

DICK BLAU is founder of the internationally acclaimed Department of Film at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where he has taught for the last forty years.

In his photographic work, Blau has had a long-standing interest in music, dance, gesture, and performance. Working with anthropologist colleagues, he has published four visual ethnographies: *Polka Happiness* (1992), *Bright Balkan Morning: Romani Lives and the Power of Music in Greek Macedonia* (2002), *Skyros Carnival* (2010), and *Polka Heartland* (2015). In conjunction with historian Nigel Rothfels, Blau has also published a study of elephants and their keepers in the Portland Zoo, *Elephant House* (2015).

Blau has three children. He lives in Milwaukee with writer Jane Gallop, who plays a major role in *Thicker Than Water*, and who has reflected on this project herself in her anecdotal theory of domestic photography, *Living with His Camera* (2003).

Cover: *Anna in Red*, 1976



THICKER THAN WATER

DICK BLAU



THICKER THAN WATER

DICK BLAU

Dick Blau's *Thicker Than Water* looks at two families, both his, over the course of some fifty years. The 110 pictures within — of Blau's three children, the two women who are their mothers, and of the photographer himself — are spontaneous transcriptions of his experience, an ethnography of family life, a phenomenology of domestic emotion, and his part of a discourse: notes to (and about) the people he loves.

"This book is a complex reflection on photography and the place it has in our desires and our lives, especially our home lives. It is also a reflection on family, an attempt to portray the realities of family life, beyond the pieties and idealizations of conventional representations."

Margaret Olin, author
Touching Photographs (2012)

THICKER
THAN
WATER



THICKER THAN WATER
MY FAMILY IN PHOTOGRAPHS

DICK BLAU

1968

We were living in Buffalo. She was standing at the bathroom sink.
I was leaning on the doorframe and playing with my new camera.
Then Heide turned to me with a look so fraught I simply had to
make a picture. The image pulsed in front and inside of me.













3.3.71



Anna was born. We moved to Milwaukee. Things fell apart.



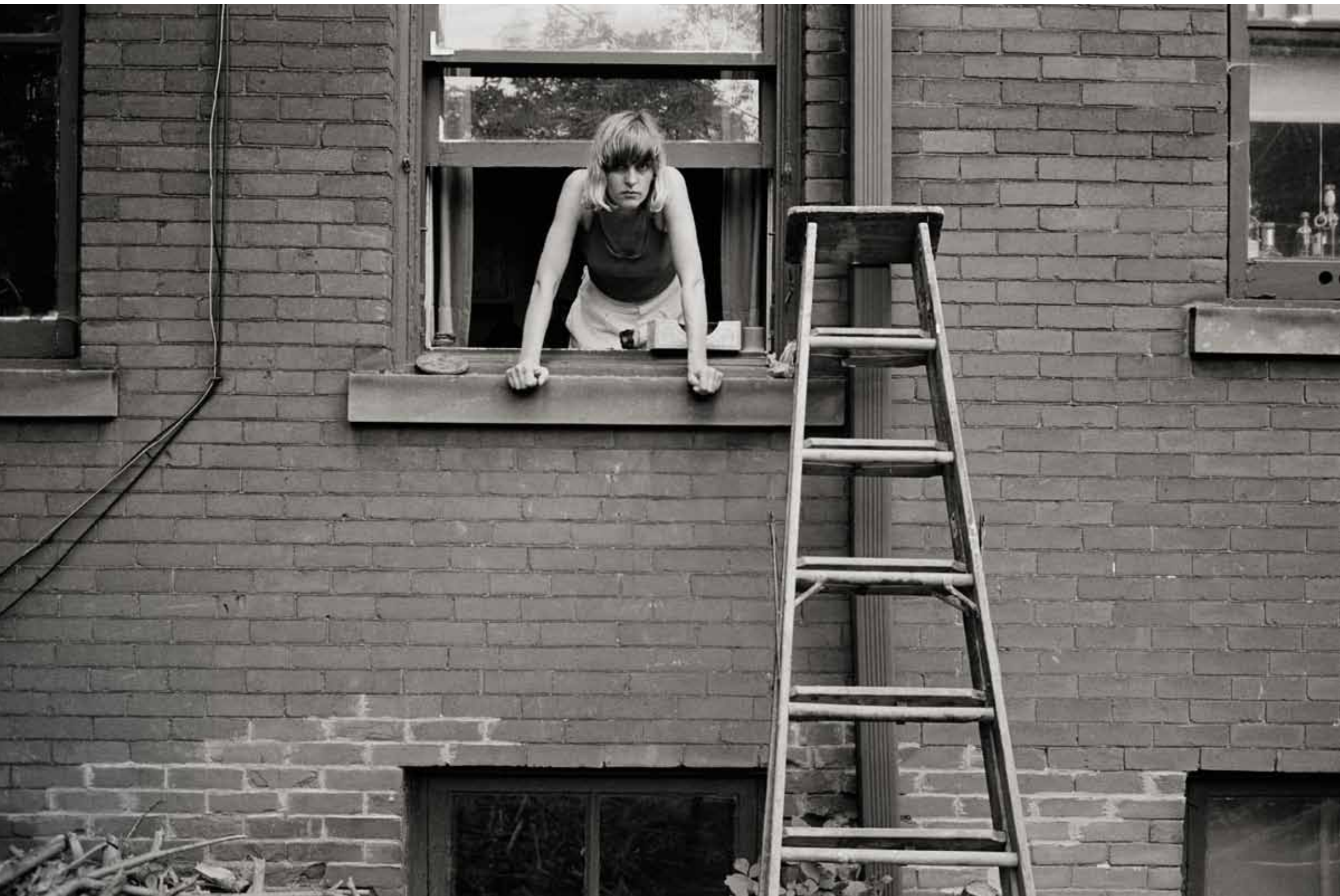


















We broke up. I moved out. They moved away. I was alone.

Then I met Jane

1979

















Max was born. This time things went better. When they didn't, I tried not to blink.

