

## FRED PRICE ARTIST STATEMENT

I was looking at the framed prints from my retrospective show at the center for the arts at homer, NY, and as I was putting them into bags to protect them from dust and fumes, I was struck by what seems to be my intention in making those pictures.

The ones that I deemed successful, at the time, had in common, my idea of beauty.

It looked like I wanted to find, capture, construct and share beauty. Whether in broken alarm clocks, landscape detail, people or reflections, beauty was my motivation.

Of course it was my idea of beauty, if it matched the Norman Rockwell, playboy or the calender company's idea of beauty that was a coincidence. That arrangement of shapes and tones was what pleased me, if no one else.

In the mess of images that is my life's work, (so far), are experiments, study's, trials and failures. But it was the path to beauty I have been traveling.

I am a straight photographer. My process is trying to execute what in the scene turned me on. A condensation of what it is that caught my eye and made me stop and look. Then the removal of everything that is in the way of what I saw. The physical print and its presentation is the focus of this attention.

When I was first interested in photography in my home town of Youngstown Ohio, all the books and photo magazines said to look at original photographs. But there weren't any. Only the dreary pictures in the windows of portrait studios. So now when I have the chance to show my pictures is so that young or beginner photographers can see a way that photographs can be made. Of course my way is not the only way but it is a path that can be followed for visual rewards.

My way is straight photography and as clear a statement as I can make.

I have started exhibiting in 1972 in New York City and being published around then too.

# OOH, LOOK AT THAT

## A Memoir in Words and Pictures

New York City was my education. My impulses after seeing things that I thought were amazing were to grab people who had seen these things so often that the passersby did not even see them and say Ooh, Look At That! New York still has that effect on me even after fifty five years.

A memoir of a time of being part of and seeing part of various arts and artists starting in the New York of nineteen fifty nine. A place and time of cheap rents and affordable taxi's, many used book stores, alphabet city before it became The East Village, world class jazz clubs and chess clubs and museums and people from around the world who often had their own neighborhoods. A place and time where I found a job, a career and a life.



## YOUNGSTOWN AFTER THE ARMY

After getting out of the army in August 1958 I went back to Youngstown. I stayed in my parents house and looked for work. It was still an Eisenhower recession.

I reconnected with buddy Jack and he convinced me to go to the cafeteria at Youngstown college. On Friday's some colored guys brought a record player and people would bring records and play them. All jazz. He convinced me that being a student was not a requirement to enter college grounds.

With couple of books from the main library I made my way to the school. One row of tables held the record player and some hip jams as we used to say. Chess games were being played. The guys controlling the record player were the colored guys. The table was integrated as was the school and the town. Of the guys at the table were ex GI's and on the GI Bill. Some on sports scholarships and perhaps some on both.

The ex GI's were older and more worldly. I think now that Aubrey asked what I was reading and I gave him the book. It was by Langston Hughes. He asked why was I reading that and I said an army buddy had recommended Langston to me.

Was your army buddy colored? Yes. I guess that being an ex GI, a chess player and a man with some records that no one else had put on good terms with everybody.

At the table the music majors would be there too.

On occasion a whole group from the table would go to a local bar for a beer or two. If there was a piano the bartender would allow jam sessions.

It was a rare event when some pot was available and we would cop and get a proper buzz.

There were hangers on around and I was startled when the Literary White Frat Brother asked he how to get into the in-group? I had not realized I was in the in-group.





## MICHAEL CHASSID

Michael was a rising star in photography when we met around 1959. He had some pictures published in US Camera when their annuals were worth looking at. He got to a certain level and could not get any closer to stardom.

He had a studio on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street at Madison Square. To my eye it seemed impressive. A large darkroom, a shooting area with an office in that area.

I remember a big doofus kind of guy younger than me who was clumsy and graceless. If you knew him for more than a half hour you would learn that he had a glass eye. He would inform every body in ear shot of this fact soon after meeting them. When he met Sid's friend Frank, Michael would say really loud, "Hey you one eyed fuck!" or something like that. Frank had been a Marine when he lost his eye and was able to walk down the street with others in a pleasant manner. It was a drag to walk down the street with Michael, because seemed unable to walk in a straight line. He would always be bumping into you. The difference being military training.

