

CHASING THE LIGHT

Summer in San Marco

2011

The Photography of Don Crowson



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Crowson Design and Production, L.L.C., Tallahassee, Florida
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This book is for educational purposes only.

This book is dedicated to my father.

Introduction

Chasing the Light, Summer In San Marco is a fine art photography book on the riverside community of San Marco, Florida. This collection of images is also a rediscovery of the same neighborhood that 30 years earlier helped fuel my love for photography.

The original idea for this project happened by chance. After my first semester of graduate school (MFA in Photography) I had the opportunity to condo-sit in the same neighborhood where I spent my teen years (age 13-19). This opportunity afforded me the time to shoot whatever I wanted for three months. It was as if the project presented itself. I knew that simply wandering and photographing this place was going to be a big part of my summer, so I decided to organize a project around it. As I now prepare to publish my first Blurb book, almost two years later, it is evident to me that this was a magical time. A time that excited my senses and made me feel alive.

The intent for this project is twofold. First as a project of self discovery and second as a nostalgic document of San Marco from an earlier time. As a project of self discovery, I wanted to take a step back in time and re-discover what ways this environment has shaped my photographic style. It is evident that my love for trees as formal shapes and as components of the landscape where

partly influenced by this place, and particularly how these forms interact with different qualities of light. These images reveal the beauty of this place in many ways. Through its people and landscape and different qualities of light, these images also show both a timeless beauty and a snapshot into the past.

I separated the neighborhood into five areas and systematically photographed these areas at various times of the day, mainly late afternoon and evening. I searched for scenes that I remembered as meaningful as well as subjects and landmarks that reveal the unique character of San Marco. The various shades of yellows, reds and oranges of late afternoon and morning sunlight were utilized to show the wonderful quality of light that the Florida summer exhibits. This light lent itself well to the three-dimensionality of trees and the various textures in the architecture and landscape. Night scenes were a common subject that I shot as a youth, so I often ventured out during this time seeking forms and subjects that have meaning and that show a unique character of place. For about two weeks during mid-summer Jacksonville was plagued by annoying forest fires that caused a thick fog of white smoke to be blown into many parts of the city, including San Marco. I don't ever remember experiencing this during my youth and found

it puzzling and irritating. What may be considered adverse and not optimal shooting conditions were turned into an asset used for photographic effect. I shot this project with a Nikon D700 DSLR, and 24-70mm zoom lens and a 50mm lens.

People as well as the landscape make up the character of San Marco. So, street portraits were included in this project which help reveal San Marco's character as well as some of my own instincts and formal approaches for photographing people.

Finally, I researched photographers in order to gain inspiration and ideas. Researching photographers like Joel Meyerowitz, William Eggleston, Henry Cartier Bresson, Walker Evans and others helped me decide what to look for and styles I wanted to emulate. As a teenager (1981), I remember seeing Joel Meyerowitz's Cape Cod images in my favorite magazine at the time — American Photographer — and remember being awe struck by their wonderful stillness, calmness, quality of light and poetic subjectivity. After seeing those images I sought scenes in San Marco that copied his style and subject matter and now thirty years later I find that this inspiration still guides my image making in many ways. The following quote was a guiding idea that helped shape the mental model I followed for this project.

In the interview: Creating A Sense of Place, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990. Meyerowitz was asked: "Why do you choose to photograph a particular place? Why the Cape? Why St. Louis?" to which Meyerowitz replied:

"You go someplace to be there. You take a vacation. You want to go investigate a middle-sized city. Sometimes you're asked, sometimes you go because there's a change in your life, and you just commit yourself to that change. And then you take the first step when you're there, and that produces a response, and then you have another response. If you like the way the response feels, you keep on opening to it. There is a dawning awareness that you feel good in this place. Something here makes you attentive, brings you to an awakened state. But you can't know that beforehand. You can fantasize about a place: "Oh I'm going to photograph China." You go there and it's overwhelming, and you don't know why you came, and you feel terribly separate from the whole thing, and foreign. So you make a mistake by projecting ahead. But if you just go to a place because that's the next step in your life, and you're an open person, at least in your photographic life, you begin to ask questions of it. So I think the reasons for going to a place are as normal as those for doing anything else. The way you respond when you're there

is more specific. Bells go off that are precisely your bells. You are aligned with the inner coordinates of your being, and you suddenly feel in the right place. It may be the slant of the light, it may be even the smell, something not visible; you may feel yourself rooted to the spot where suddenly there's a smell of salt water mixed with roses, and it's got your number. At that moment you know, 'I'm alive. Here, now.' And what's there? Whatever you make of it. Sometimes it's ephemeral and nonviable. Ordinary."

While working on this project I continually felt a sense of purpose, delight and heightened awareness supplying a fresh thread of inspiration and a sense connectedness to the community.

