

Elkmont, and Community (a series of pictures taken from a mountain locale)

When our children were younger we used to camp in the Great Smokey Mountains at a place called Elkmont. The campground actually sits at the base of a hillside on which Elkmont Community once stood. Housed in cottages, here, were the descendants of loggers who had stripped much of the surrounding area during the 1920's before it was tendered to the National Park Service. An agreement was made whereby the residents of Elkmont and their descendants were permitted to live in the cottages – each of which was architecturally unique - until 1992. The houses were then vacated and left to die on the hillside until the government began to renovate some of them in 2007. I began photographing in and around the area – there are other communities near by – as early as 1994. One year my sister-in-law, Mary Ann, suggested that I begin photographing the houses as a way to record the slow process of dilapidation.

Once when people still lived in the cottages, one of my daughters, Rachel, and I went for a walk up Jake's Creek Road. Rachel was very young, but always very outgoing. She met and struck up a conversation with a lady who invited us into her house to have orange juice. It was the first and only time I was ever in one of the cottages while someone still lived there. Since then, I have been in all of them, after their abandonment.

We don't get back to Elkmont as much as we used to. When we were there last, in 2007, the kids didn't come along with us. I understand that since then a number of houses have been removed. Soon, apparently, what remains of the community will become a tourist attraction. At some point I will be going back to visit and have a look, and when I do I will be taking more photographs. All things change, but as long as some of the houses - and other structures in and around the area - remain, there will be memories to make and a visual story to be told and perhaps passed on to another, then another so that there is a legacy and a heritage that is not entirely lost.

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