I seem to remember that Michael had an older brother who was a cop and would wear his gun while visiting Michael at his studio. The brother asked Michael how you knew which side of the negative to put facing the paper in the enlarger. There was a roll of 35 mm negatives and Michael said that the curl of the film indicated that side should be down. The brother said "Don't bull shit me. Come on how do you tell?" Michael smirked at me and said that there was a shine on one side and the other was dull. He showed this to the brother and told him the correct way. The brother was satisfied with this. Michael didn't tell him that both of these ways were correct.

Both Michael and Sidney Kaplan told me this story the same way. There was a younger photographer named Steve who felt that Michael was a little more advanced and he could pick up some tips from Michael. At that time Harvey's 777 was the developer being used to "push" Tri-X film for available light photography in dim settings. It seemed that Steve never noticed that 777 as used by Michael was always replenished.

One evening a desperate Steve called up Michael and had a problem. He did a job and when the film was developed the negatives were very thin. Meaning that prints made from them would be very flat. No contrast. Michael told Steve to bring over the negatives and he would show him how they should be printed.

Photographic papers were numbered 1 was very flat, 2 was normal, 3 had more contrast, 4 had much more contrast. Kodak had a number 5 paper which was their highest grade. Agfa had a number 6 paper which was the most contrast of any paper made. Kodak made a Polycontrast paper which allowed several grades of contrast on the same sheet of paper by using filters between the light source and the paper. But Polycontrast number 4 filter was not nearly as contrasty as numbered paper.

Developers had names that ended in a vowel and the letter L. Microdol, Dektol, Selectol, Rodinal etc. Lenses had names ending in a vowel and the letter R. Tessar, Ektar, Elmar, Sonnar, and so on.

The contrast of papers and films can be increased by lessening the exposure and increasing the developing time. Michael lifted up a few sheets of Polycontrast paper and put in some Agfa 6 in the box and waited for Steve.

A anxious Steve showed up with a flat negative and a grim demeanor. They go in the dark room and Michael makes a straight print. It is very flat. He then puts on a Polycontrast 4 filter makes a print and it is a little better. He then cuts the exposure and increases the developing time. Marginally better. Michael then stands on a stool in the darkroom and pisses in the developer! He takes out the Polycontrast filter and slips in a sheet of Agfa 6 paper without Steve noticing this and Michael then makes a stunning print! Steve is astonished while Michael says that this process is called Urinol!

Michael wanted to appear hip. I suppose he wanted to be hip. Among many people marijuana was exotic and dangerous and was sometimes called tea. Once at a lower east side party my friend from the army Stan (a colored guy, as we used to say) and Larry were bored and decided to roll some

joints with tea. There was no pot so we rolled some with real Lipton tea. Just for a goof. Michael came over to me as with great stealth asked, “Is that regular tobacco?” I said no and he said, “Thats what I thought.”





In those days although I was working professionally in photography I didn't know much and had a meager wage. I used to have my clothes washed at a Chinese laundry and the shirts would come back starched and ironed and they had a cardboard insert to keep them tidy. I used those cardboards to dry mount my prints on. I used cheap Camera Barn paper for print and my equipment was of a similar quality.

That was the kind of print I gave Michael. Years later when I used good paper, good enlarging lenses and much better technique I made another and larger print of that negative. The image just did not speak to me any longer. It has never been in any of my portfolios.

## DAVE SUSSMAN

A fellow I casually know, Michael Chassid, a photographer, asked me what I did for a living. I said that I was a flunky on Wall Street. He asked me if I liked my job. I said that I hated it. Michael asked how would I like a job in photography?

When my brother and I were kids we got a little darkroom outfit for Christmas and after the family replaced the coal furnace with gas we turned the coal bin into a darkroom.

I told Michael that I didn't know anything about photography, I knew developer, short stop and fixer and that was everything I knew. Michael went on to say that there was a photographer in his building who had an assistant that was so stupid that he, Michael, could get some one off the street that could do better!

I met Dave Sussman and he hired me even knowing as little as I did. I stayed seven years. Dave was an excellent commercial photographer who could do anything but make a good living. He was my teacher and taught me everything technical I could absorb and some artistic stuff as well.

