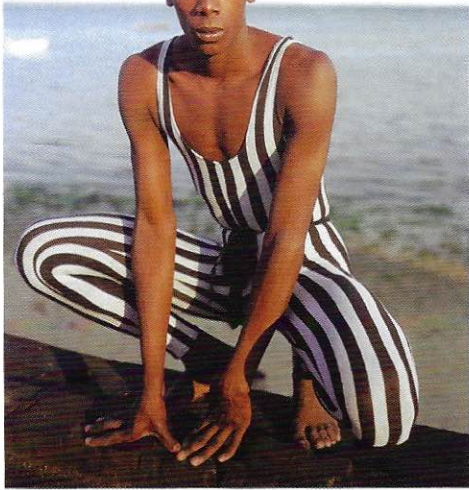
I first came to Provincetown in 1971, desperately seeking relief from the grief of losing my recently stillborn daughter. While I could not partake of the town's lively atmosphere, nonetheless its energy penetrated me in such a way

that I knew I would return. And so I did, first in the late '70s, and then regularly throughout the late '80s. In 1990, reeling from a recent divorce, I chose to spend a week here at the end of September, which—in those days—combined good

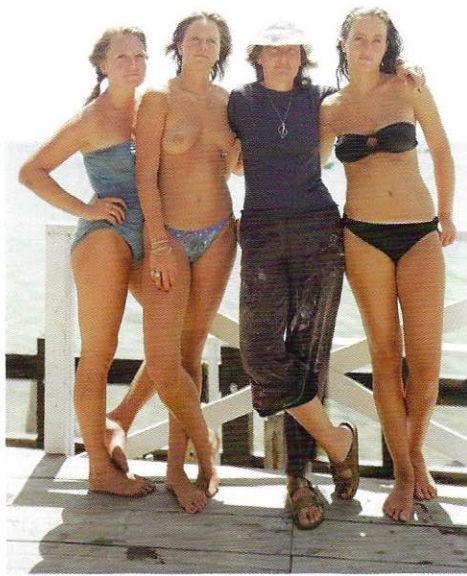
weather with the peace of a town released back into itself, otherwise known as the off-season.

It was during that week that I met Joel Meyerowitz, whom I subsequently married and with whom I have shared the last thirty years, the

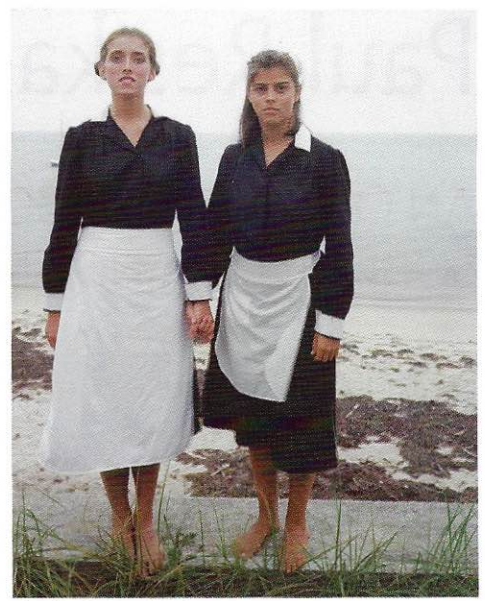




Daryl, 1983



The Packard Family, 1981



Caitlin, Daisy, 1986

first twenty of them in a small cottage on Cape Cod Bay. Joel's newest book of portraits, published in September 2019 by Aperture, explores the Provincetown of the '80s that we both experienced separately before we met.

To spend time with this book is to experience the transformation offered by the atmosphere of light, leisure, and the luxury of contemplative attention offered by the town. Deceptively simple, the photographs combine a fleeting time of innocence and promise with the everlasting beauty of place. Each subject seems to stand exposed as its essential self, surrendering to being in the moment, displaying an almost palpable exhalation into the light and into the lens. One feels the proof of a promised land where all are welcome to be their unique selves, unfettered by family, or place of origin, or gender.

