



Elephant keeper, London Zoo



Message, Daphnia C



Street Smarts



Street Smarts

Photographs by Thomas Pindelski

1971-1977

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To my mother.

Her support was never in question.

Preface

I have been taking street pictures since I could first hold a camera.

It's hard to say why.

Maybe it is a love of cities, of the way people interact with the urban environment, of the constantly changing nature of how we live and behave.

Maybe it's because that, with a few years' seasoning, these snaps become instant history of a time and place.

And maybe it's because of the fun of the hunt.

Not to mention the recurring thrill of being invisible.

Maybe that's why.

Thomas Pindelski
California, April 2005

Street Smarts

About the photographs

About the photographs

The Swinging Sixties were over. David Bailey was *passé*. A Nikon was the required passport to photographic respectability. The pound in your pocket, the Prime Minister reminded us, had not been devalued. Princess Di and her coterie of press manipulators were nowhere in sight and the Third Estate still preferred discretion to disclosure.

That *ne plus ultra* of genteel camera stores, Wallace Heaton on New Bond Street, was still very much in business, replete with Royal warrants and walnut paneling. Later it was to suffer the ignominy of acquisition by a mass merchandiser only to be bowdlerized into oblivion.

With my earliest visual recollections being of Degas, Sisley and Manet and their photographic successors, Cartier Bresson, Brassai and Kertesz, I wanted nothing so much in the whole world as to take street pictures. In 1971 I was at college, aged 19, with my net worth invested in an already dated Leica camera with but one lens. Obsolete or not, it remains the best street photography machine yet devised.

Realizing that fewer variables made for less risk in the photographic process, I settled on Kodak TriX film processed at home in Kodak's venerable D76 developer. The meat and potatoes of any self-respecting street photographer's diet. Printing required that a piece of hardboard be attached to my bedroom window with three trays of smelly chemicals and an old Gamer. Plus a red bulb so as not to trip on our Scottish Terrier.

Why street photographs? It always seemed to me that the genre offered too much that was either humorless or contrived. Posed pictures trying to pass for spontaneity. Worst of all, much of the work out there was positively invasive when it came to respecting other's privacy. Cameras cruelly stuck in the faces of the poor or destitute. Not for me. But make it spontaneous and interject a touch of humor and now you have a picture worth taking.

Life at University College, London was blissfully easy. Attendance was not monitored and class content was not especially challenging. Most of the professors preferred to work on their richly subsidized governmental contracts, caring little for their teaching. A degree could be earned by having fun for two years and nine months and then working like stink for the final three.

So fun it was. London's great spaces beckoned. The Courtauld Institute was across the road. The British Museum around the corner. UC's magnificent library a few yards away. Then there were the great Victorian parks. Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, Holland Park, Regents Park, Green Park, St. James's Park – all a short, free, Tube ride away.

It took but a couple of rolls of film to learn that stealth and speed were the norm for the Leica, a near silent piece of engineering genius. Subjects were everywhere. Lenses were cheap. The small collapsible 50mm Elmar lens, which came with my M3, was soon supplemented with a long focus 90mm Elmar, costing all of \$60 and a 35mm Summaron wide angle for \$75. Thank God for scholarships....

It was the wide angle Summaron that was most frequently mounted on my Leica. You had to get close to your subject to fill the frame. "If your pictures are not good enough, you are not close enough", Robert Capa had said. And when the opportunity finally arose to visit Paris, but one camera and lens came along – the Leica M3 with the 35mm Summaron. And six rolls of TriX film. No one had taught me that you had to take thousands of pictures to get a good one and some two rolls remained unused after a week in the world's most beautiful city.

In the 1970s the British photographic press was mercifully more interested in pictures than in equipment. It was a fine outlet for publishing one's photographs, and you even got paid, which is a good thing on a student's income. Further, the occasional prize went a long way to providing film, paper and chemicals to keep the productive process going.

