

Sidetracked: Travels Across the Undiscovered South

“She would heat her Bunson burner to sterilize the needles and put alcohol in it. Lots of times, when I smell alcohol, it brings back memories of that time. She was a little, thin woman and had a pointed face with small round glasses. She had her hair in a ball on the top of her head. She was not friendly at all. We would all start crying when we saw her coming.”

Dorothy Kelly, near New Hope, Alabama

Before there were food trucks, there was the rolling store. Before it was “The Real Thing,” Coca-Cola was an illegal drug, at least in some areas. Learning about the South is discovering stories about worm grunting, monkey fishing, mudfish balls, Hoover chickens and the Fall Line.

This is the impetus behind **Sidetracked: Travels Across the Undiscovered South**. This documentary project will produce a new body of work by traveling and looking for narratives and stories that dive beneath the surface, giving the South its distinctive character. Using unconventional photography and storytelling skills, the project is character-driven with a distinctive visual aesthetic.

This is a project to advance awareness of heritage — the desire to educate and capture the cultural landscape of the South's people, culture and history and to shape our understanding of what it means to live *rural* and *small town*.

Through conversations with local residents during a series of one-week road trips, we are able to broaden our knowledge of the past by showcasing people of all ages, demographics and livelihoods and places that are undiscovered.

Emphasizing the traditions of documentary photography as a way of seeing and interpreting cultural life, the project fieldwork is accomplished primarily through the lens of large-format, black-and-white hand-printed silver gelatin film photography in a style reminiscent of legendary documentary photographers Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee and Walker Evans.

This project is not an attempt to present a comprehensive look at rural populations— but to share a different angle than the normal narrative and shed light on things not usually reported. The focus is on local, ordinary people to find out their perspectives. This project will capture some of the little known and compelling stories through pictures and the anecdotes of those who live “small town” and “rural.”

The project content will be broadcast through shared websites, blogs and social media and will culminate in a printed book, presentations and exhibits, letting local people discover the stories of their neighbors and friends. The project leverages contacts and cross-promotional strategies as part of an outreach plan to maximize the reach and potential for this project.

Tucked away in rural landscapes are people telling stories of the small-town South — stories being woven into the fabric of new histories.

While the definition of “rural” and “small town” may seem obvious, the documentary project is refocusing what they mean through the words and imagery of those who live it and new places discovered. This is not another look at the small towns of the South espoused in guidebooks — the objective is to explore the people and communities that are known only by the locals — to create a *new sense of place*.

To begin a conversation on how we can work together, please email e.dusenbery@gmail.com

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Eric Dusenbery (B.A. Cinema & Photography, Southern Illinois University) utilizes the power of the still photograph and frequently uses the traditions of the large format film camera for fine art, documentary and commissioned projects. His photography has been widely exhibited from traditional fine-art galleries and museums to educational and cultural centers. His work has appeared in numerous publications and he is the recipient of several national awards.

Eric is passionate about using curiosity and photography to tell stories — to enrich and preserve the human spirit and to educate and promote an appreciation for the rich cultural identity of the U.S.. He is also a speaker, an award-winning journalist and author/photographer of two books.

RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTARY INTERESTS include

- Rural and small town cultural studies
- Industrial diversity
- Ethnography
- Historic architecture
- Large-format environmental portraiture
- Human interest
- Analog photography

Based on experiences learned in producing several documentary projects, Eric speaks on the power of curiosity and inspires audiences to find new ways to connect and stand out. Whether maneuvering among the rafters in a historic clock tower or crouched in a cooler on a shrimp boat, Eric’s photographic escapades and stories make us eager to begin living a life of curiosity.

CV / Resume available upon request.