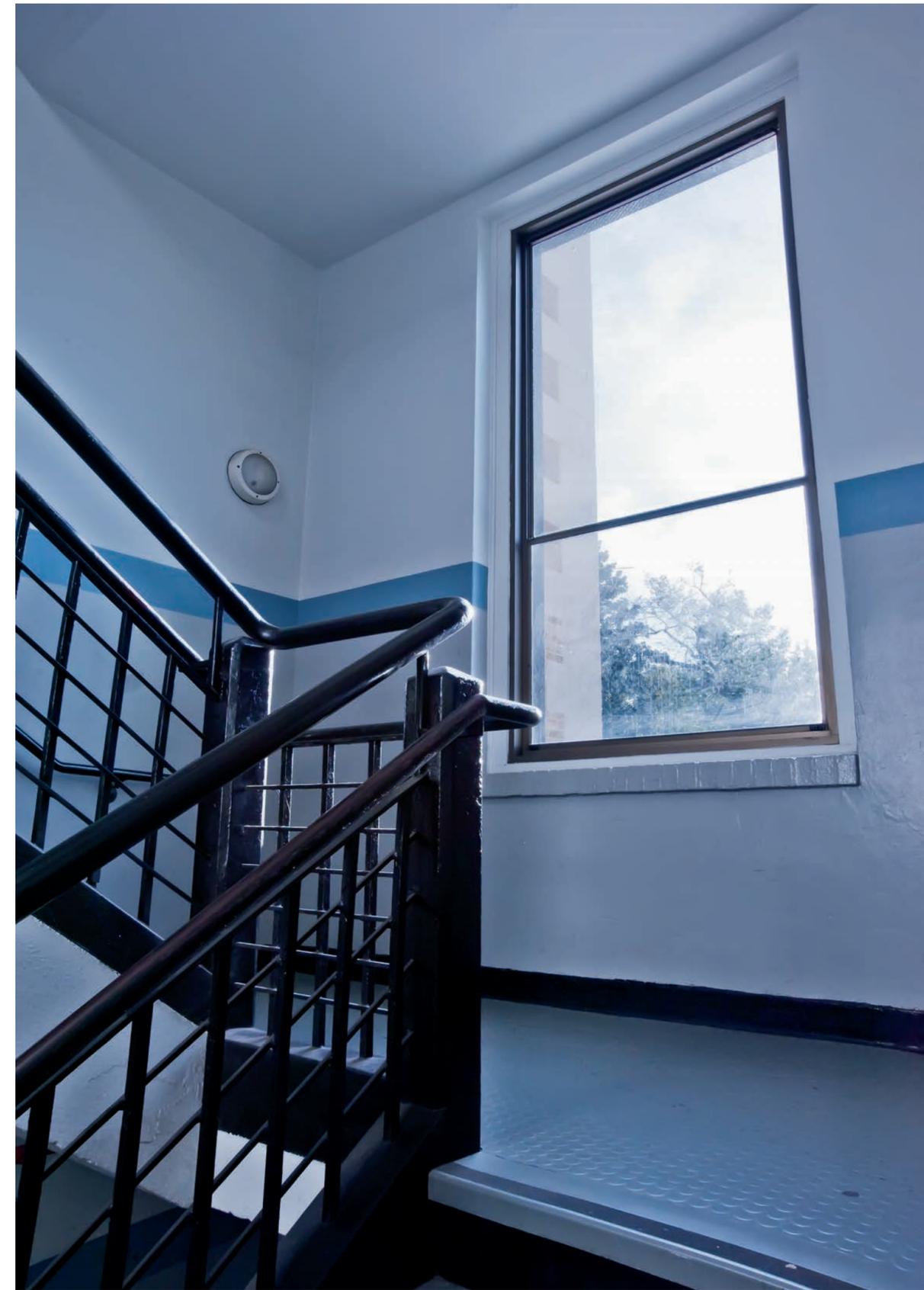
The community of San Marco began as an up-scale housing development that started in 1926. With borders that include Interstate 95 to the east and the Saint John's River to the west, this roughly two square mile community is a diverse area of posh riverfront estates and middle and lower class urban dwellings (where I lived). It's also home to several churches, parks, a public school, and a thriving commercial, industrial and art district. Built before the massive urbanization that took place in the 1950's - that predicated it's design on access by automobile - this community is designed around San Marco Square,

a sidewalk lined shopping district that is accessible for people to walk to. From historical buildings and dwellings, estates and apartments (all with their associated streets, alleyways and landscaping) to many parks and public areas, San Marco has a wide assortment of urban settings. In the past few years San Marco has gone through a massive redevelopment project.