Another great resource was the extensive photographic library at the Royal Photographic Society, which made its home in Mayfair at South Audley Street, offering a student membership for a negligible sum. It was a rare afternoon that would not find me in its warm interior, poring over the works of the Old World masters while also learning that there was a whole New World to be found across the Atlantic, in the guise of the works of Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham and Walker Evans. Pictures and vistas we could simply not imagine in England's subtler landscape. Then there was the public library on Hornton Street in Kensington with hundreds of books on art and photography. All free.

So there you have it. An easy life, no money, free resources and the best street photography opportunities life could offer.

By 1977, now trying to earn a living and increasingly coming into contact with the New World, with all its energy and innovation, it was clear that the path to success lay elsewhere. While flying on a one-way ticket to the west coast of the United States in November 1977, it dawned on me that no one could take away all those warm memories which you see illustrated here.

Thomas Pindelski
California, 2005









































































































































































































About the Photographs



1. Reg Bolton sculpture exhibition in Holland Park. This spectator was deeply fascinated by the sculpture, viewing it intently from all angles. I was lucky not to be spotted. Camera: Leica M3 (all photographs). Lens: 50mm DR Summicron



2. I heard the band from afar, walking across Green Park. The young boy was messing about behind the last of the musicians and it was inevitable he would march along with them. I just followed along and waited for the moment. 35mm Summaron.



3. This charming example of Britishness at its best shows keen spectators at a parade, with at least one trying to get a better view. This was before the days of body piercing and ripped clothing passing as fashion. 50mm Elmar.



4. You can't go wrong at a vintage car show. This young spectator doesn't share grandfather's obsession with his ride. 90mm Elmar.



5. At a 'happening' in the Kensington Gardens Gallery. It was never quite clear to me what the mask was meant to signify, but the whole thing was an absolute blast. 90mm Elmar.



6. Early morning in Hyde Park, whose circular horse trail is enjoyed by the more affluent of Londoners. A rare picture with the 280mm Telyt, mounted on a Visoflex II reflex housing on the Leica.



7. This eccentric old lady could be seen marching through Kensington Gardens in all weathers, invariably attired in the same coat, regardless of the season. The goal here was to maintain her dignity, preserved by the beautiful lighting. 50mm Elmar.



8. There will always be an England. Oblivious of the masses behind them, this well attired couple takes a few moments to enjoy the sun, seated on one of London's many monuments. The umbrella remains furled at all times, regardless of the weather. In the 1970s your clothing still denoted your social class. 35mm Summaron.



9. An aptly named realtor on that most costly of thoroughfares in Mayfair, Old Bond Street. The wonderful Wallace Heaton camera store was just a few yards up the road on New Bond Street. 90mm Elmar.
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About the Photographs



10. Brighton. A town of fine Victorian cast iron architecture, relatively unspoiled in the 1970s. And a city of retirees. This couple is passing the time on a rare sunny day, while walking the dogs. 35mm Summaron.



11. What is this macho looking guy, leather jacket and all, doing selling balloons? Good thing they were helium filled or he would have given chase! 35mm Summaron.



12. The hue and cry of the demonstration has bypassed this disinterested spectator, who expresses his level of involvement by taking a nap on the grass. Note the neat two piece suit and the obligatory London pigeon. 'Sports clothing' was yet to rear its ugly head. 35mm Summaron.



13. The kids' interest alternated between the 'whoosh' of the water slide and the other distractions all around, while at least one of the mothers shows how tough life with children can be on the feet. 35mm Summaron.



14. Clearly the small lady at the circus was not happy to have her picture taken. On the other hand, the signs above her work so well in contrast to her evident ire. 35mm Summaron.



15. Karl Marx may be buried in Highgate Cemetery but that is probably the worst reason to go there, unless you plan to crack a bottle of bubbly to celebrate his passing. This fallen statue says far more about this beautiful place. 35mm Summaron.



16. On the Thames Embankment, before it was wrecked with what passes for modern architecture. An old man. A cloth cap. A raincoat. London Weather. What else need be said? 50mm Elmar.



