

## **Q&A for TOWN Magazine, February 2022**

<https://towncarolina.com/road-warrior/>

**Hi Pat!**

**I was so taken in by your photos. I saw both the 2017 and 2019 Ain't Bad features, and clicked through the photos on your site. Your photographic work acts as both an archive of Deep South culture and an ode to your family ties. It's keen and uneasy and beautiful, too.**

Thank you very much, Angie! I appreciate that description of my work. Nice to know someone looked at my images on the Ain't Bad site.

**I know you work in other mediums as well, but what is it about photography that makes a compelling vessel for your stories about the South?**

Yes, I greatly enjoy trying new processes and mediums - I like to dabble! I have done a bit of printmaking and ceramics, and I actually made my first quilt last year and just finished up a couple of face jugs during winter break. Photography was my first love in college, so that is what I keep coming back to. I earned my associate degree from Greenville Technical College, concentrating in photo.

For over a decade, I have solely photographed in Alabama, home to generations of my family. For me, these continual treks are reminiscent of the childhood road trips I would take with my parents to visit family in Tuskegee, AL. The camera was ever-present on these journeys; my dad would always have a Polaroid in hand or a giant video recorder on his shoulder. It's those connections to memory and childhood that keep me interested in exploration and photography, especially in Alabama.

**What's your process like on days that you shoot? Have you noticed any patterns in the objects you're drawn to photograph?**

My general "photographic shooting regimen" when in Alabama is to get up and out the door before the sun rises, and I do not come back in the door until it is dark. I like to drive, more of that reminiscing about childhood road trips to Tuskegee, and I will easily spend 12 hours on the road just wandering around, although sometimes I have specific locations in mind. I repeatedly travel familiar stretches of highway and reshoot the same subjects, but I am frequently amazed when I see something new on those regular routes or turn down a road that I have driven by a hundred times. If I'm not out "keeping the roads hot" as my mom likes to say, I'm probably in a museum looking at artwork. I always check to see what is on exhibit throughout the state.

There are definite patterns in some of my chosen subject matter. I keep an eye out for interesting typography and signage, especially hand-painted signs. My fondness for type has strengthened over the years by working in a graphic design-centric visual art department. I am also known to rescue decaying signs; several are on display in my home and at Greenville Tech. A subtopic is fireworks stands; I appreciate the colorful nature and graphic quality of those displays. Another subtopic of signage are churches; I'm a sucker for a Jesus sign – it comes from being raised in the Baptist church.

Often the subjects that I choose to photograph are solitary and melancholy, or uneasy as you describe them. Some of that has to do with the weather; it seems like I always have overcast days on my treks. There is also a sense of loneliness and loss on these journeys, partly because I usually travel by myself, as these trips are a means of escape from the daily grind and a chance for me to get away, but I also think about family that has passed and the ravages of time itself on favorite locations. Cemeteries are common subjects for my camera as well. Everything is not always gloomy though; there are plenty of sunny days, and I throw in some wry humor from time to time!

**When processing your photos, do you take a particular approach? What, if any, goals do you have in the finished, physical product of a printed photo?**

When I am out photographing, I have five or six different cameras with me: two Polaroids, a 35mm film camera, a digital SLR, a large format 4x5 film camera, and my cell phone, of course. If there is a subject that I feel is really strong, I will photograph it with each camera, perhaps more than once, but I often enjoy the cell phone images or the Polaroids the most – damn our societal need for instant gratification! I love the surprises that the Polaroids can give you, sometimes disappointments, and again there is that tie to memory and childhood.