The images in this book are organized in know particular order, but they are separated into sections according to quality of light and subject matter/place. I inserted my portrait images in mini sections as well. Some images are paired as diptics, but the positioning of images (to the outside page edges) leaves a large amount of white space between the diptics, so they may be viewed as single images or paired.

I am very proud of my first Blurb book and know that there will be much to be learned by comparing the images I edited on screen with the printed results. It is my intention that this first volume be the beginning of many to follow.

This staircase in Landon Jr. High School was only a few blocks away from where I lived in a two story duplex apartment on 1905 Naldo Ave. This lot (see next page) has since been turned into a parking lot for the Southside Baptist Church. I snuck into my alma mater for this shot and remember walking these stairs many times.

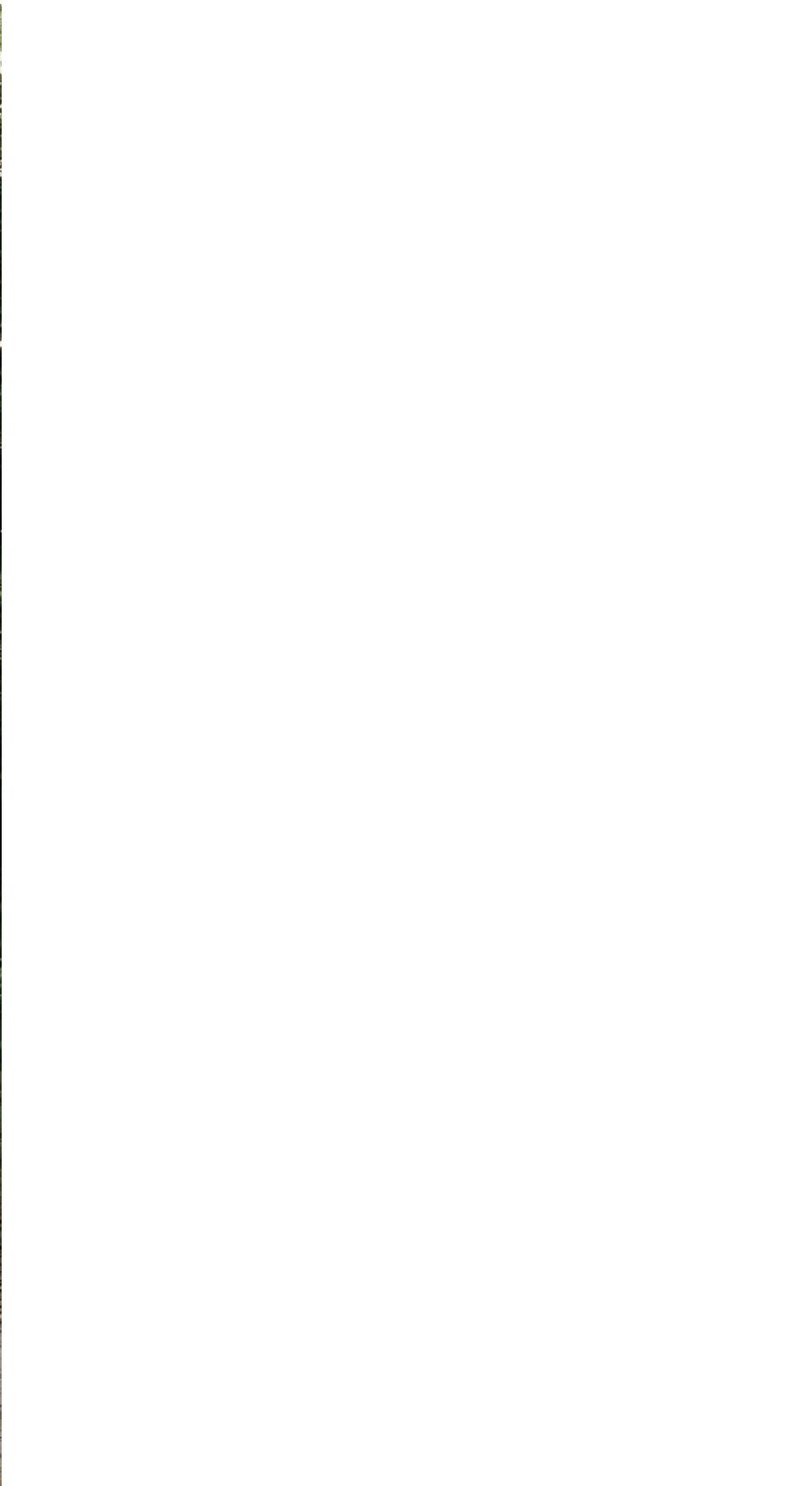




1905 Naldo Ave, facing Southwest.



1905 Naldo Ave, facing Northwest.

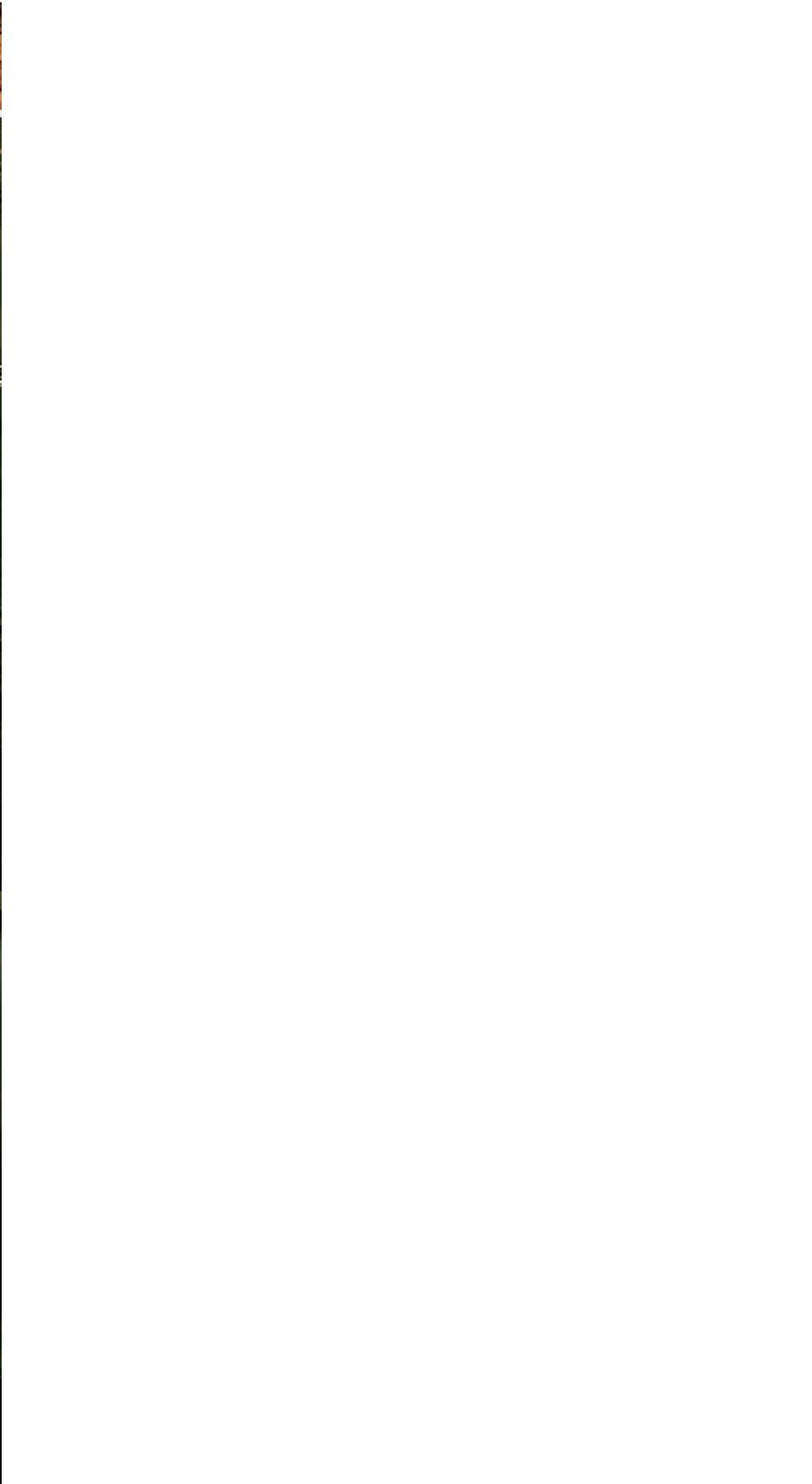




































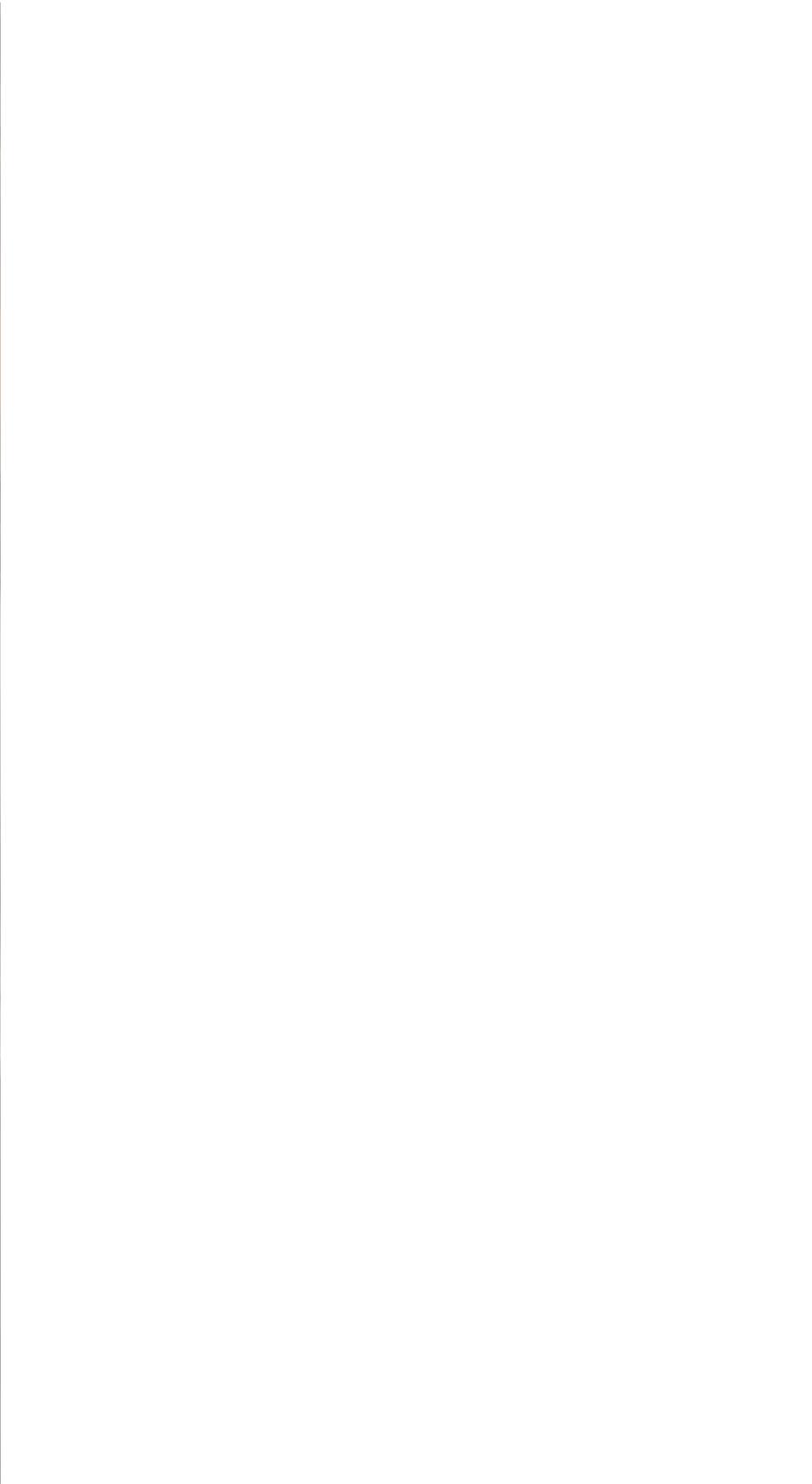
St. John's River Park is an important place for me. As a youth I would walk or ride my bike here often. The horizontal plane of the river has a calming effect.



I worked here at the San Marco theater on San Marco Square during high school.