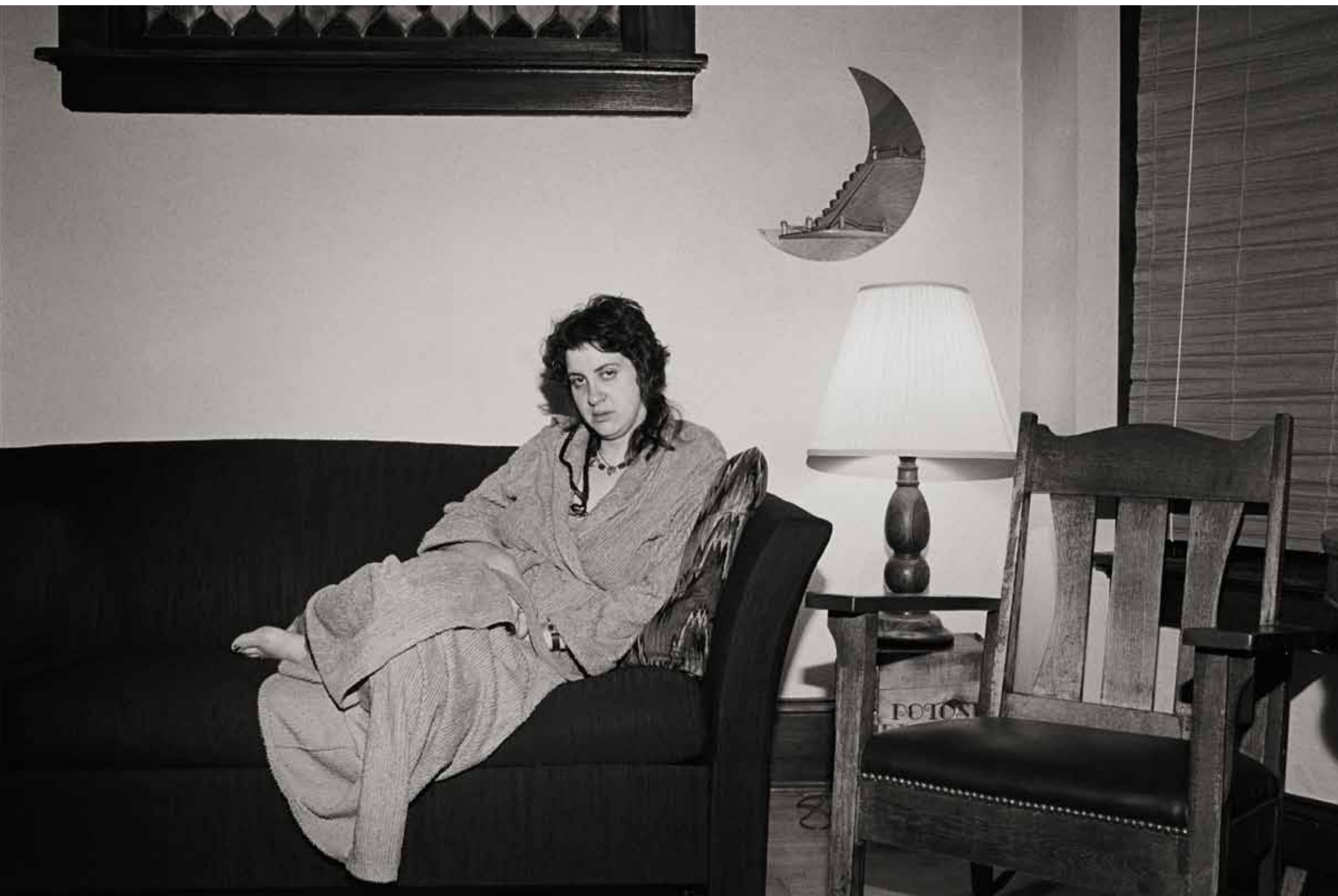
3.9.86





Max and Anna





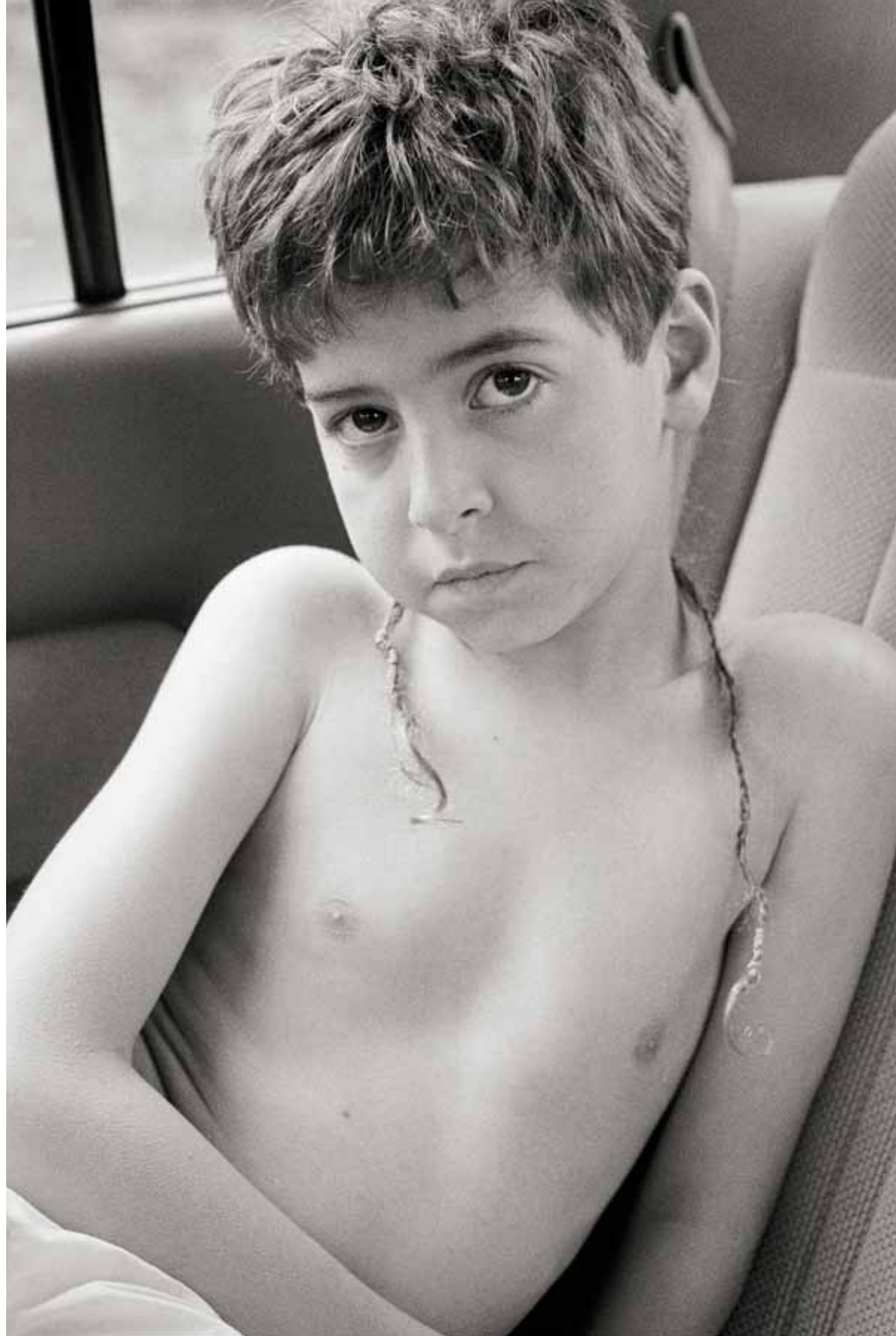


















Ruby

6.12.95











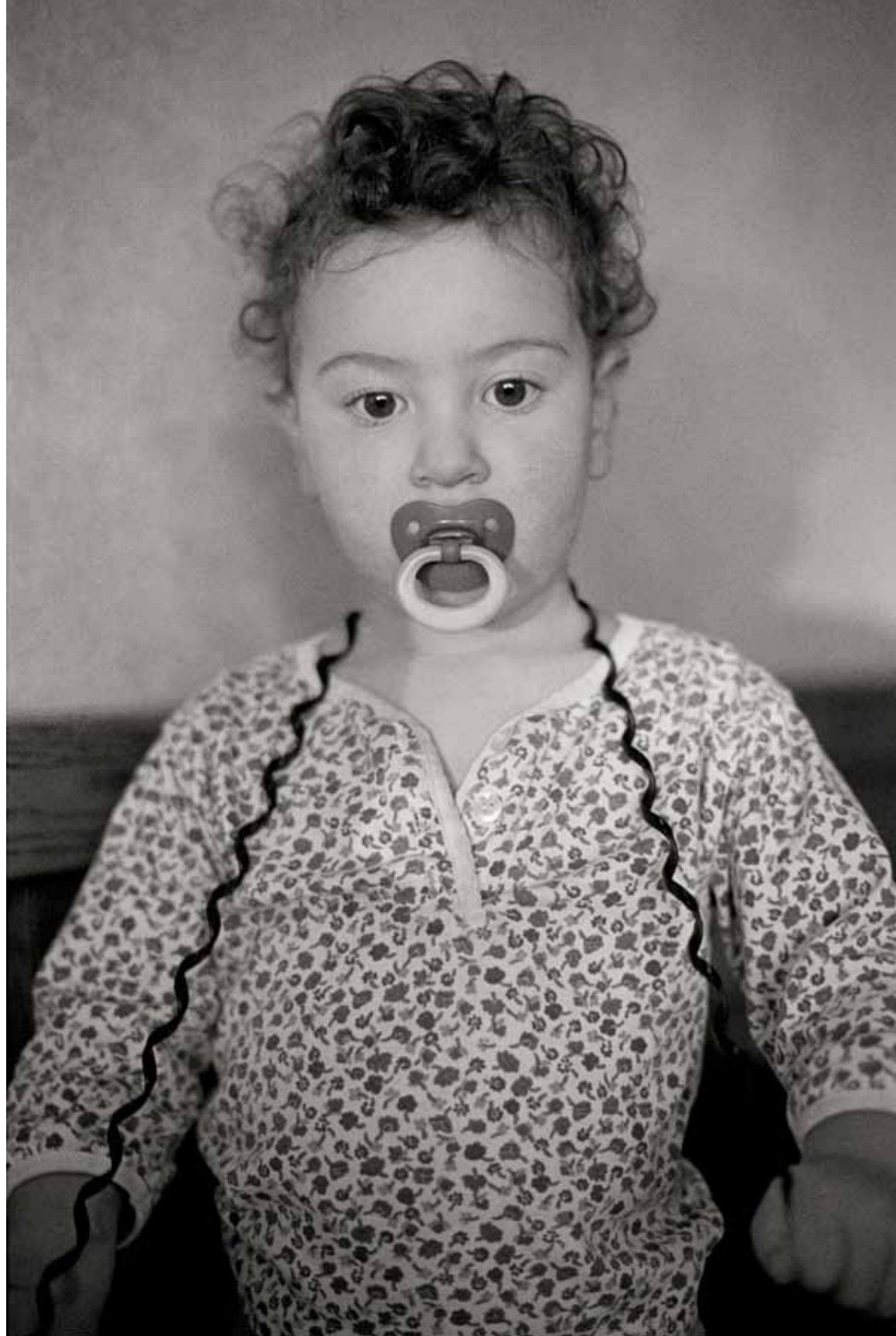