I photograph for myself, so most of the work never really sees the light of day, so to speak, other than on Instagram. I spend a lot of time in Photoshop, especially if I am working with a scanned negative. I also do a lot of digital dodging and burning with all my images, just like working in a traditional darkroom. Color photography is a continuing struggle for me, as I have a color deficiency. I'm not color blind, but I have difficulty seeing color casts, so I must get my friends Zane Logan or Amber Eckersley to check my prints. They are both excellent photographers and instructors. So, not so simply, my goal for a printed photo is to have decent color, and it generally takes me a few tries! That's probably true for everyone though; you always notice little things in the print that you didn't notice on the screen. Framing artwork is expensive, time-consuming, and frankly often a pain in the rear, so the only time I produce a larger image is if I get work accepted into an exhibit or on the rare occasion someone wants to buy a print.

**Your work has been featured in galleries, journals, and even the Looking at Appalachia project. Talk a little bit about your favorite project you've been involved with of late.**

Yes, I have been fortunate to have work in Looking at Appalachia and the traveling exhibits organized by the director of the project, Roger May. Participating in Looking at Appalachia also introduced me to the Curator of Photography for Ogden Museum of Southern Art, Richard McCabe. Richard included some of my images in the 2017 "Contemporary Alabama Photography" exhibit at Mobile Museum of Art in Mobile, AL, alongside several wonderful Alabama artists. This exhibition was part of the state's bicentennial celebration. Seeing my work in the museum in conjunction with a phenomenal William Christenberry retrospective was buttercream icing on the cake! Christenberry was a son of Alabama and my favorite artist. He passed a few months before the reception, and I was saddened by his loss and not getting the opportunity to meet him.

My favorite project of late would have to be finishing up my bachelor's degree. I graduated in the fall of 2020 from Clemson University, magna cum laude, concentrating in sculpture. I returned to school in 2012, taking fine art studio classes at Greenville Tech before transferring to Clemson, and I plugged away for eight years chipping at my BFA while continuing to work full-time.

I had great professors at Clemson, but I also had incredible mentorship from my friends and coworkers at Greenville Tech, such as department chair Shane Howell and especially gallery director Fleming Markel, both Clemson sculpture grads. Fleming is the one who pushed me to go to Clemson and study printmaking with Syd Cross and sculpture with Dave Detrich. Working in sculpture allowed me the freedom to really suss out some ideas that were tumbling around in my head. I miss having regular interactions with Dave and feeling the need to create – there's nothing like a deadline to get your creative juices flowing! Last year I had three solo exhibitions of my sculpture and photography at Greenville Tech's Benson Campus Galleries, Spartanburg County Public Libraries' Crutchfield Gallery, and the Fine Arts Center's Sheffield Wood Gallery. I'm so thankful I was able to share my artwork with a wider audience after working towards my bachelor's for so many years!

**Also, you're an educator. No small thing! Tell me about the importance of being an active artist when teaching the arts.**

I have been involved with the Department of Visual Arts at Greenville Technical College in some fashion for 20+ years, first as a student and the past 14 years as studio manager/gallery assistant. Even though I am not faculty, I regularly interact with the student population. I give Photoshop portrait retouching demos for our advanced photography class, instruct typography students in letterpress printing, and show students how to frame work and cut window mats, among other things.

Aside from making my own work, I'm always looking at other artists, whether it be in books, on social media platforms, or in a physical gallery – of course nothing beats seeing artwork in person, something we always encourage students to do. One of the things that so impressed me with my sculpture professor at Clemson, Dave Detrich, was not only his skill as an artist but his reference of other artists' work; he was an absolute fount of knowledge! Being an active artist and being involved in the larger community gives credence to your interaction with students. For them, having the ability to view your work first-hand and see that you are a credible source is invaluable.

Obviously studying and working in the educational field gives you information to share, but to continue to expand that knowledge and push yourself to try new things and keep a finger on the pulse of what is happening around you is pivotal for encouraging students to look beyond the classroom and explore the greater art world and put themselves out there. As a practicing artist, you also have the track record to show students that just because they did not get in a juried exhibit or win Best in Show does not mean that their work is not valid, and if they feel like they have something to share or something to say, keep making!

**Thanks for looking over my questions and taking the time to answer!**

Thank you for the opportunity, Angie!

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