The job was assistant, darkroom man and gofer. Dave had bought the business, Marci Studio and did commercial work. Table top still life, product shots, fashion, portraits, head shots, architecture and even a wedding or two. But product was the mainstay. Electronics, toys, furniture and that sort of thing.

Since I knew so little I took a pay cut to get the job. But I was soon making the slave wages that equaled my wall street job as an addressograph operator.

He was a kind and patient teacher for me, and I became a good commercial printer. He allowed and even encouraged photographic exploration. We did a lot of testing of films and developers. He allowed me to use the studio after work and on weekends.

His business was so poor that sometimes I would have two or even three pay checks that I could not cash until he was paid for a job or jobs.

He tolerated my friends coming by the studio and hanging out with me in the darkroom.



The above portrait was taken years later when he had given up the studio and was moving out of his house after his wife died.

Dave told me he could never afford to pay me what I was worth and I could have any of the photographic equipment that he had in his basement studio/darkroom. It was all old, in mostly ratty condition and outdated. But I got some tripods and film hangers and holders and that sort of thing.

Some time later I got to see some of his personal work and I could see that he had been an influence on me although I didn't recognize it at the time.

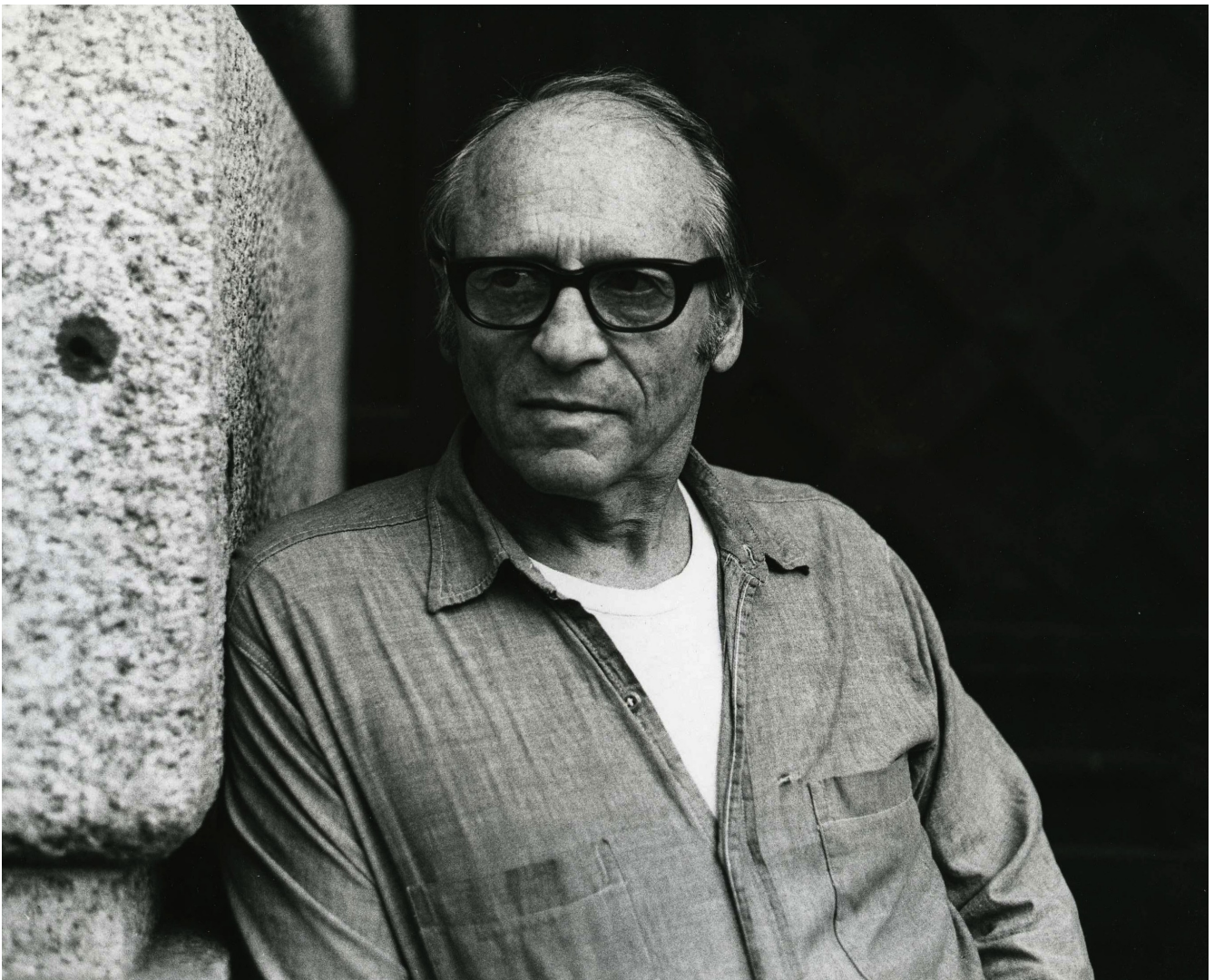
We started out he was my teacher, after a couple of decades we became peers. But we were always friends. I still think of him some times and am grateful.

