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## **Living Under South Street by Jonathan Elderfield**

"... there are two kinds of people in the world: the kind that grew up in south Philly, and the kind that wished they did," says writer Murray Dubin. Photographer Jonathan Elderfield is of the second kind. British born and living in New York he set out, in any spare time he had over a two year period, to find the people of South Philly, to wander their streets and photograph their unique slice of Philadelphia living.

"It seems as if the whole block is out on the street," Elderfield remarks. The world he finds is "combustible, full of emotion and noise and color". For not only is South Philly America's original neighbourhood it is also historically its most racially and ethnically-mixed. In Jonathan's photographs we meet: Italian Americans; African Americans; newly arrived Mexicans and Asian Americans. They are: kicking back to survey the block on garden chairs drinking on the sidewalk outside the bar; playing a game of street soccer or dominoes; lining up for the annual parade; in the the hot summer lounging on a sofa around a paddling pool out front; and in Autumn hanging out on the street corner wearing Halloween masks. There are babies, kids, teenagers, the middle aged and the elderly, everybody is out – it is the street theatre of the community.

To make his pictures Elderfield first overcame his "outsider" status by choosing to shoot from the hip. The resulting images create a waist-level walking tour of the streets and passers-by, nothing stops us too long before we are off again down South street or is it Wolf street along the busy thoroughfares or wandering the quiet row houses in the small back streets. Like all good photography this books comes from an enquiring mind and this project was Jonathan's way to seek out and discover those places where he might uncover that special neighbourhood ingredient (it is also a key ingredient for making good photographs), feeling.

When not cruising the street Elderfield talks to people and asks permission to photograph them on their steps or in their street. Individuals and groups, families and friends he engages with the people who make up this rich and diverse community and makes some of his best and most intimate photographs in this environment. The closeness with which he portrays hanging out on the front stoop allows us to feel the flavour of Philly, as though it is us the viewer kicking back with the boys. For this reason the images attest to Elderfield's patience. These images are warm and full of respect and though they lead us through an energetic and exciting tour of the area they are not rushed or contrived. They tell the story of South Philly as they also tell the story of a dedicated photographer who came to find it here. As Dubin says of Jonathan, "Fieldsy's photographs say a lot more than ...words. Take a look. Trust me. I know South Philly"

I first became aware of Jonathan's images when he showed me the project, beautifully conceived, scanned and presented as a dummy book. His dedication to photographing the story did not cease with the realisation of the images, he was sure and determined that it would be a book. The subsequent publication by Kehrer in Germany is simple yet exquisitely printed, it is not a large book as photography books go yet it speaks volumes; of the South Philly way of life, of Jonathan's skill and dedication and of Kehrer's vision and regard for photography. **JL**