

Abraham Alexander
Artist Statement "*Story of My Life*"

a documentation of sorts
a social documentation of reality and existence
the narrative of being, the good, the bad and youth who love life
youth from an after school homework club
a homework club in the neighbourhood of Jane and Falstaff
a neighbourhood that presents some social problems but one that shows
promise
stories of youth who have great dreams, goals and a life ahead of them
youth who want to be heard, youth I wanted to hear

Toronto at large, is a cosmopolitan city, full of culture and life. However, like with any big city, many communities have fallen through the cracks of society's standards. These communities suffer from the lack of proper attention from the government and society as a whole. The common factor among these disparate communities is that they are labelled "ghettoes" crawling with violence and people living within the area are either gang members or involved some how involved in lifestyle. In most cases, only a minority of the area suffers from such problems. However, a shadow of blame and neglect hangs over the majority of the area's population as a result.

One such area in Toronto is the neighborhoods found along Jane Street. More specifically in the Jane and Finch area, an area that is nothing more than the name of two major streets that intersect each other. The Jane and Finch area was developed in the 1960's by the Ontario Housing Corporation. Its population boomed from about 1,300 in 1961 to 33,000 in 1971. As of 2007 the population of the Jane and Finch is around 85,275.

As an outsider, I did not have prior knowledge of the area apart from what I saw or read in the media, stories of crime, homicide, public unrest or people in distress. I questioned whether this was all that took place in the communities, I wondered if there was no one who was striving for a better life.

I tried to find the answer they (society) all ask. Why this community experiencing these social issues, but then I realized that was asking the wrong question. I needed to ask what life is like in the community, the good the bad and things that needed to be changed. To get this information I attended community events and meeting to find out what people had to say about their community and the things they are trying in order to make life better.

I wanted to know the truth, I wanted to know the stories. I wanted to hear it first hand, to hear the dreams and aspirations of youth who have a whole life ahead of them. Youth aged between 10-14 who are living, enjoying life, in school, with dreams and apparitions of participating and being something to the great society. I wanted hear the stories of youth from a community that society expected nothing more than problems. I wanted to do something no one else was doing in this community. I wanted to be involved in an area of need within my city and attempt to create change for the better. I intended to the document history.

My objective was to focus on the positive, promising elements, but not ignore the harsh conditions such as crime and violence some of the kids might face. I got the kids to write a story about their life. I wanted them to include what life is like within their community, what they hoped to see changed, what they liked about their neighbourhood and their aspirations for the future. I decided to photograph them in a studio like setting. I wanted to keep the photographs simple and stark, focusing on the portraits of the children and the text.

The youth are from the area of Falstaff off Jane Street, a community that suffers from some the same social problems that plague the Jane and Finch area. I decided to work with an after school homework program for youth from the area. My plan was to begin the project with an open mind and expect the best from the youth in the program, despite society's negative view of the area and its residents.

See this work: www.abrahamalexander.com/janeandfalstaff

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