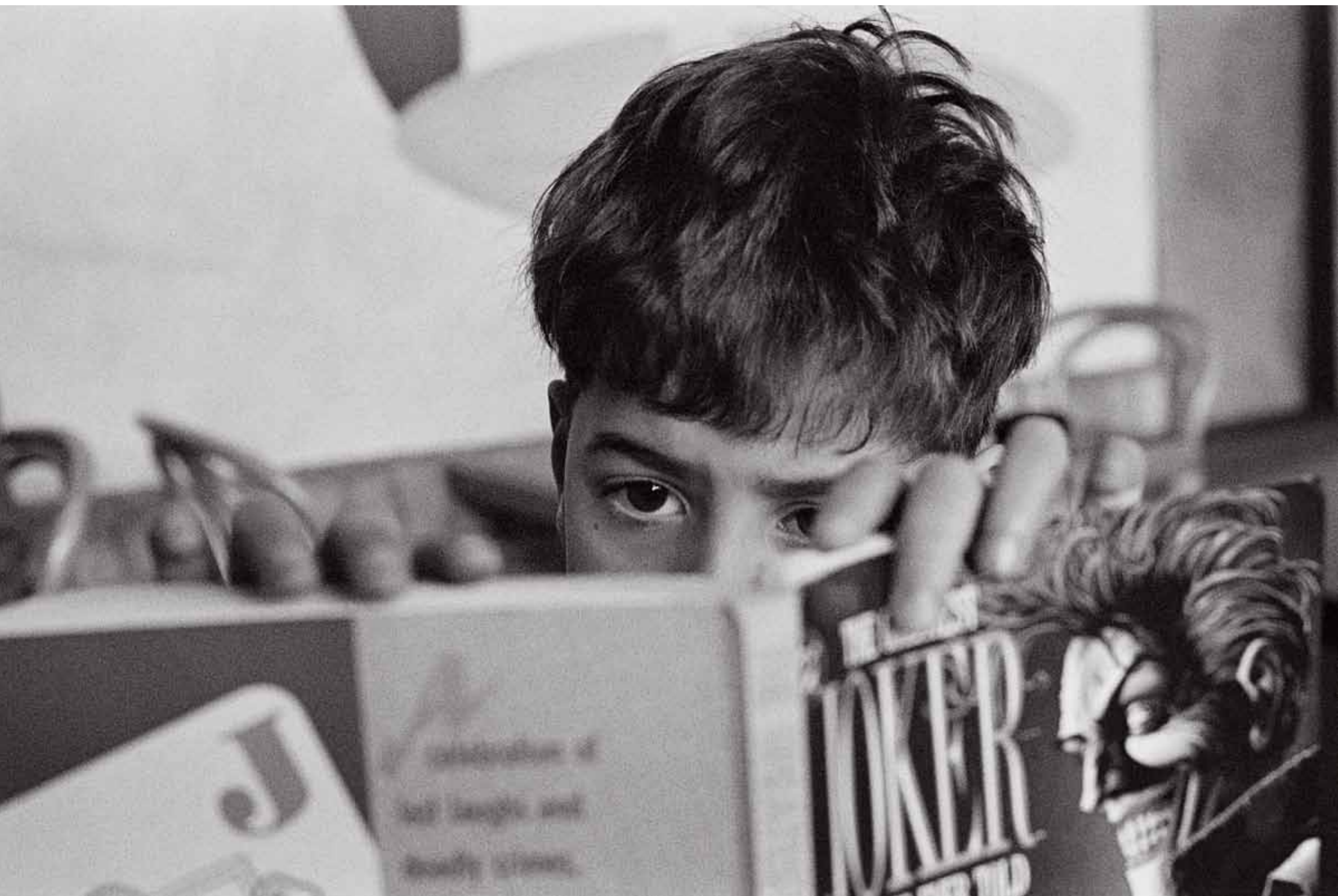




RESIST
PRAGMATISM
BE
SMARTER









Parenting, at
its best, is a
strange combina-
tion of caring
and detachment;
the parental
gaze is partial-
ly detached.









