

Week ending
DECEMBER 19 1981 50p

amateur photographer

EVERYTHING
INSTANT
-all the formats

PHOTO
REFLECTIONS

Tested: SICOR
BUDGET-PRICED
LENSES

£950 Treble
Crown results



amateur photographer



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Nancy Rudolph

Following the tradition of Lewis Hine, Jacob Riis and Dorothea Lange, **NANCY RUDOLPH**, a New York photographer, has guided her career towards photographing subjects that reveal concern with her society. Our roving correspondent **SUE ALLISON** has returned to the USA, hotfoot from compiling our review of the Nikon Gallery in Zurich, and now gives us an insight into Nancy Rudolph's compassionate work. . .





Left: Easter Sunday, New York City, 1981.

Bedford Stuyvesant School, 1979.

NANCY RUDOLPH has exhibited and published widely, and since 1975 has been included in such anthologies as "Who's Who in American Women," "The World Who's Who of Women," "Community Leaders and Noteworthy Americans," and others. She won the Excellence in Photography award in Communication Arts in 1977, and has taught at the New School for Social Research in New York on the subject of 'Photographing People.'

Having been concerned with a journalistic approach to her photography for most of her professional life, it is only recently that she has begun to concentrate on, as she states, perfecting her art, extending her exposure into the photography market itself, trying to reach people on still another level.

Rudolph's school was the documentary photography that was being done extensively in the 30s and 40s, while she was growing up. She was influenced by such people as the photographers of the Farm Security Administration, a renowned group of select men and women who were hired, during the Roosevelt era of 'The New Deal', to travel into rural America to record how the people were living. She watched

and was affected by the newsreels of the day which were concerned with the human condition. *Life* magazine blossomed during the time when she also was developing her visual maturity, and while many photographers grew up during the same period as herself, she was particularly stimulated by the work of the photojournalists, and when she took up photography, she aimed her own cameras towards recording the society that existed around her.

"As I look back," she considers, "I realize that I have always been pondering the 'why' of inequality, the 'why' of injustice. With my craft, I have tried to make some statements that may change the situations for certain people, improving what needs to be improved, even if just a little bit." What she has aimed for in her photography is not only commercial or artistic recognition, but more to achieve a tangible success in changing conditions for the better, when she has seen a need for them to be changed.

Rudolph's most recent exhibition was held at the *Photo Center Gallery* in New York. It was titled *Welcome to Kentucky* and represented work accomplished pho-

tographing Appalachia, a severely economically deprived area of the South. The project began with an assignment to illustrate the annual report for a New York based foundation for the humanities.

She became so interested in the coal-mining communities of Appalachia, however, that once the assignment was completed, she returned to the area whenever she had an opportunity, documenting the lives of the people and the problems they had to face for her own satisfaction. The collection of pictures was published in the US in *Art Annual* and then compiled for a large-scale exhibition which will eventually travel to Europe.

What is particularly notable in the work is that she portrayed the individuals and their difficult situation not with an overbearing sentimentality at the pathos of their existence, but with respect for the people as individuals.

Honesty, she feels, is the most important element a photographer can bring to his/her work. Though this is true in any relationship between a photographer and his/her subject, be it portraits, still-life, or environmental photography, it is particularly important to social documentary photog-



Children of Mexican farmworkers, California, 1980.

Right: son of America and Bill Simpkins, Saw Mill Hollow, 1976.

raphy. Passion and compassion are the essential characteristics of any 'people photographer,' she emphasises. "Some photography," Rudolph elaborates, "makes people think, while some makes people buy and other photography offers beauty. Photographs serve a multitude of purposes and can be presented in a multitude of ways. . . I feel that is the ultimate role of a photographer to capture that which he is photographing in the most direct and honest manner. A photographer must be honest with whatever and whomever he or she is photographing."

An area in which Rudolph has been particularly prolific is that which concerns children's playgrounds. She has produced three books on this subject: *Workyards: Playgrounds Planned for Adventure*, *Play and Playgrounds*, and *New Neighbourhoods, New Lives*. As in her work with Appalachia, these books rose out of an assignment.

She was asked to photograph children at play—in schools, on the streets, and in parks and playgrounds—and travelled throughout the US with a writer, the result being *Play and Playgrounds*. In working

on that, she learned, through direct experience and additional study, what was lacking in American playgrounds. Interested, she independently began to research the way in which other countries provided playing areas for children. She went to England, Sweden and Israel, photographing *Workyards*, for which she supplied the text as well as the photo-essays.

Some photographers separate their personal photography from that which they produce for clients. Often, they will justify commercial work by its ability to finance the photography that stems from their



personal interests and motivations. It has been a consistent pattern in Nancy's career that her professional and her personal work are related, in some instances, one leading to the other. Even on a commissioned assignment, she will rarely undertake a project in which she would not expect to be stimulated on a personal, human level.

One of her assignments resulted in an involvement that surprised even herself. She was commissioned by a black publication to produce an article for a Sunday supplement magazine that was distributed throughout the US primarily to black communities about an adoption problem that was prevalent in their communities in the 60s. "There were then very restrictive laws regarding adoption," she explains, "but many children needed to be adopted. Because of the restrictions, many families who wanted to adopt were made apprehensive by the elaborate system of bureaucratic procedures and investigations."

