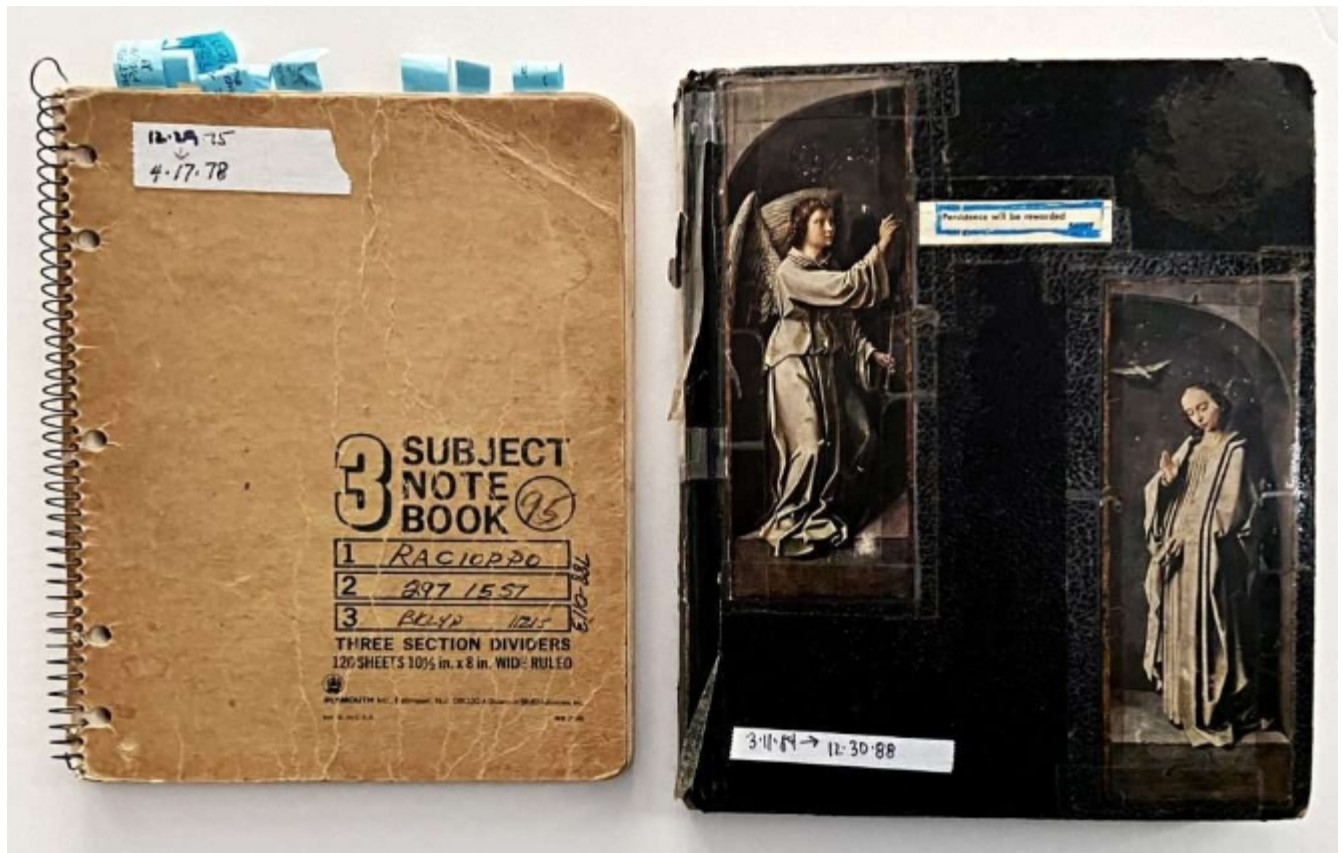


# Keeping Track

Larry Racioppo

As I think and write about photographing, I have become increasingly aware of the importance of the notebooks I have kept since the early 1970's. I return to them often. Sometimes I am pleased by my eagerness to learn and desire to become a good photographer. Just about as often I am dismayed by my lack of knowledge and discipline. I wrote then, as I do now, to clarify my thoughts and to keep track of what I'm photographing and printing.



I did not write every day but when I did, I found my self to be more centered in general, and more focused in my photo work.