Anna visits

1998





Anna and Max

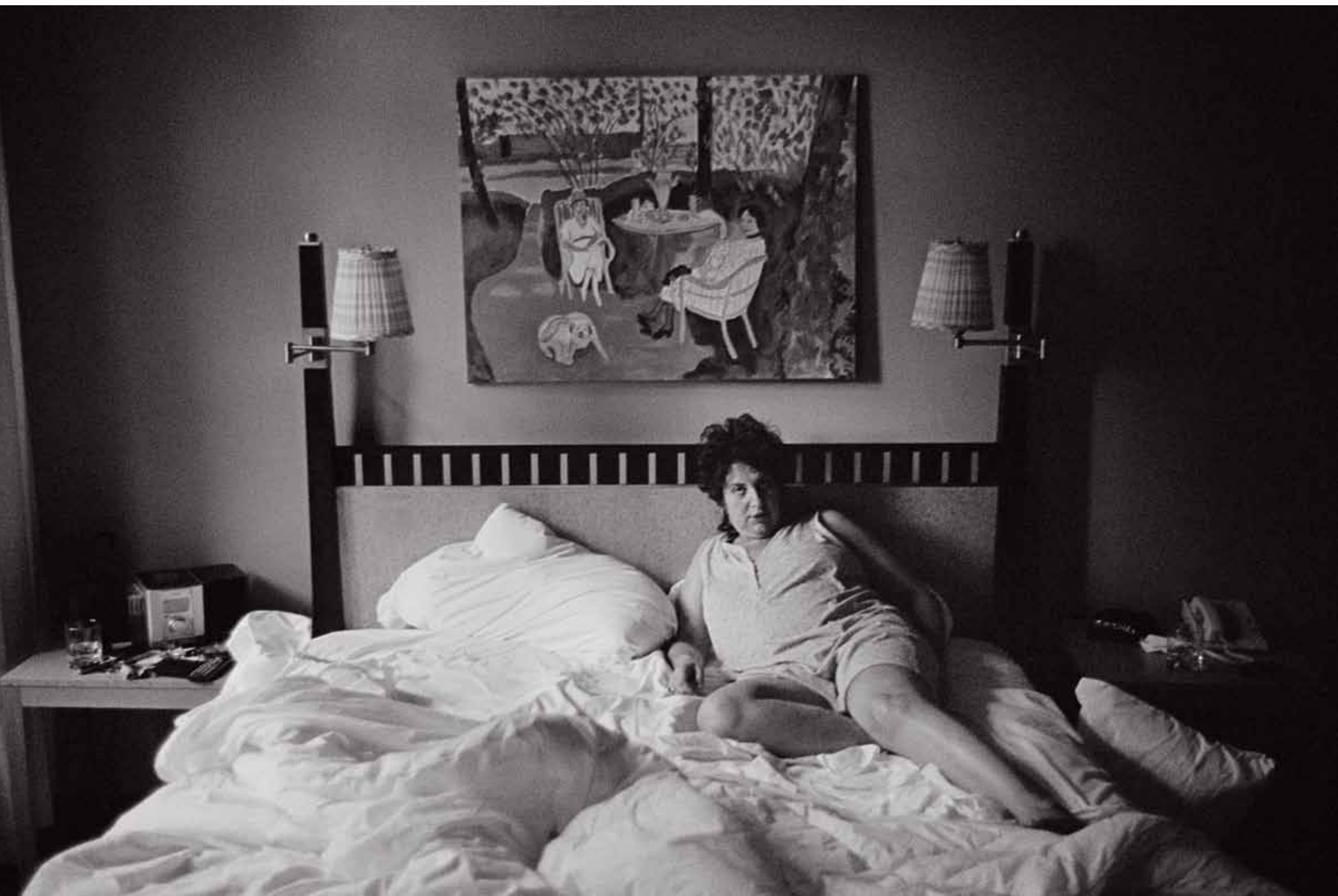






















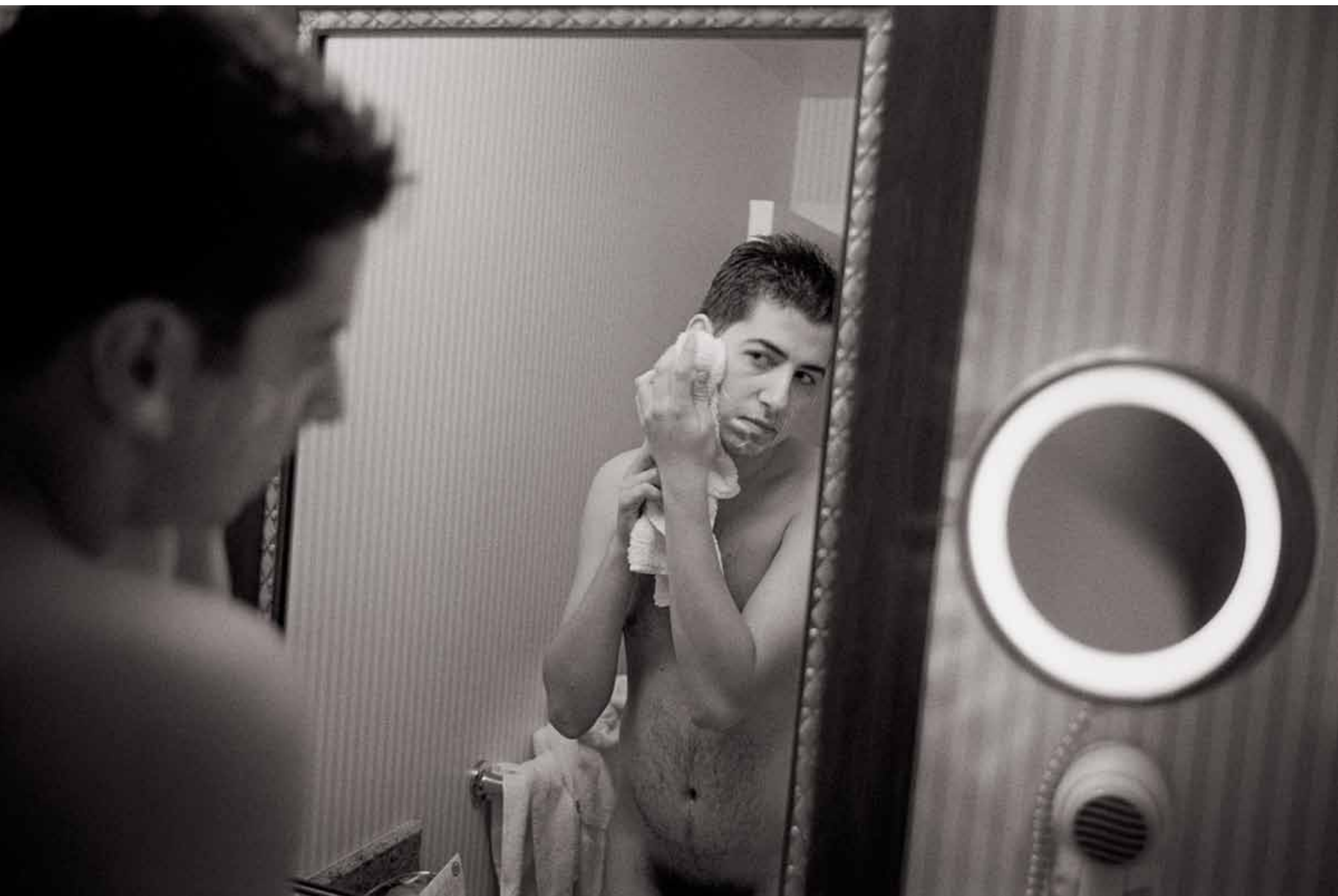




We visit Anna

2004

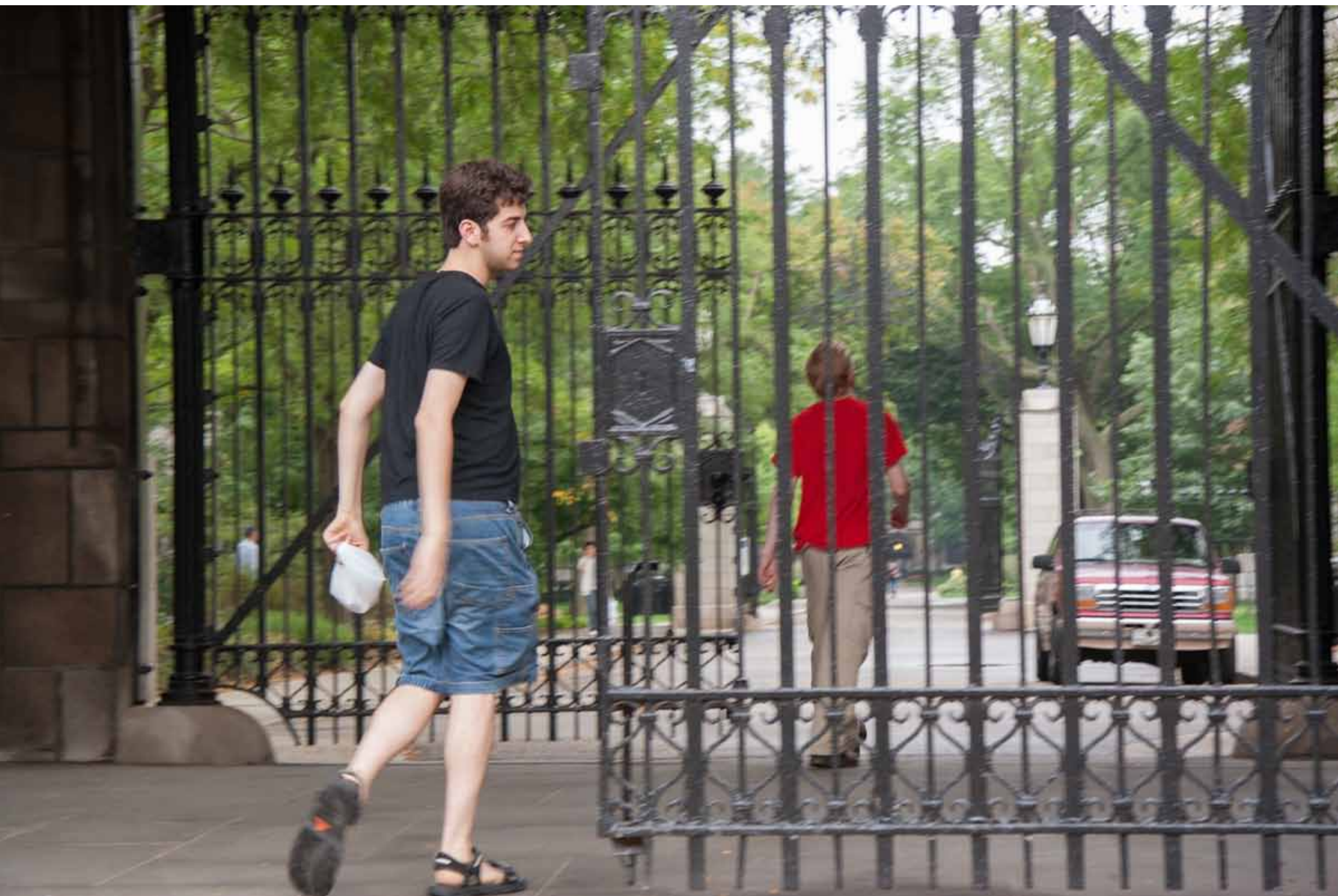






Freshman

2005