## MICHAEL CARVER

When I lived on the Lower East Side, 6th Street between Avenues C and D I would enjoy walking and exploring my new neighborhood.

On the farthest east of St. Marks Place near Tompkins Square Park, as I remember , I would sometimes pass A Sign that read “Michael Carver School of Art”.

After doing this for a while I thought that I would inquire just what was up with that. I met Michael and found out that he had a little art supply store and gave lessons in his studio which was a loft on the second floor that later became the Jazz Gallery, and Michael got moved out.



Michael gave lessons in eight week increments, starting when he had enough students. I think there were almost 10 for the beginners or introductory lessons. I don't remember the costs involved but you needed to have a sketch pad, some charcoal for drawing a still life set up and then painting it in oils.

A paint box, brushes, tubes of oil paints and I guess turpentine and linseed oil. The following eight weeks was an oil painting of your choice.

When I started, I was working as a flunkey on wall street, and while taking these lessons I changed jobs and started working in photography.

I felt that if I took some painting lessons I would learn something about composition. There was a lack of that kind of knowledge in my photography. And I was right, of course.

I thought that Carver was a good painter and he wanted to sell some of his work. But the paintings I liked best were much too big for my apartments. They were maybe 4 x 5 feet. My pad could have comfortably dealt with an average size calendar.

I needed to know everything I learned from Carver. And a lot more.

He was a New York painter and there was some interest in his work. He was not in any sense a bohemian. I would think he had a very self-conscious sense of humor. I can't remember any really free laughter coming from him.

I was glad I knew him, I liked him but he was not the kind of guy you would smoke a joint in an alley with.

## RALSTON CRAWFORD

Marci Studio 10 East 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York City. The building faced north overlooking Madison Square Park. An old guy would once in a while come in with a piece of photographic equipment and ask for advice or opinions or just make a brief visit. He introduced himself to us as Ralston Crawford. It turned out he was an artist famous in the 1930's and 40's and somewhat out of fashion when we met in the 60's. He was primarily a painter and print maker (lithographs) but was also a photographer and film maker. He had a studio upstairs.

As I remember Marci Studio was on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Ralston's was on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor. I had by that time become a good photograph printer and was just starting doing personal work. I must have showed Ralston some of my prints and after a few years he invited me up to his studio to see what he was up to.

There was a very abstract oil painting on the easel. I looked and looked. Ralston said, "You don't have to say anything if you don't want too." I didn't say anything. For quit a while.

I would sometimes take a print I was working on, or had finished and would show it to him. He was very nice and would point out what he liked about it. I guess over time he saw my printing improve and asked if I would do some printing for him after work.

Ralston would sometimes tell a story to illustrate a point. One of the stories he often told, and each time would be used to make a different point.

There were rich white people in Hawaii who had a property with a spectacular view. They had Japanese gardener. The gardener wanted to cut down a beautiful tree that would enhance the overall scene. The owners were adamant, the tree was not to be cut down! At one point the owners were away for a while and the gardener cut down the tree. When the owners got back they were furious. But after a while they saw that the gardener was right, the scene was much better and in fact more beautiful than they could have imagined. The gardener kept his job.