Edward Weston was an early influence. I first saw his photographs in the early 1970's at the Witkin Gallery on East 60<sup>th</sup> Street. Back then, I could have purchased one of his original 8x10 inch contact prints, including his famous *Pepper #30*, for \$125.00, the same amount as my monthly rent. I passed on the print (selling for \$10,000 this week on 1stdibs.com), paid my rent and bought Aperture's soft cover Volume One of Weston's *Daybooks*. Very few books have affected me liked this one. I read it over a few nights and soon bought Volume Two.

In 2023, [Susanne Helmert](#), a self-taught photographer working in Hamburg, Germany, wrote about the significance of The Daybooks in her blog *My Morning Muse*:

"The *Daybooks* consist of almost 300 pages of diary entries. Starting with early fragments from 1922 and ending with the last entry from April 22, 1944. Some of the entries are several pages long, others just contain a few thoughts and sentences.

"Edward Weston's *Daybooks* are a series of diaries he kept writing throughout his life. When he began writing in the early 1920's he had no intention of publication. A few excerpts have been published in different publications during his lifetime, but only after his death the *Daybooks* were compiled and published in a two-volume set.<sup>2</sup> Weston also wrote about his struggles and the mistakes he made while photographing and used his writings to reflect on these experiences. Having this insight from an iconic artist like Edward Weston shows me, we all struggle from time to time. It is part of the creative process and just a question of how to deal with it."

THE DAYBOOKS OF  
**EDWARD**  
**WESTON**

TWO VOLUMES IN ONE  
I. MEXICO  
II. CALIFORNIA

Foreword by Beaumont Newhall  
Edited by Nancy Newhall



In 1990, the two volumes were combined and reissued. The book is out of print but readily available online.

Unlike Weston, I often wrote at night, trying to understand what I was doing and why. I felt a disconnect between the pleasure of photographing and the work of printing.

'My uncle 'Locco' has died, my ~~a~~ <sup>mom</sup> gone to the hospital for tests for a valve operation. ~~The~~ <sup>Vague</sup> feelings of mortality are running high, and permeating me with a certain sadness.

Strangely I have spent lots of time relatively with my dad's family — the post funeral get-together, Johnny's confirmation and Kenny's daughter's communion. I've shot hundreds of pix, but still in no dark-room, so they're still undeveloped. A good shot, I think, of Mom & girl cousins, she watching as they played some kiddo game. I may do some work today, using a borrowed changing bag just to develop negs.





My mother and girls, 16th Street, 1977

Printing feels best when I haven't done it in a while. The chemicals (whose toxicity I've been afraid to really find out) don't smell as bad. The ritual of setting out trays, mixing chemicals, etc feels soothing, not boring.

The prints themselves, esp 11x14 in 16x20's, look good: large, crisp and luminous. It feels good then to see the images that I first touched months or years ago when using my camera.

82-42-05  
 MG 1/8  
 ① 1/8 #3F 20sec D: bkgd 5sec

\*② same 50. + B: Tim's Bpoch 10sec

③ S - A - M - E  
 CARE SUOT  
 Photos cut wren

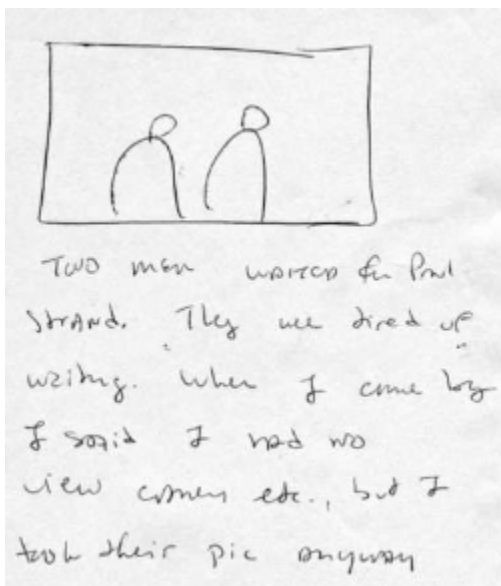
-03

① 16sec



Tom's Wedding, 1982

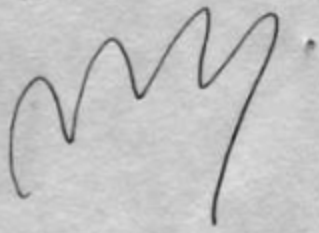
Sometimes, I would have an idea, write or draw on a piece of paper, then later on tape the paper into my note book.