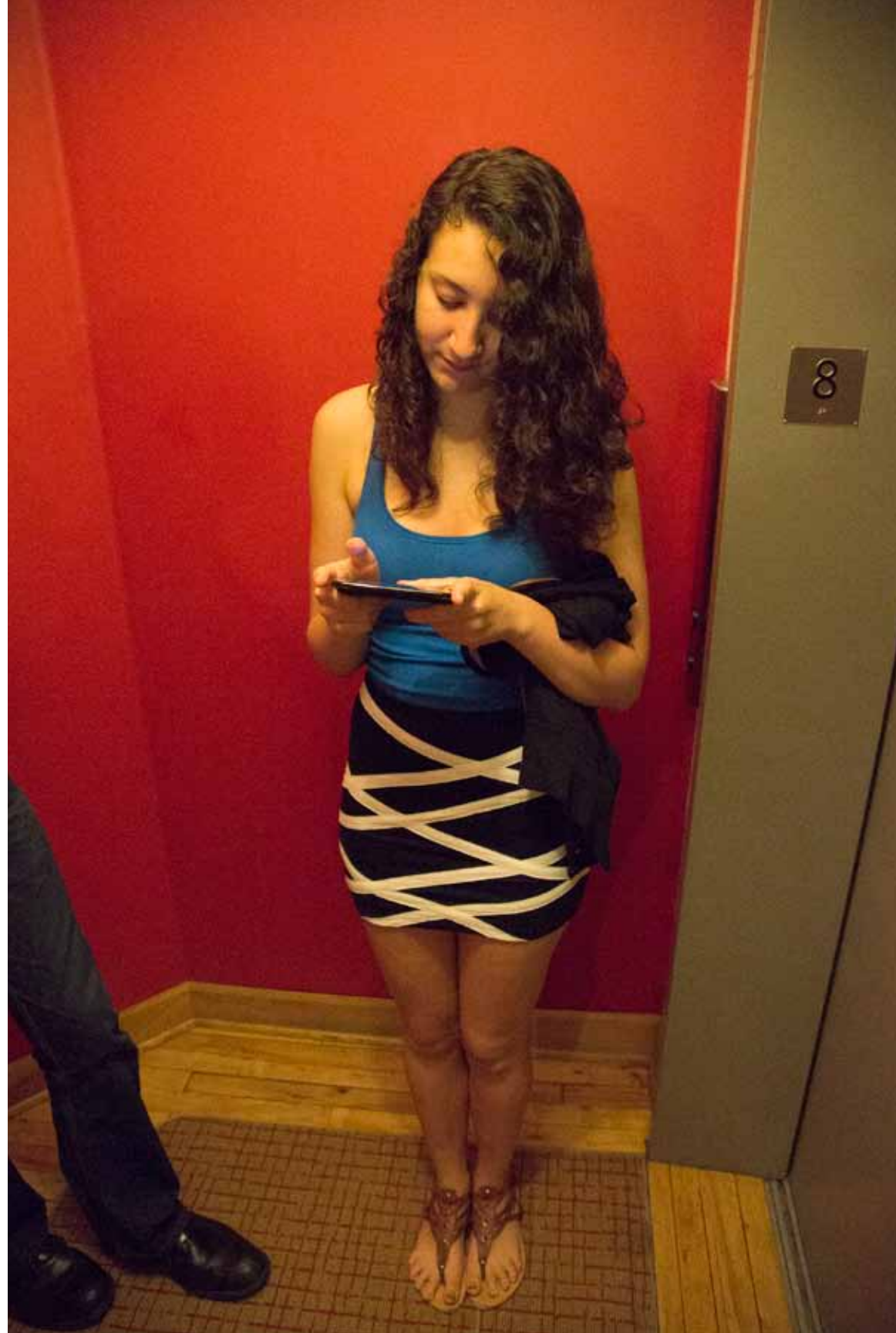




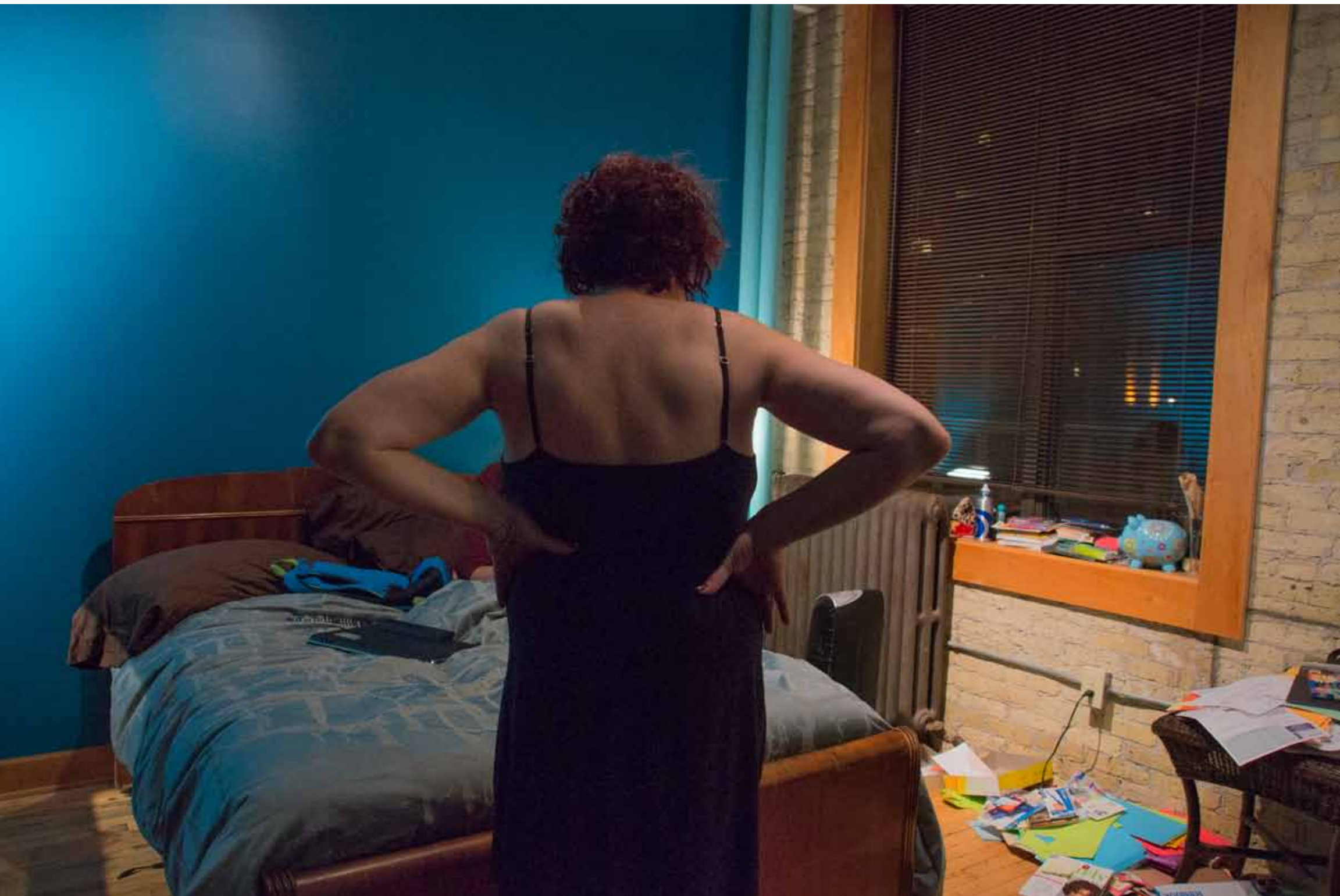
2006







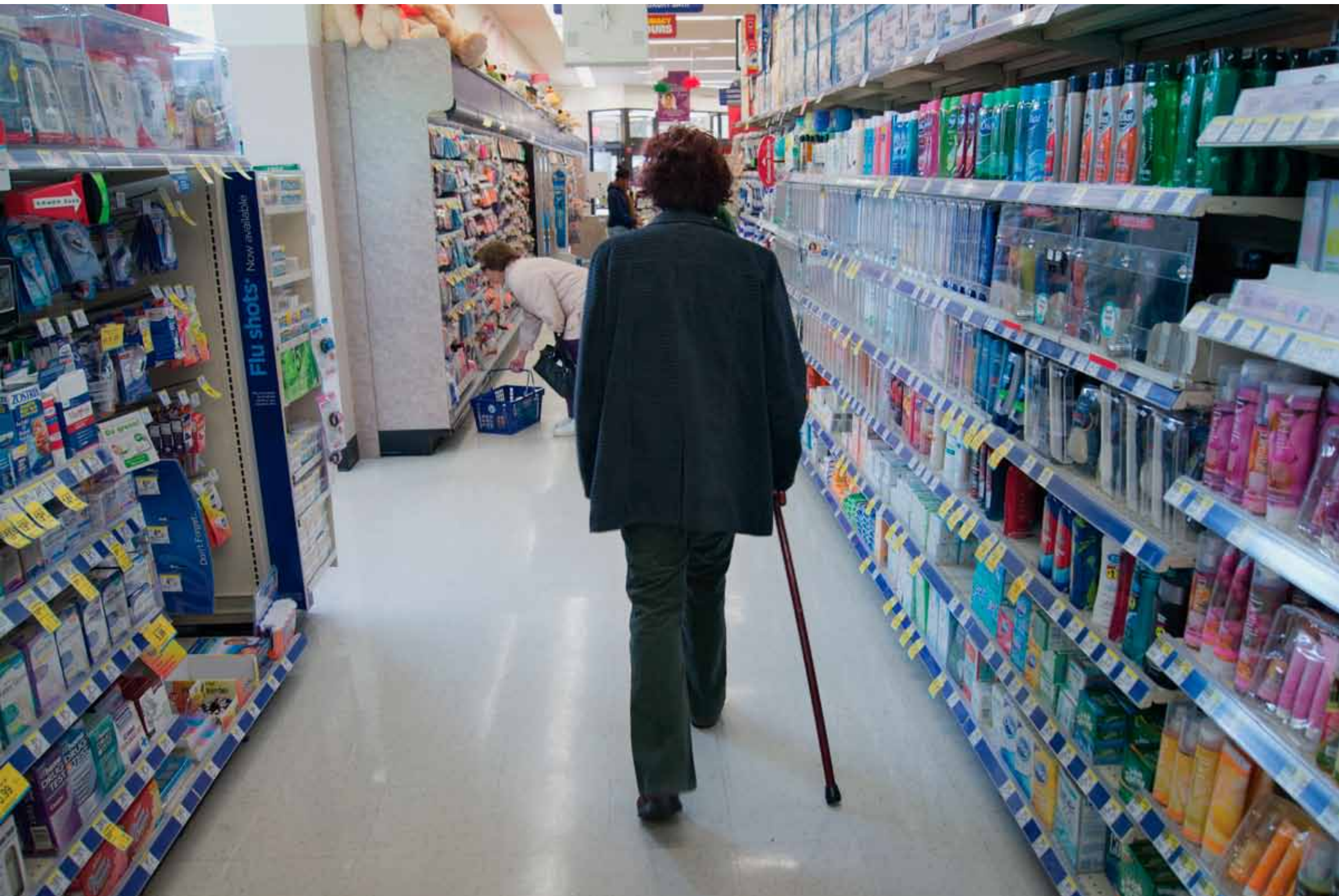




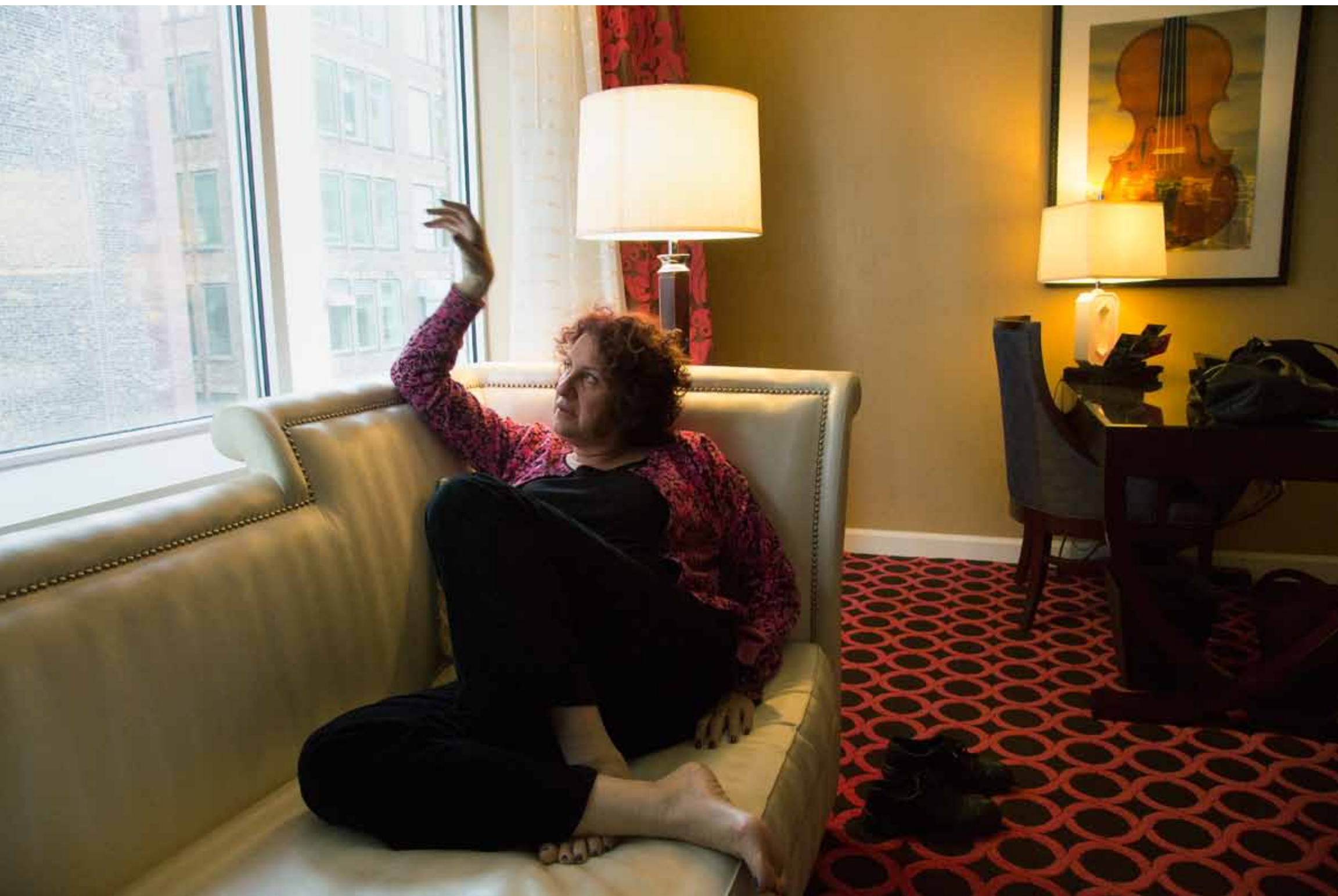




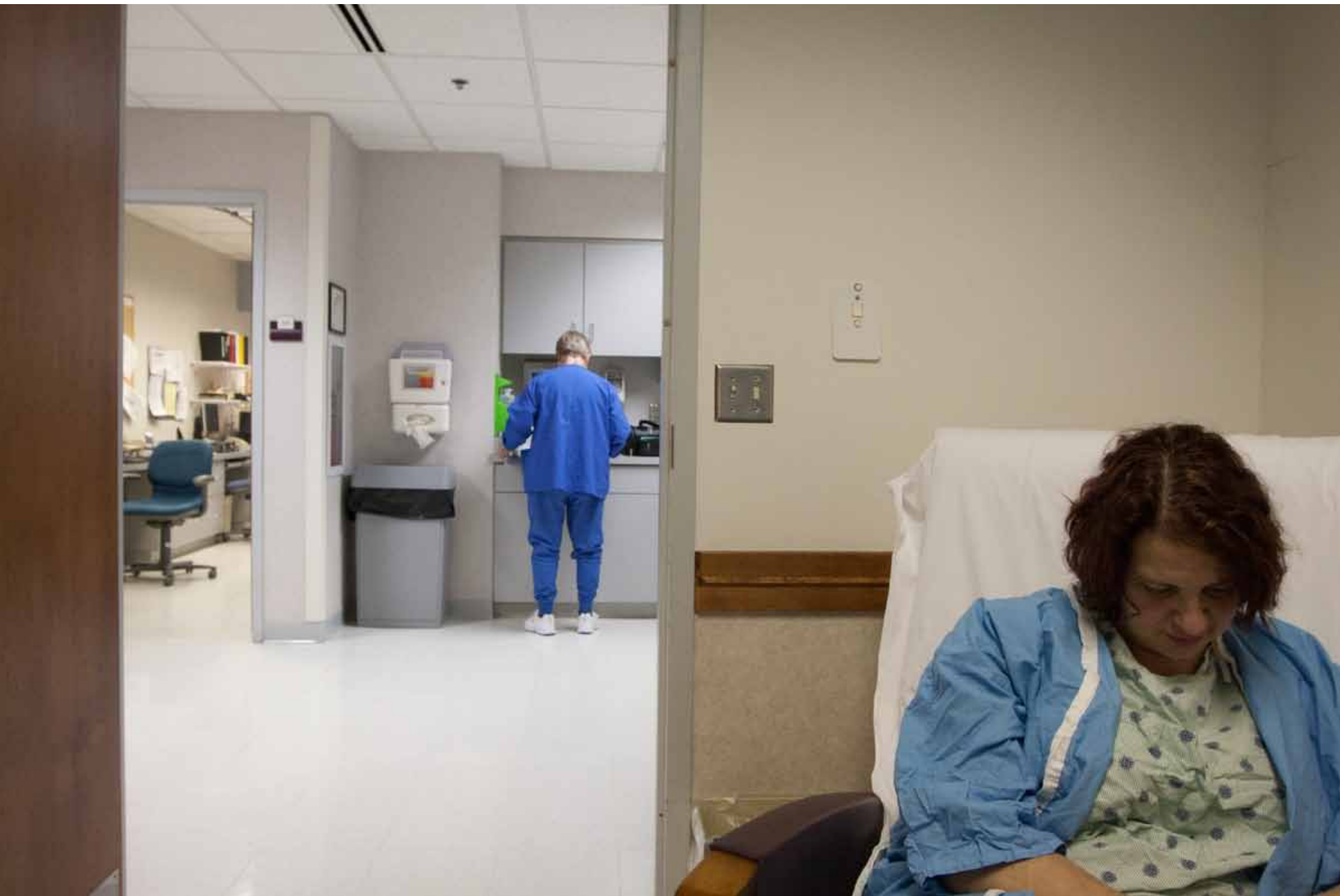




















The night before college

2012