17. This lady was intently puzzling over the London Underground map under Queen Victoria's stern gaze, even though 2 miles from the nearest Tube station. Caught on a stroll through Kensington Gardens. 50mm Elmar.



18. The weekly North End Road market in Fulham was truly a social place. This lady was giving the vegetable seller a really hard time about his potatoes, unaware of the gorgeous backlighting on her hair. 90mm Elmar.



19. Was there ever more magnificent a dog than the Irish Wolfhound? This one is a perfect match for his owner's Tweeds and the neighboring competitor's woolen skirt. 90mm Elmar.

About the Photographs



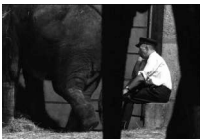
20. No sooner does one extol the Wolfhound for his grace and beauty than something equally good, in the shape of these Irish Setters, comes along, perfectly matched with their serene owner. 35mm Summaron.



21. See. Owners do look like their dogs. 90mm Elmar.



22. British dress at its best. One of those innumerable, somewhat quirky, parades which seemed to typify London life at the time. 90mm Elmar.



23. This poor elephant keeper at London Zoo is doubtless contemplating the enormity of the clean up task after lunch. The great photographer Tony Snowdon designed the aviary at the zoo, something I always enjoyed. 280mm Telyt.



24. Dressage is one of those events where behavior of the horse (and rider) is on show. The rules quite escape me, but you cannot resist the personalities. And the riders and spectators make for fun people watching. 90mm Elmar.



25. Yes, Virginia, there were still well dressed nannies to be found in the best areas of London in those days. The prams (sorry, perambulators) are straight out of Monty Python. Caught on a damp morning in Hyde Park. 35mm Summaron.



26. This lady was always walking her gigantic Afghan, the latter's size emphasized by her diminutive stature, in the park. Clearly her dog lacks nothing in the obedience department. Just outside Kensington Palace in Kensington Gardens. 35mm Summaron.



27. The most beautiful city in the world. Attention is paid to Parisian artifacts at all times of the day or night. Here the maintenance man is framed by the Eiffel Tower. 35mm Summaron.



28. This security guard at the Louvre, providing neither security nor guardianship, was none too pleased to have his picture snapped. My surpassing impression of this wonderful time was of the gorgeous Parisian light. 35mm Summaron.



29. Old age in Brighton. A city where you retire quietly to live in genteel poverty. 35mm Summaron.

About the Photographs



30. This lady at the bus stop clearly is not following the instructions on the back of the truck. Doubtless she is concerned for her coiffure. 35mm Summaron.



31. A chance moment in the Tuileries Gardens outside the Louvre in Paris. A child's wonder, an old man's indifference. I simply do not know of a more perfect public place in the Western hemisphere. 35mm Summaron.



32. Street toughs. Well, it has to be admitted that not all dress at the time was good. 35mm Summaron.



33. Girlfriends or not, you wonder what the one on the right must be thinking. In the Louvre, where artists were welcome to bring their easels and paints and where there were no restrictions on picture taking. 35mm Summaron.



34. Another observer displaying supreme indifference to the goings on around him. British phlegm at its best, on view in Hyde Park. 35mm Summaron.



35. A little bit of Hollywood on the South Bank. Little did I know that a few years later Los Angeles would become my home. 50mm Elmar.



36. Outside London's largest home, her loyal subjects hope for a glimpse of the Queen. The attraction of this venue transcends the ages. When newly refugees in London in 1952, one of the first destinations for my parents was Buckingham Palace. 35mm Summaron.



37. London's street newspaper vendors are a breed apart, proclaiming their wares in unintelligible vocal outbursts. Brylcreem for the hair was very much de rigueur back then. 35mm Summaron.



38. This passerby has little inkling of the fate awaiting her. In marked contrast to London's West End, the 'working class' East End was notable for two things – an absence of great parks and foul architecture. 35mm Summaron.