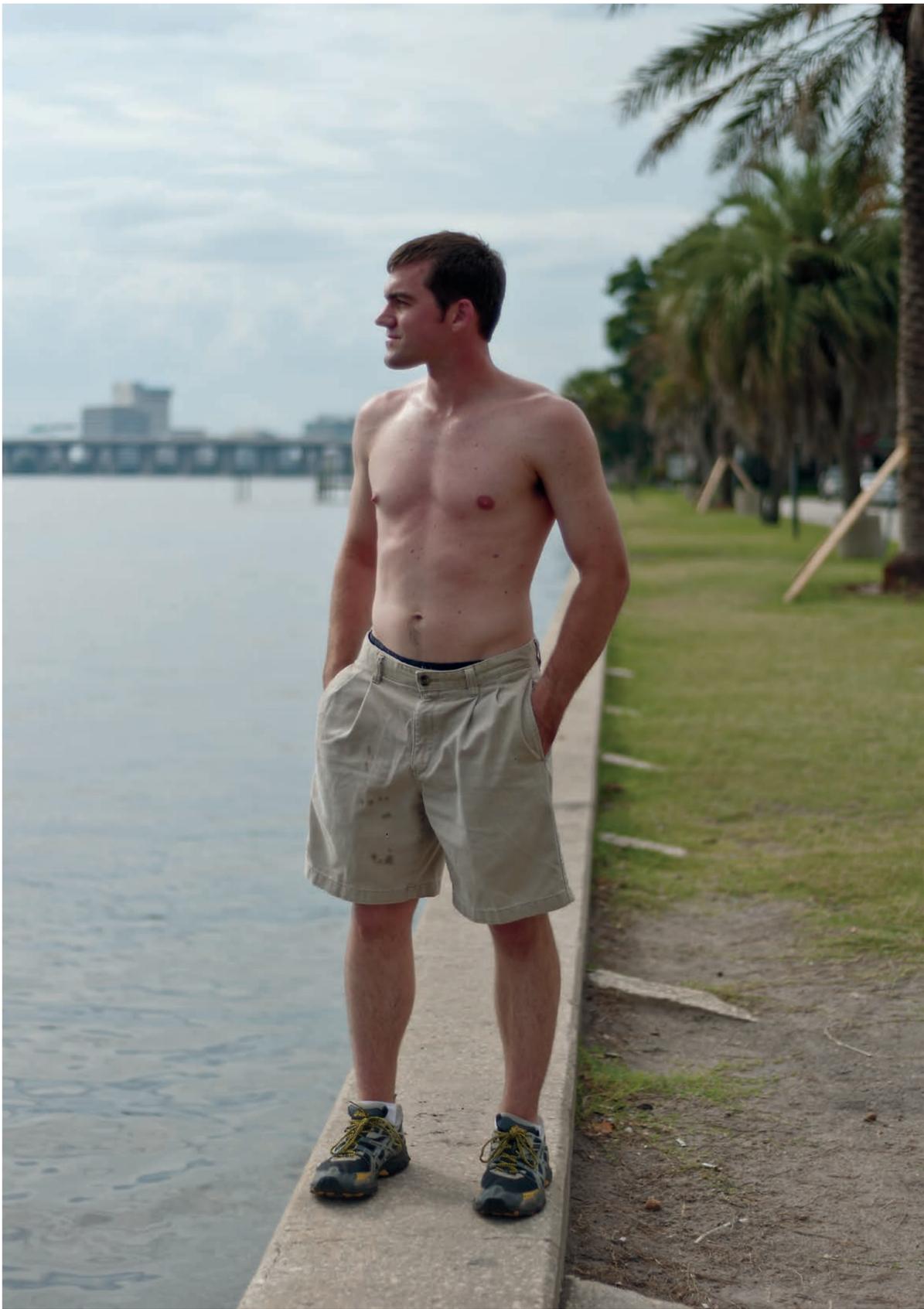


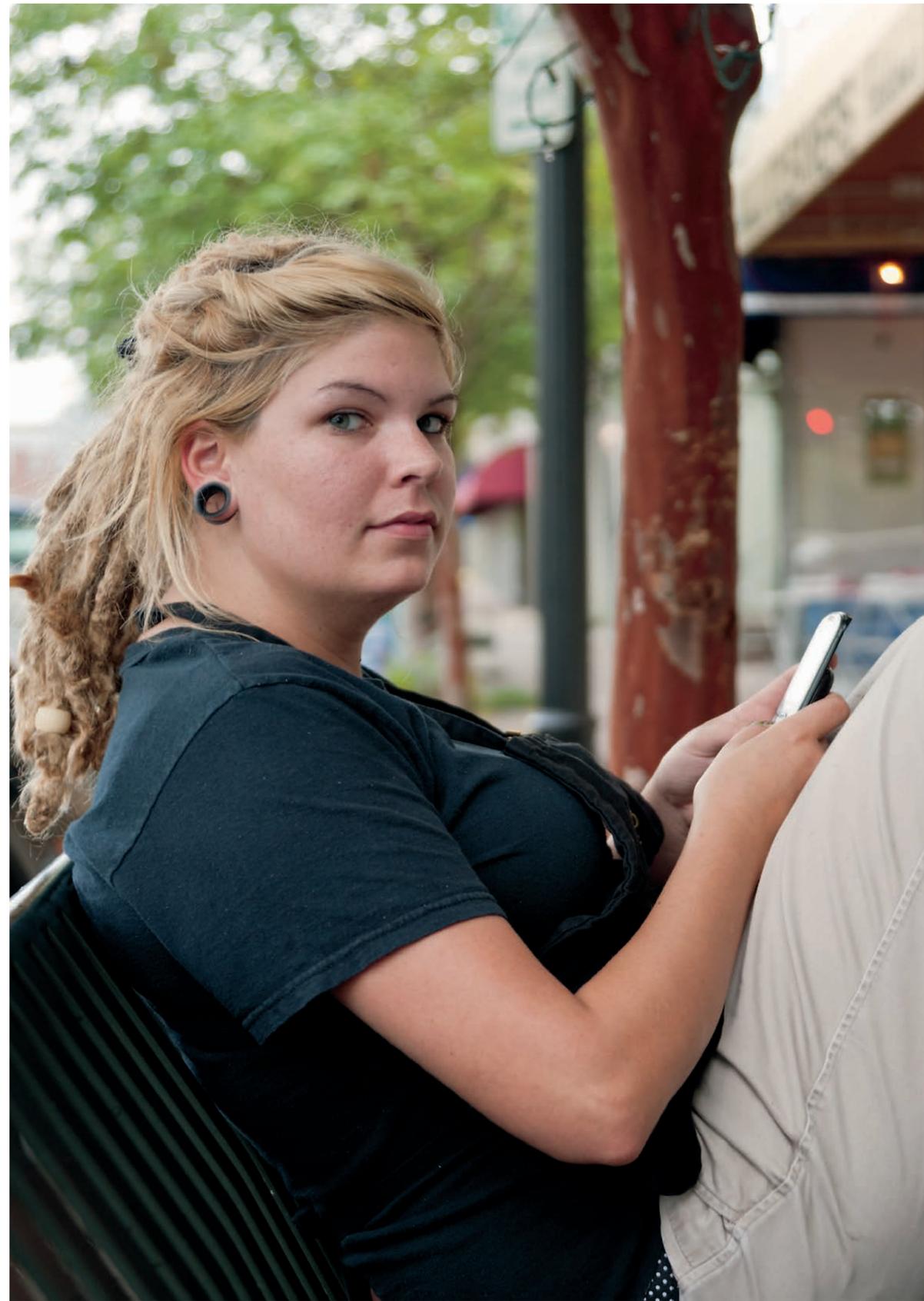