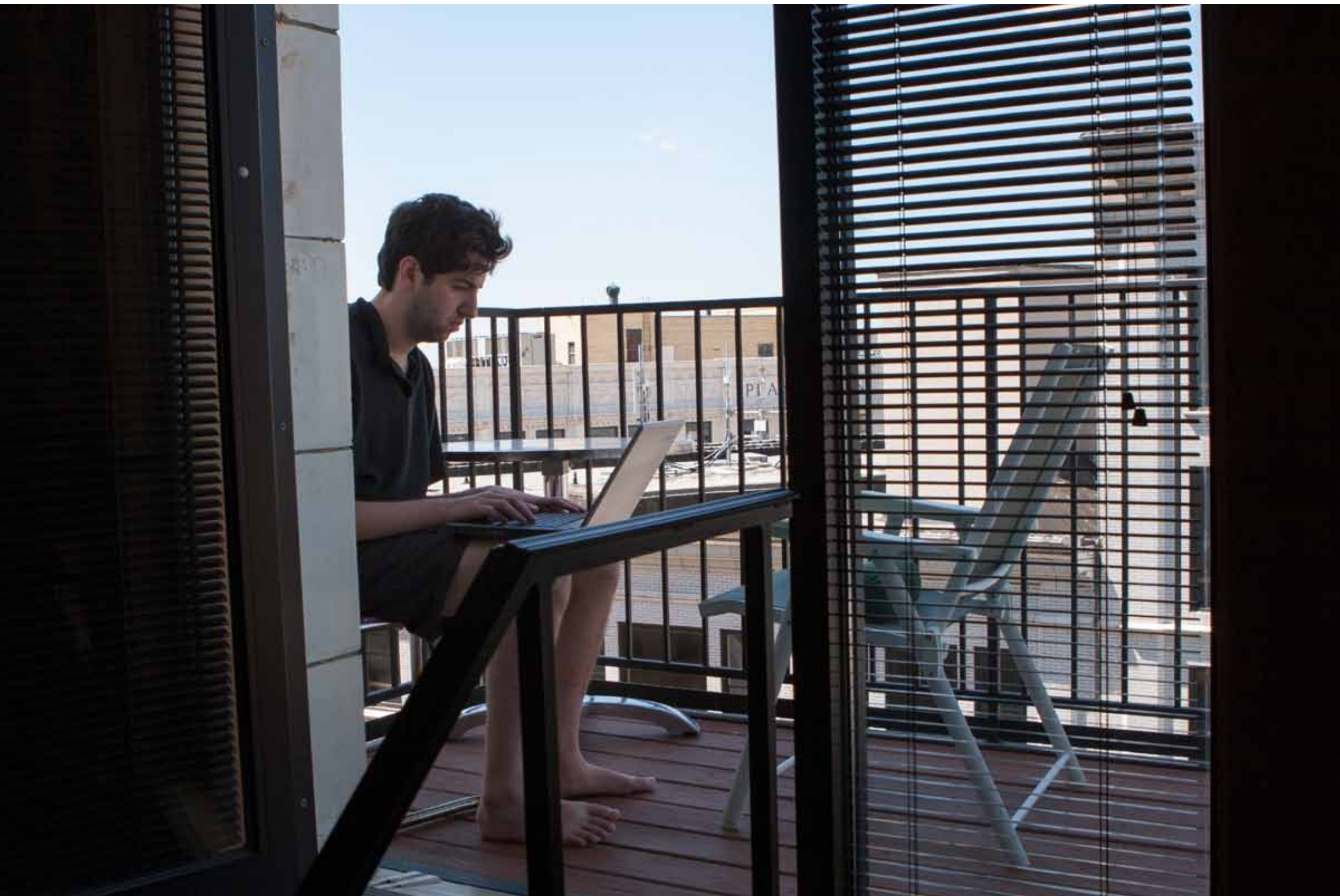










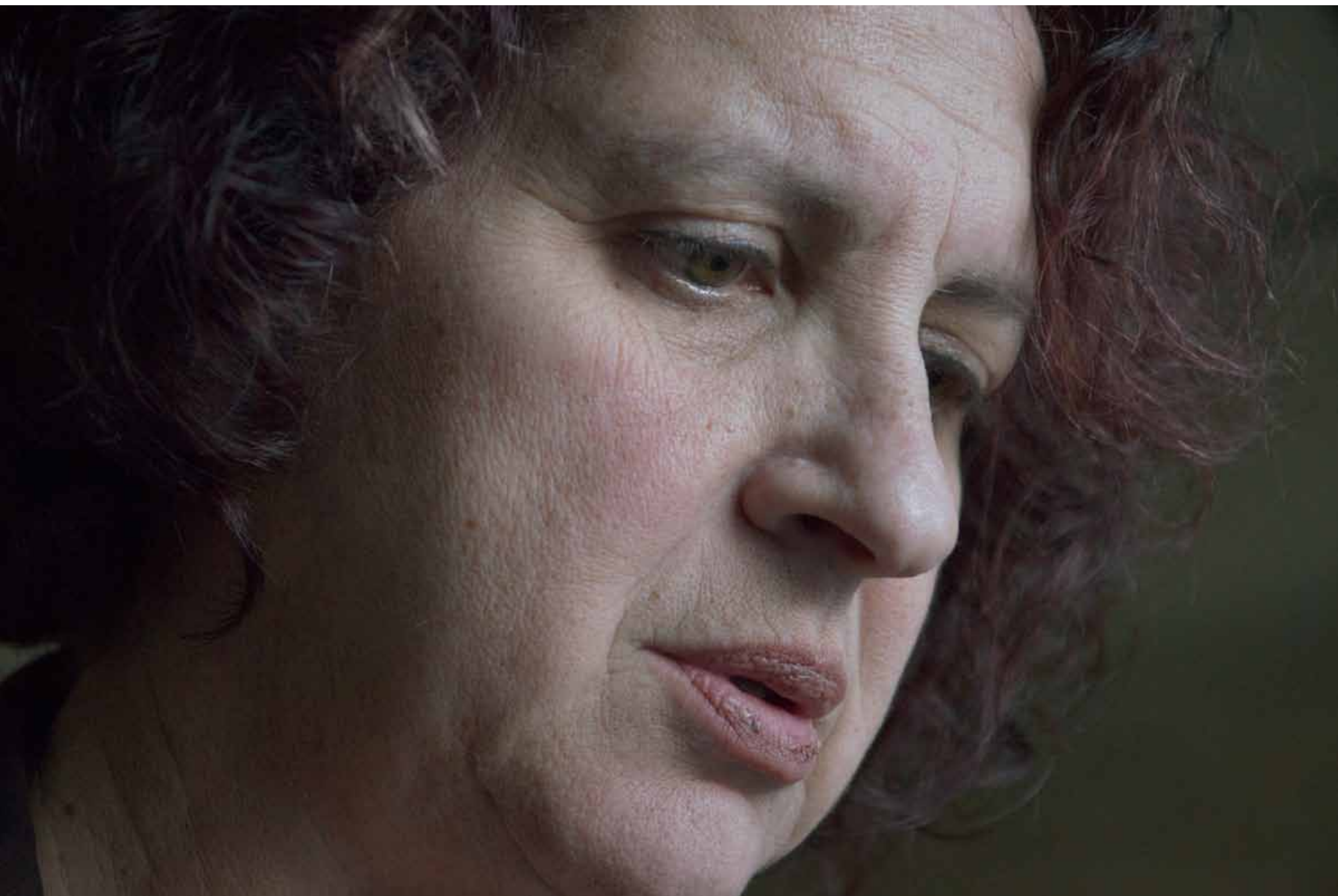














It's almost fifty years since I began my album. Max is now married to Idil and teaches in Glasgow. Ruby is in graduate school. Anna and Alex have three kids; she teaches high school in Pennsylvania. Jane is busy on another book. As for me, I have a new camera.



For Jane Gallop, longtime collaborator in life and art.



With many thanks to my closest readers — Roberto Muffoletto, Marianne Hirsch, David Greenberger, Jake Fuller, Steven Feld, Margaret Olin, Kathleen Woodward, Tom Knechtel, Luis Roldan — and special thanks to Tom Bamberger, who has supported this work for a very long time and in so many ways.

DICK BLAU

2017

TITLES

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