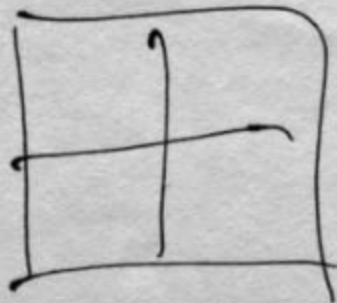
Laborers, Brooklyn, 1975

After my mother died in 1993, things were never the same in my family. One of the ways I dealt with my feelings was by making a series of still life photographs

~~REMAINS~~  
REMAINS  
of the Farm

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Dale, Brook<br> | mint blue<br>white<br> |
| w baby<br>shoes  | R28's<br>lit<br>C...<br>B...L   |

W  
4 BxL  
P14  
of 1980's  
(use please  
my well  
in 64 Ave)





Sometimes I am surprised by my notes. When Jimmy Carter died, I remembered that I had photographed him in 1976 while he was campaigning in Brooklyn.



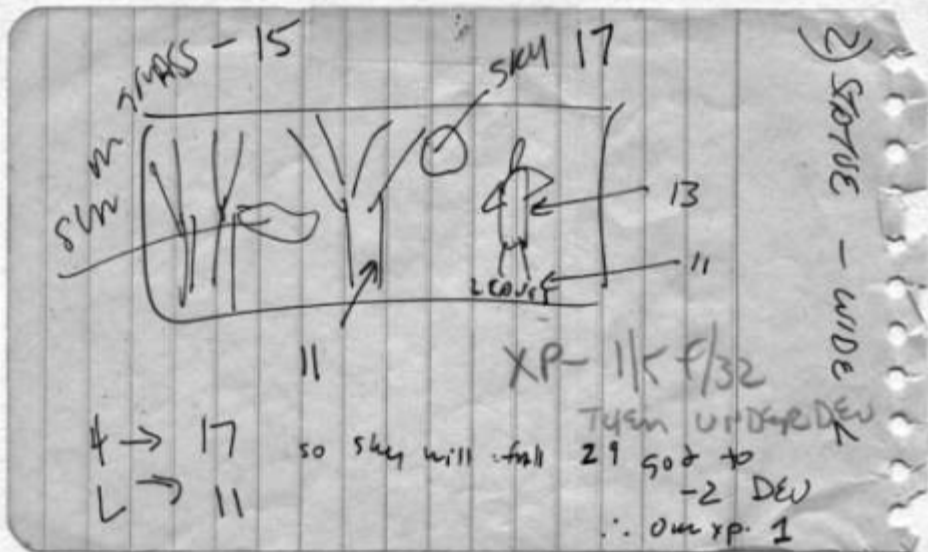
Thurs 10/28  
photographed ICA-sponsored rally:  
"Jimmy Carter for Pres"  
shot 3 rolls of 36xp TRI-X  
they'll do all processing.



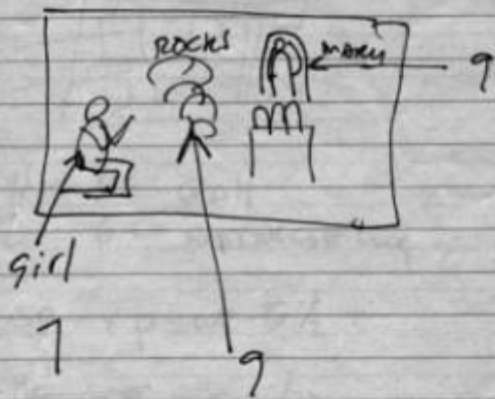
Sometimes I come upon examples of frustration with my "career"—symbolized here by a camera I smashed, then photographed on a piece of sidewalk I had saved from a demolition job.



SOME NOTES for ven early 4+5 work



5) GROTTO - 90mm



so up as 9 + DEV

f/32 - 1/5 sec  
 - +1/2 DEV.