One point of the story was 1) sometimes you really love something in your picture, but if you

remove it, the picture would be better. You need to be a severe editor of your own work. 2) you need to stick to your guns no matter what.



as I worked in Ralston's darkroom I began to see that those abstract shapes in his paintings were in fact not made up but were rooted in reality. These shapes might be extracted, condensed or simplified, modified in some way but they were based in reality.

One time he had finished a pretty large canvas in as I remember in black, white and gray. It was on his easel drying for quite a while. I came to work one day and he was in the process of repainting the entire gray area a different shade of gray! Only he knew that the painting was not optimum. To my eye it looked great before and it looked great after.

Once Ralston came into Marci Studio while Dave was in a struggle with a bouquet of fake flowers he was to photograph. We asked Ralston about composing a picture with these flowers and the

vase they were in. Ralston said that he would have to think about it for quite a while and might require cutting hole in the bouquet!

He told me that if I wished I could spend the day or part of the day looking at his work instead of being in the darkroom. I would still get paid.

I had become interested in the print as a physical artifact and was exploring black and white printing. I grew to hate Kodak and the ugly yellow and brown of their papers. Ralston agreed with my findings that better images were to be had with GAF VeeCee Rapid, Dupont Varigam and Varilour, Agfa Brovira and Ilford were to be preferred. The whites were whiter and the blacks blacker. I was also learning about selenium toning and its use to make the image more stable, archival.

It was the only job I ever had where the point was to make the best print I knew how to make.

We were both W.C. Fields fans and would sometimes engage in reciting dialogue from memory bits from a movie or two. I would sometimes tell jokes that he thought were funny. Ralston thought that the cartoonist George Price was great. "When George drew a drunk, you could smell his breath." He said laughing.

Keeping records is not y strength bu I think I worked for Ralston off and on from the mid sixties to the mid seventies. He was my boss, but also my teacher and my friend. He taught me how to see and had some success teaching me how to reason sometimes I will make a picture and wish I could show it to him. He was a great artist and I miss him and think of him often.



## TO WALK IN THE APPLE

Too live in New York City is to walk. All the subways have stairs. Many many people live in walk-ups. Some of the walk-ups are very spacious and expensive. That is why they are expensive.

This city is always changing. And the changes are organic. Those buildings have grown. Each building when it was built was most likely the highest building in the area. Because it is this way shadows are an important part of the visual landscape on the street and on other buildings.

The heights and the styles of the buildings have grown together. Of course there is tremendous variety and many anomalies happening too.

On the walk up Broadway from East 17th Street to West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street I pass this intersection which may be 19<sup>th</sup> street. If it is hot and sunny you walk in the shade, if it is cold and sunny you walk in the sun. If it is early morning, or late afternoon, walking uptown or downtown, from bright mid-day sun through gradual changing approaching dusk, to total night time it is never the same.

Looking toward the roof line or watching where you step it is always changing. Puddles of summer thunder storms or ankle deep slush from massive snow storms and their deposits.

And of course people. They appear, they disappear. They walk into your picture when you do not want it, and if you make a composition that requires a person and wait for anybody to walk into it.....they will avoid it. It is well known that people are unpredictable.

And of course vehicles, cars, busses, trucks, taxis block your shot and otherwise mar your intention.

New York is a visual wonderland. Being in the proper frame of mind allows the artist to see what is there and perhaps take advantage of it.

Sometimes we find the components of a picture and sometimes we seek them out.



At this time I was looking at and for water tanks. They seem to be special to Manhattan and common too. Their shape and placement enhance any architectural city-scape.



I sometimes view the City as an organic forest with the buildings as giant trees and the street as the forest floor and the windows and their reflections as the flowers to be discovered.

You never know what you will see.



New York is a theatrical city. Since the earliest days the costumes of the inhabitants and the visitors were always funny looking to the others. The original Dutch traders and the English settlers looked funny to each other and to bystanders too. Visiting sailors, homesteaders, Indians were all odd looking to each other. It still goes on.

It has been for many years a show business center and people in costume for their own amusement or their profession the casual passerby is always entertained.

Sometimes well known people are out to be noticed and sometimes to be ignored. And sometimes ordinary people just get dressed up for a goof.