This freedom of expression, perhaps, was also part of what beckoned Joel to the tip of the Cape. Here was the place where he could let go of his speedy 35mm Leica and the manic pace of street photography—which he perfected on the streets of New York

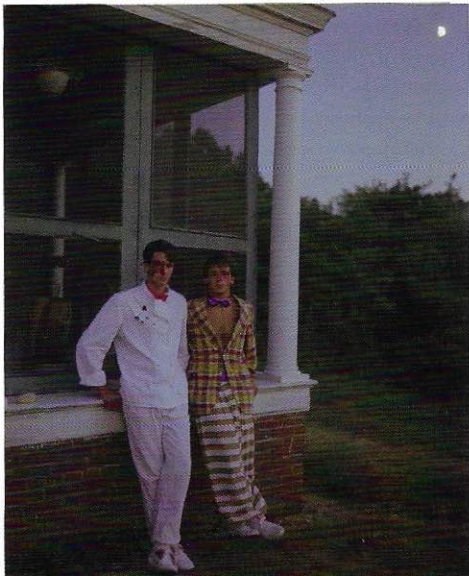
City—and choose instead to slow down with the aid of his newly acquired 8-by-10-inch view camera. The instrument, built in the same year that Joel was born and carried on a tripod over his shoulder along the beaches and streets of Provincetown, meant that he was no longer invisible. Unlike street photography, which requires speed and invisibility, the view camera demands time and cooperation between photographer and subject, its lengthy exposure allowing for a more expansive description of color and increasing emotional resonance. The result is a shared intimacy of being and observation. The slow shutter speed, the long exposure of the camera, allowed his subjects to connect with their own unselfconscious, intimate selves.

The alchemy of seeing and being seen is something we all long for, and this longing is part of what has drawn people to Provincetown for more than a century. Here, you are allowed to appear as your untamed self, and here you are also free to look at others who are in the same state. Joel's ability to both look and see

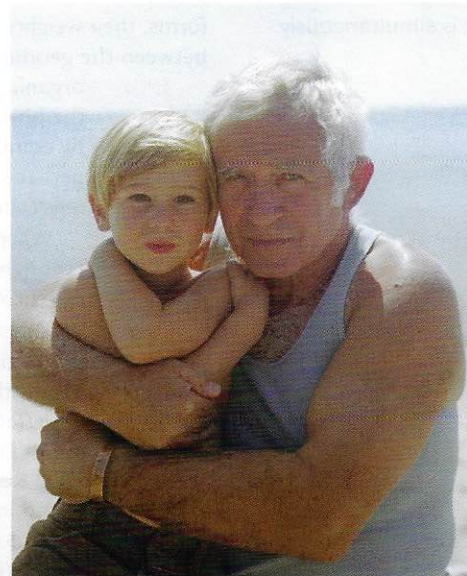
is his gift. In a career spanning more than fifty years, countless worldwide exhibitions, and more than thirty books, we see the extraordinary range and depth of his ability to take in the world and give it back to us in images of rare humanity and beauty—whether on city streets, in interior spaces, in landscapes, or in still life. Of all these genres, Joel's new book of portraits reveals him as a curious, generous, loving, openhearted chronicler of a particular time and place and some of the people who passed through it, stopping in front of his lens, willing to reveal themselves for just a moment.

These moments live on and in us. As we look at these portraits, we feel ourselves to be in the same moment. We can feel the sun on our skin, the sand between our toes, the promise of the night, and the knowledge that transformation remains possible in Provincetown. ❏

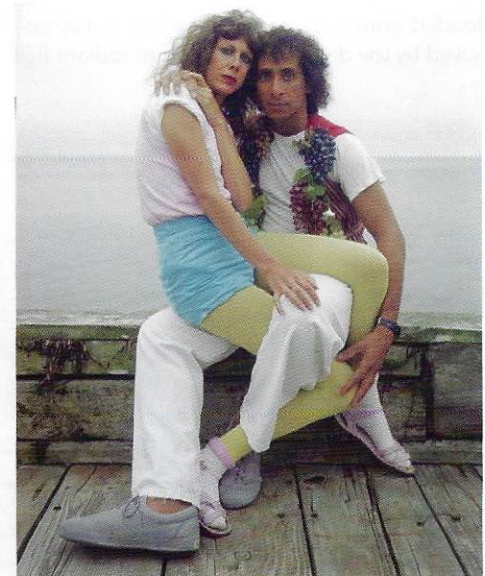
MAGGIE BARRETT is a writer and artist living in Tuscany and London. Her latest novel, *Felicity*, is available from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and IndieBound.



Tom, Ethan, 1984



Norman, John Buffalo, 1982



Louise, Jackson, 1983