39. Getting to the bottom of the matter, this lady is secretly grateful for her comparatively svelte build. These sort of sculpture shows seemed to be a fixture in London's public parks at the time. 35mm Summaron.

About the Photographs



40. It's almost the end of the day for this news vendor who is obviously thinking of his first pint of beer to go with the ciggie. These vendors were a colorful part of the London street scene. 35mm Summaron.



41. It's sad to reflect that the English gave the world the Old People's Home, where unloved and forgotten parents are consigned in their dying days. This lady is enjoying a day off from one of those institutions. 35mm Summaron.



42. An impossible sight today, outside one of the most famous addresses in the world. No barriers, no chains, no armed guards. A better world. Imagine trying to do this today.... 35mm Summaron.



43. Nun's Day Out and a spot of luck, as this one was more curious about me than about the Holland Park peacocks that captivated her sisters' attention. 35mm Summaron.



44. How do these things happen? I always think of Manhattan when I look at this. Magnificent edifices whose shadows shelter destitution. 50mm DR Summicron.



45. Streetwise East End kids. "Got a penny for the slot, mister?" Battersea Fun Fair had that peculiar quality of forced enjoyment to it. Once you paid the admission fee you were expected to have fun. 35mm Summaron.



46. An early Chinese invasion of St. James's Park. This delegation from the incongruously named People's Republic was doubtless surprised to discover that a photographer could take a picture without being confined to ten years' hard labor. 35mm Summaron.



47. It's hot in these costumes! Those were really small people in there. Spotted at one of London's innumerable street parades. 35mm Summaron.



48. Well dressed, genteel and bored, this gentleman awaits the next item on the agenda at Speaker's Corner, where the spectators are often more fun than the objects of their attention. 35mm Summaron.



49. This rather well dressed street artist was attracting more than his share of attention. He could dash off a charcoal pencil portrait in 3 minutes and was having a bumper day, on Piccadilly, just outside Green Park. 35mm Summaron.

About the Photographs



50. Permit me this one landscape picture. Constable's Hampstead Heath. A lovely place, well tended. A rare picture without people, I could not help but be attracted by the solitude of this early morning scene, tractor and all. 50mm DR Summicron.



51. I'm a sucker for cemeteries. This ravishing sculpture adorns one of the grander tombs in the Brompton Road cemetery, a short walk from my home in London. Many such Victorian masterpieces adorn the old cemeteries, unseen by most. 90mm Elmar.



52. Both dog and owner appear apprehensive before the final judging of the Great Dane section at Cruft's Dog Show. The world's oldest dog show, Cruft's was held in Olympia, London in those days. 35mm Summaron.



53. By contrast, all is gaiety in the terrier world. Note how the hair styling is uniform for all involved. 35mm Summaron.



54. Wales. No capital, no architecture, no weather. Hard to imagine a bleaker way to live. It must be difficult to be a denizen of the nation which gave the language 'to Welsh' on a deal or 'to Jones' one down. 90mm Elmar.



55. Proud children of the affluent wave the flag. English private schools insist on dress and manners to this day, recognizing that jeans and sneakers are no conduit to a good education. 35mm Summaron.



56. An early rebel in a nation renowned for its love of meat and potatoes. While things have mercifully changed since, the Britain of my youth was renowned as something less than a gastronomic venue. 35mm Summaron.



57. Paris. City of Light. Early morning in the Tuileries Gardens. It seemed to me that the light in Paris was always like this. Imagine walking across this hallowed place on your way to work. 35mm Summaron.



58. Early morning light in Paris. The lovely tonal range of TriX film captures the mood perfectly. 35mm Summaron.



59. A cup of coffee and time for reflection in one of the world's greatest public spaces, the Tuileries Gardens. 35mm Summaron.