SISTERS of Mercy

50 STATUE in SHADE  
 150mm lens



LP readings  
 TRI-X-300

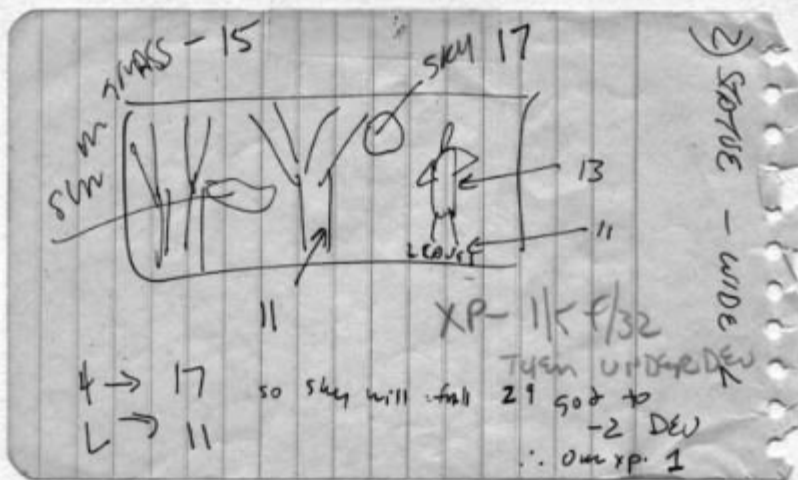
DEV  
 NORM  
 +1

50 xp @ 13 for 2 V  
 sides 11 - as 2 III

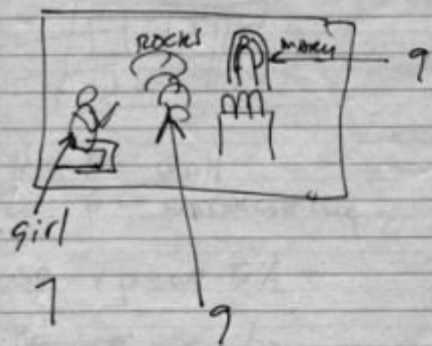
4/45 - 1/5

These notes document my learning how to use a light meter with a "spot" attachment to get an accurate exposure reading.

SOME NOTES for very early 4+5 work



5) GROTTO - 90mm



so ap as 9 + + DEV

f/32 - 1/500 sec  
 - +1/2? DEV.

SISTERS of MERCY

50 STATUE in SHORE  
 150 mm lens



LP readings  
 TRI-X-300

DEV NORM +1

so xp @ 13 for 2 V  
 sides 11 - as 2 III

f/45 - 1/500 sec

Each number on my crude sketch indicated the light reading of a small specific area in the photo. I had to balance the readings to get the best exposure. It was a slow process but essential in becoming a better photographer. I took these notes and processed the film in 1979. I scanned the 4x5 inch negatives last week, and made the prints below yesterday.





I struggled to find a way to support myself by doing commercial photography and still have time for personal photography. I created a fictional photographer with the same issues, Rialto, and sometimes wrote in the third person, although it was obvious that we were the same person.

EASTERN SUN  
3.31.91  
ROCKAWAY

Rialto walked in the park. He liked the back spaces, the old stairs to which he often returned.  
woman in grass

Sometimes people come by. He photographed the shyly provocative young woman.

72-15

girls  
+ park

+ signs + trees

IFB MG  
f15.6 2 1/2 f

- 8x10"

5-7 sec  
+ 204mm



In 2024, I donated 102 photographs to the New York City Transit Museum. While preparing photos for the donation, I returned to my notebooks to verify my memory of a 1975 interaction with some fellow subway riders.

And yes, Rialto was there with his camera.

Subway {grand story} R.A. **FW Transit Museum**

Rialto loved to walk the streets and photograph strangers who were presented to him in such a way that their momentary touch no longer made them strangers. Very often the person would smile (all teeth) and say "Thank you." Even tho they'd never receive the photo, they thanked him. It was maybe a honor to have your picture taken by a stranger.

Rialto often wielded it the event presented it self. Eg. one night on the Delgado Ave platform subway, a woman sitting behind him was holding several folders. As she started to

75-5

I have both these  
pix  
this pic  
story of  
SP in  
June  
Sun

fall asleep the feathers dropped, brushing against his hair. The woman's daughter/friend called her in Spanish "Este hombre..." She moved and apologized and we all smiled and laughed.

We got on the train and I sat across from her. As I photographed her I held the SP  and an old man across the way signalled me to change to a vertical composition. More smile.

The world is kind at times.

When the people got off the train they thanked me again.



## About the Columnist



Larry's portrait by Anna Delaney

When I returned to South Brooklyn in 1970 after two years in California as a VISTA Volunteer, I was 22 years old with no plans and a \$30 camera I barely knew how to use. I took a course at the School of Visual Arts, a job with the telephone company and began to photograph my family and friends. Things worked out better than I could have expected. I've been making photographs for over 50 years, and have some things I'd like to share.

Check out my book, *Aqueduct*, [here](#).

Readers can respond directly to me – [larryracioppo@gmail.com](mailto:larryracioppo@gmail.com).