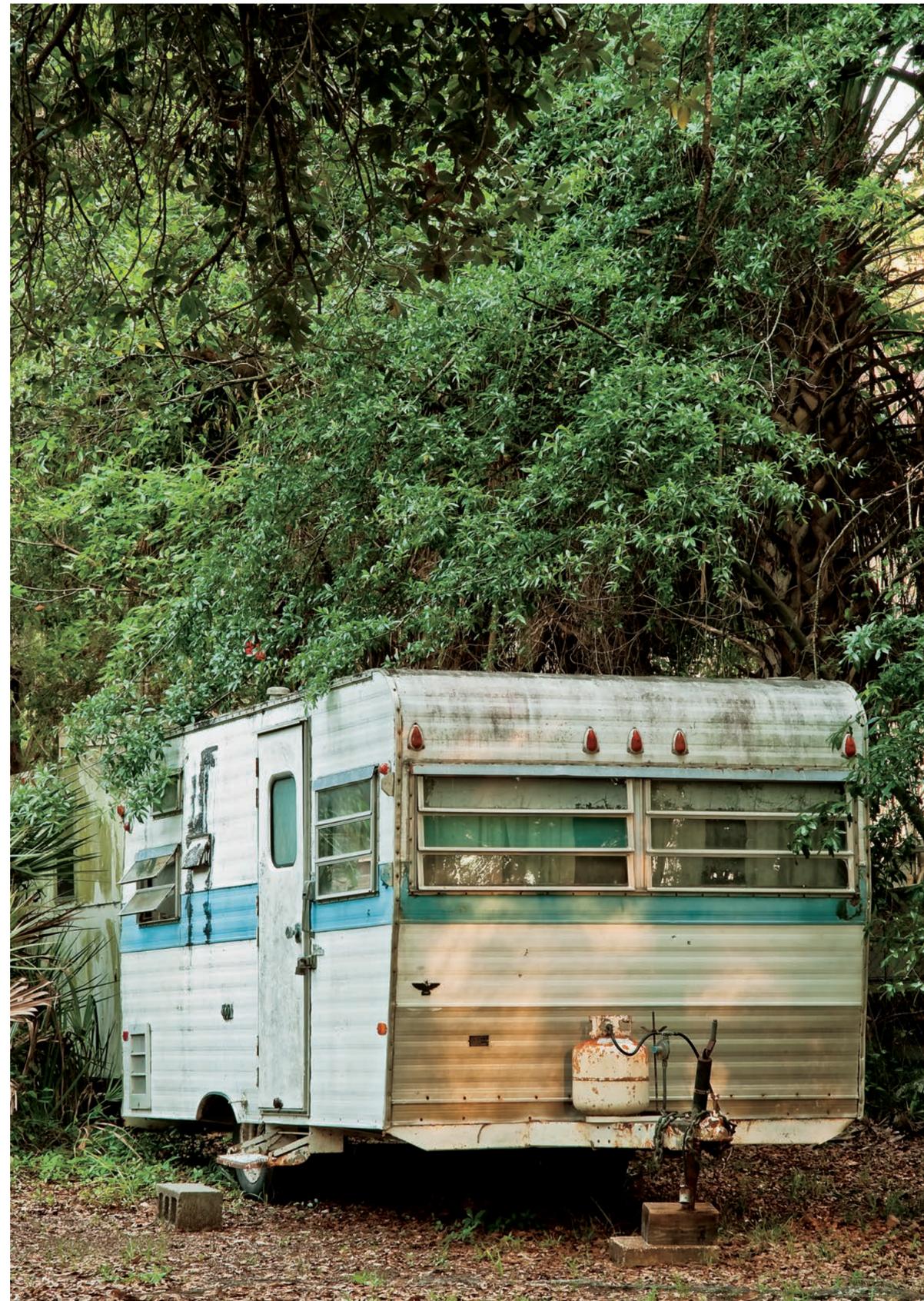




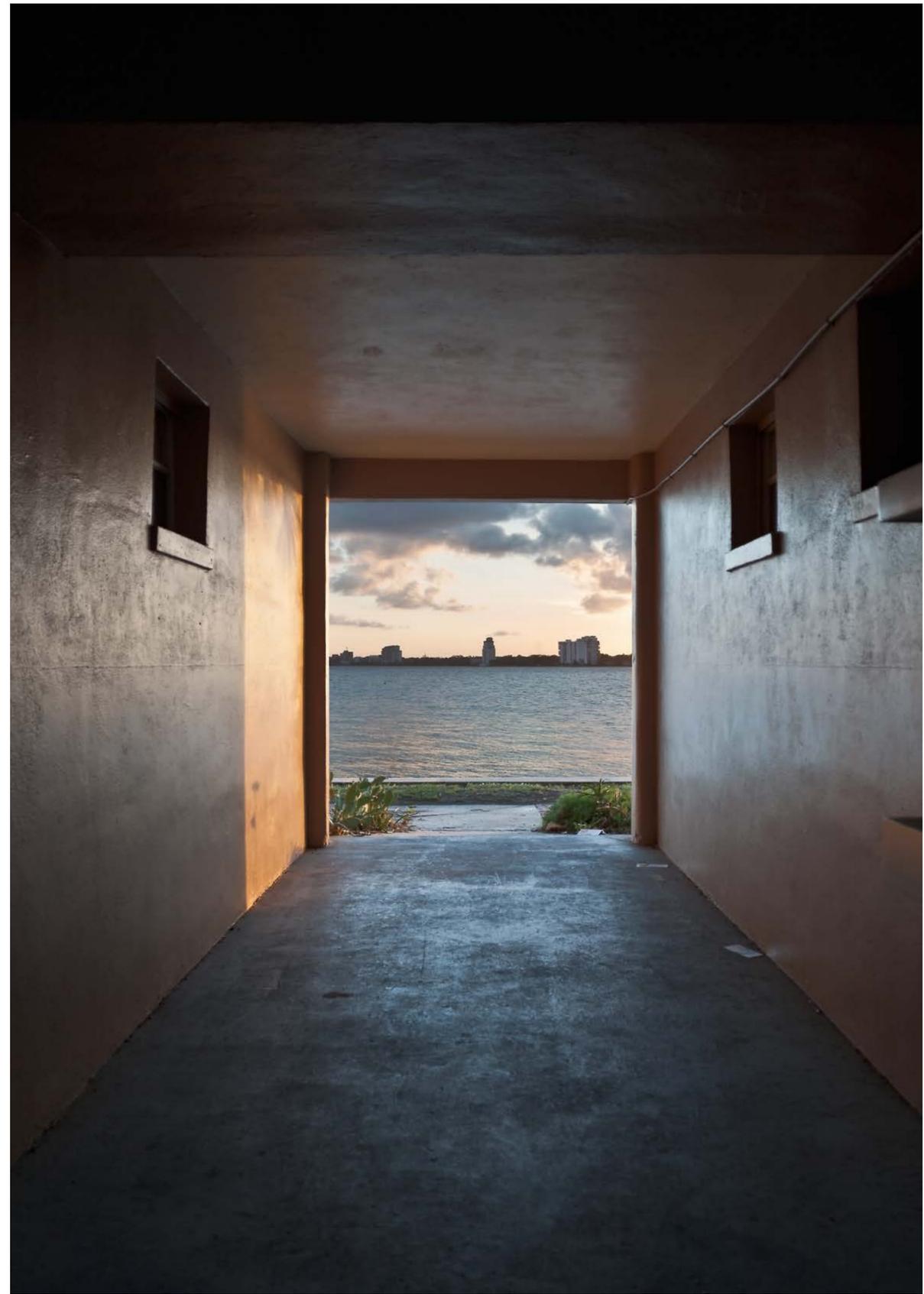












I want to thank Dr. Karen Moran for the comfortable condo and professor Jim Sienkiewicz's help with project direction.