About the Photographs



60. Nothing says so much about Paris as its public seating. Simply gorgeous. 90mm Elmar.



61. Ever distrustful of the weather, these Brighton residents prefer to keep their coats on, sun or no sun. It never ceased to amuse me to go to the seaside only to see people attired in hat and coat, enjoying the sun. 50mm DR Summicron.



62. Avid discourse and obligatory coats for these Brighton retirees. 35mm Summaron.



63. The forecourt of the Louvre, before the execrable excrescence known as I. M. Pei's pyramid destroyed the space. 90mm Elmar.



64. Early morning outside Sacre Coeur is a fine place for a walk with the dog. Parisians allow canines access to everything. A worthy emotion, but watch where you step. The views of Paris from this vantage point are to die for. 35mm Summaron.



65. Time to put the boats away for another day. This small businessman made a living by renting boats to children which they would sail in the fountains in the Tuileries. 35mm Summaron.



66. Some things never change. Park bench. Cloth cap. Brick school. The English village green. And, of course, the overcast sky. Once I moved to America's west coast I had no more use for TriX and its great sensitivity to light. 35mm Summaron.



67. Why I emigrated. Thanks to incompetent government, there would be strikes of some service or another daily, the trains never ran on time, and unemployment was as high as the income tax rate. It took a great woman to fix all that. Too late for me. 35mm Summaron.



68. The brooding industrial landscape dooms life. A perfect example of how little attention is given to the urban environment in the poorer East End of London. 50mm DR Summicron.



69. One last gasp. I never quite understood why the British diet of bacon, sausages and eggs, washed down with copious amounts of beer and followed by a cigarette resulted in such longevity for its citizens. A judge at Cruft's Dog Show. 90mm Elmar.

About the Photographs



70. The guide would point, the heads would obediently swivel, and twenty cameras would be raised as one to record the scene for the folks back home. No rugged individualists to be found here. At the Tower of London. 35mm Summaron.



71. The Music Critic. This little boy would rather play than listen to the brass band, that fixture of London's finer parks in the summer. In St. James's Park on the Queen's doorstep. 35mm Summaron.



72. Cricket as ballet. Another loopy 'happening' at the Kensington Gallery. That said, the performance bore abundant respect for the world's finest sport. 35mm Summaron.



73. A fire on Kensington High Street attracted these onlookers' attention. Conservative manners made this sort of thing easy to photograph. The fire was at the once famous Biba's department store across the road, rumored by many to have been self-inflicted. 35mm Summaron.



74. Hey! Don't touch that. A plaster cast of Michelangelo's David gets a touch up in the Victoria and Albert Museum. 35mm Summaron.



75. Another shot from the V&A as everyone calls it. These workers are contemplating a tough restoration job. Many of the world's greatest statues were reproduced by the Victorians in plaster cast for all to see. 35mm Summaron.



76. The soaring dinosaurs at the Natural History Museum draw the gaze of this visitor. Resplendent with great exhibits and housed in magnificent architecture, this South Kensington museum is a 'must see'. 35mm Summaron.



77. London was full of this sort of rubbish, awaiting a gullible patron. These canvases were almost blank, yet still attracted much detailed analysis, not to mention paying patrons. Motherwell, Rothko and their followers had fooled the art world. 35mm Summaron.



78. Seemingly without an owner, this black dog strode purposefully across one of Greenwich's finer public squares. The site of the Royal Observatory and the home of Greenwich Mean Time, the city houses some splendid architecture. The sort of grab shot at which the Leica simply excels. 35mm Summaron.



79. Now replaced with the Thatcher revolution's office buildings, the Isle of Dogs was a derelict and most photogenic area in the 1970s. 35mm Summaron.

About the Photographs



80. My beloved sister, Ann Barrack. Roll One, Frame One, August 2, 1971, on the British Rail train back from Waterloo where I had just bought my Leica M3. Once I saw this negative I knew I was on to something! 50mm Elmar.



81. Long Distance and Local. It's wrong to think of the British as withdrawn, so long as you speak their language. These couples were having a right old time outside the Victoria and Albert museum. 35mm Summaron.