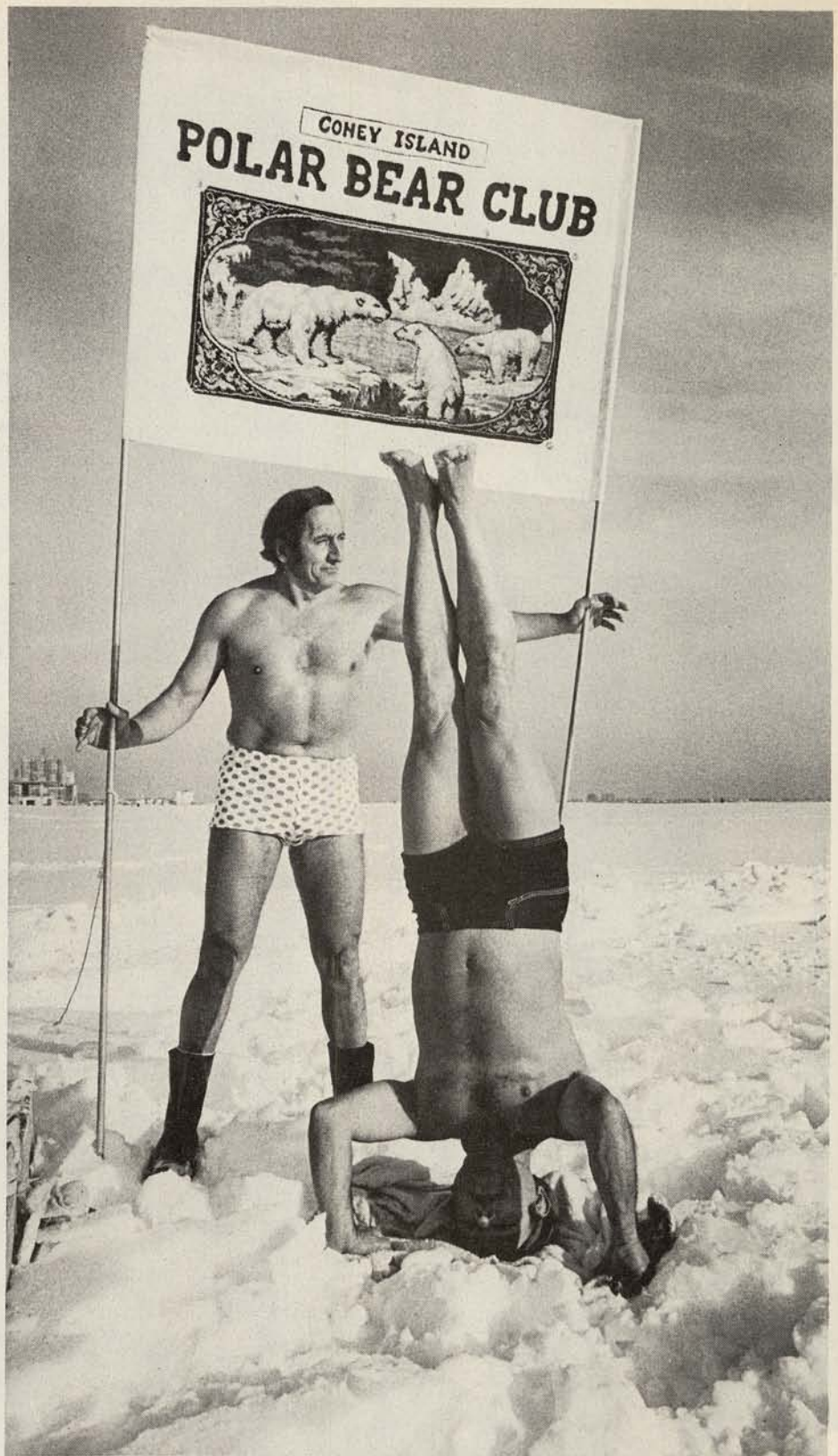
When Nancy completed the feature, the newspaper began to receive inquiries by its readers, which they referred to Rudolph, who then put families in touch with members of adoption agencies she had met while photographing. The result was that some families were able to adopt children. With this interest having been created, the magazine asked Rudolph to do follow-up stories and she became, in effect, a "photographer/mini-adoption agency."

The number of films Rudolph will use on an assignment varies according to its nature. Since most of her work involves people engaged in some kind of activity, she can generally anticipate requiring between 15 and 20 rolls per day. Her preferred medium is black and white and she has, over the past decade, standardised her shooting to using Tri-X and developing the films in D76. This may vary, naturally, as it has for a current project for which she is photographing Californian farmworkers. Because the light in California is so intense, she has had to revert to a slower film, Plus X.

Rudolph learned photography through the method of trial and error, referring to technical manuals to discover how other photographers solved certain problems, but mainly relying on devising her own solutions. Standardising her film, developer, and printing has, she adds, proved to be particularly helpful.

When shooting colour, she will use Kodachrome 25 for its vivid colour saturation whenever possible. Kodachrome 64 is her second choice and Ektachrome reserved for especially low light levels.

Practically all of Rudolph's work is street photography. Her basic equipment is the ultimate tool of photojournalists—Leicas. She uses the M2 and M42 models with the 90mm, 50mm, 35mm and 28mm lenses. On the street itself, she prefers the 28mm and 35mm lenses; the depth of field and wide angle of view affords her especially dramatic environmental portraits that demand the viewer's attention as much as the subject demanded hers and caused her to photograph it. In the studio, she'll switch to the 90mm lens, but for studio



Coney Island, 1978.

portraits she will use a Rolleiflex.

Supplementing her books and exhibitions, Rudolph has worked for such publications as *Harper's Magazine*, *Cosmopolitan*, *New York Times Magazine*, and *Architectural Forum*. With every completed assignment or personal project, she asked herself: "What next?" answering her own question simply by saying: "Where I go from here is farther along from where I've been, always keeping open to learning and growing and getting stronger in my

photographs. My motivation for doing photography is to study human problems and try to communicate my understanding.

"Whenever I'm out shooting, I'm excited because I'm learning about different people—how they live, how they feel, how they move." She has rarely departed from her journalistic approach to photography because she has never wavered from her authentic interest in people and in using photography to contribute to the social fabric that is the world.