We do not know the motivation but are entertained by the effort.

Parades and marathons, ambulances and firetrucks, police cars and taxies, bewildered visitors from the suburbs or from far away the City is visual kicks.



Day and night, the variety of stuff and the people who make, sell and display these things are endlessly unpredictable.



People of every color and size, from every part of the world are in New York. They bring the old country with them and sometimes we can see what that is. They bring the food here and then offer it for sale. It is often delicious.

Store windows with incomprehensible writing on them, with things inside that are also mysterious and exotic.

## THE NINETIES

A concentration of color work and reflections found on the streets of New York City. The found surprises while looking at store window reflections became even more captivating to me. What was in the store window, mannequins and dummies, odd objects, costumes, sometimes people, sometimes pictures of people.

Things reflected in the windows, people on the sidewalk, traffic, buildings across the street, signs of every sort, hand written to neon. Masses of light and dark, sunlight objects, a wonderful mess of things to try and organize on the spur of the moment. Almost like the improvising of a jazz musician as the light and objects change with every step.



Sometimes waiting for a person to walk into or out of the frame, or vehicles to move into or out of the picture. Or waiting for the flashing light to flash on or off. Coming back to a scene when the light was better, or when the rain would stop. A great experience for the picture maker. All found and



never manipulated in the darkroom or on the computer.

I had been photographing store window reflections for many years in black and white. Some times with a 4 x 5 view camera on a tripod, often with hand cameras. Sometimes studiously composed with large format, and sometimes using the hand camera like a sketch pad.

In the nineties it was freely sketching in color.

I had avoided color because it would fade and I wanted color that would last at least My



lifetime, and if people bought color works as investment, the color should last. The word was that stable color could be had digitally. So I started to shoot color prints and then have digital prints made from them.

This process had none of the toxic qualities of the wet darkroom and some of its virtues.

All three photographic colors are never true to life, no matter what is done.

And besides, what is the importance of being true to neon colors? They are man made colors anyway.



## LENS AND REPRO

There was a man, a big cheerful good looking guy named Stu Kay who worked for Arkin-Medo a photographic supplier. He would drop in at my bosses studio and find that we needed to order a case of Dektol or a case of Fixer, or see if they could get us some Edwal NoScratch or some exotic material.

He would apparently be told that some body would have a camera or something to sell or we might ask if he knew of anybody selling a 12 inch Ektar in a shutter for example, and he would hook up equipment between studios.

Eventually he was in the business long enough that he had many contacts. Studios go out of business, new ambitious young photographers come on the scene and he found that there was a need for his services.

He started his own business, quit Arkin-Medo and opened Lens and Repro. He dealt with only professional equipment. And he knew a lot. He would know not only about Ziess Protar Lenses, he might know of somebody who had some. And, might consider selling them.

I knew him in his first loft as Lens and Repro, and like in ten minutes it was too small.

He would buy a whole studio. A guy in business 40 years, decides to retire and sell the equipment that was new 40 years ago. But stainless steel sinks do not go bad with constant normal use. So as you strolled around L&R among tripods, dry-mount presses, darkroom enlargers, contact printers, easels and everything a studio needed to stay in the game you might find what you were looking for or something that would give you ideas. It was a wonderland. Glass cases full of lenses, some in shutters, some that could be, some you never heard of, like 90 millimeter Angenieux in an Exacta mount!

Or a Pacemaker Speed Grafic with 127 Millimeter Ektar in a Compur shutter that could give professional result might be available.

So for quality equipment, used, this is where I went.



Jeff was Stu's oldest son. As a teen he worked for his father which is where we met. I do not remember just how it happened but I seem to recall that Jeff was a typical sullen teenager and we ended up at my apartment in Washington Heights in my darkroom.

I would show him rudiments of darkroom techniques while we listened to jazz records and smoked pot.

He went on to become an accomplished photographer and print maker. Because he had access to all the equipment of Lens and Repro he was able to explore large format cameras and the lenses required to make pictures. And because he was a big young guy he could carry all that heavy

equipment that was needed.

We have remained friends for many years. I once had medical problems and he loaned me \$1000 for that purpose, which I eventually paid back without interest.

He now claims me as his first teacher and I am proud that he feels that way.