82. With little else to do, this bowler hatted gent whiles away a few pleasant moments in the park with some of the world's worst coffee. Suit and tie, of course. 35mm Summaron.



83. This couple prefers to take a more relaxed approach to life. Sunshine is so rare a commodity in England that every opportunity has to be taken to enjoy what little there is. 50mm DR Summicron.



84. The ubiquitous, quirky, French car, abstracted on the Champs Elysées. This great thoroughfare is made even more so by the trees lining its length. 35mm Summaron.



85. Did you know the Eiffel Tower boasts a magnificent restaurant half way up? This waiter was busy setting the tables for the evening's repast. The French really do live to eat. 35mm Summaron.



86. Awash in wonder, a spectator hears out a speaker. Nowhere else are there more eccentrics to be seen than in London's public spaces. 35mm Summaron.



87. Quite what the armed guard from the Planet of the Apes was doing here I have yet to determine, a question obviously on this little girl's mind also. 35mm Summaron.



88. You can draw your own conclusions about these Vestal Virgins. Another one of those street parades. You cannot but wonder about all the work that went into these events, which were not remotely commercialized. 35mm Summaron.



89. Leave it to the Parisians to keep their prized Metro clean. The station at the Louvre is replete with statues, no less. Unlike its London counterpart, the Paris Metro ran on time in those days. 35mm Summaron.

About the Photographs



90. The Isle of Harris, where Scotland's magnificent Tweed comes from, and where sheep outnumber people. This was taken on a pilgrimage to the far north west of Great Britain shortly before emigration to the United States. 35mm Summaron.



91. What's the name of that book? Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus? Spotted in the Jardin de Luxembourg in Paris. 90mm Elmar.



92. Serenity in the Tuileries gardens. 35mm Summaron.



93. The Photographer and the Photographed, the latter in some distress. One of the great challenges of street photography is not just to capture the moment but to avoid all the clutter the streets teem with. 35mm Summaron.



94. If the great public spaces of London and Paris dominate this book, then time must be set aside for Parc Monceau in Paris as the finest jewel of all, wisely chosen by this bride for the most important day of her life. 35mm Summaron.



95. The French and their dogs. I will leave determination of the lady's profession to the viewer's discretion, but there is no denying her sartorial sense or the care lavished on her cocker spaniel. 35mm Summaron.



96. A somber, sacred place, the starkness of the Paris Holocaust memorial is in marked contrast to the beauty of the city surrounding it. This old man had come to remember times past, as the modern generation plots the future. 35mm Summaron.



97. Amongst giants. A reader is dwarfed by Henry Moore's sculptures in Holland Park, London. 35mm Summaron.



98. At the fun fair. Everyone intent on their own small part of the world. 35mm Summaron.



99. Don't let this lady's charm fool you. Not quite the American marketing model for politics, but endearingly sincere, it has to be said. 35mm Summaron.

About the Photographs



100. Thomas Pindelski, Paris 1977, Lejca M3
35mm Summaron.

About the Photographs

All the pictures in this book were taken with a Leica M3 with 35mm, 50mm and 90mm lenses, save for two taken with the mighty 280mm Telyt mounted on the Leica via a Visoflex II reflex housing. The camera was manufactured in Wetzlar, Germany in 1960 by Ernst Leitz GmbH.

Negatives were scanned on Nikon Super Coolscan 2000 and Canon FS4000US film scanners at 2000 dpi and processed in Photoshop. 'Processing' was limited to retouching of dust and a couple of the pictures were cropped for effect. Otherwise these are mostly full frame reproductions.

About the Photographer

Born in 1951 and growing up in London, Thomas Pindelski got his first camera, a Kodak Brownie, as a gift from his parents at the age of seven. The fascination of a lifetime was born with that wonderful Brownie.

Pindelski finally purchased his used Leica M3 on August 2, 1971 and continues to use it today. He emigrated to the United States in 1977.

Contact

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