

I'm Robert Floyd.

Back in DEC, 2001, I open a Southampton Photo Gallery. Soon, Julius Lester exhibits stunning artwork of the Deep South at a newly opened Springfield venue. I admire his photojournalism. I muse that 'imagine one day if Julius Lester exhibits someday at The Floyd Gallery.' Time passes...Seven years...

Wait...this morning while preparing The Gallery to be open in my absence today, I come nearly eye to eye with a chipmunk standing assertively on The Gallery steps. Doing a quick math while seated here earlier, I believe I have used those Gallery stairs to and fro, sometimes several times a day...and never saw one chipmunk even on the property for over 16 years...over 9,000 times using those same stairs.

And today of all days, being somewhat nervous of my presentation, I stare at this most confident assertive chipmunk. I start talking to it. 'Hello' 'How are you?' 'What

are you up to today?’ ‘Where do you live?’ Suddenly I notice an open window on the porch where there is an apartment. Oopss... I proceed. The chipmunk scampers off slowly. I hear a commanding statement in my head, “Everything is going to be all right.” I believe that was Julius this morning.

OK... Time passes...Seven years...

Julius Lester visits The Gallery w/ his wife Milan. Julius announces Milan & I are to select 15 prints for his NEW exhibit at The Gallery. Milan & I look at each other. We realize to select 15 prints we essentially are NOT selecting 45 other prints. In a way rejecting them. Oh-Oh! Artwork like nothing I have seen before. I’m expect pure photojournalism. Wrong. His creativity stuns me.

Milan & I pull it off w/ success, my heart beats wildly.

In 2008, I ask him to present a Gallery Conversation. He responds, “I’m not feeling any burning desire to talk about

the photographs. I have no idea what I would say about it. The photograph's eloquence exceeds mine”.

Julius eventually agrees to speak during his solo exhibits at The Gallery.



Julius Lester speaks in The Floyd Photo Gallery main room (partial audience view.)

Twice we have 45 Gallery Visitors each and turn away people at the door. Standing room only for 20 visitors. And thus begins a nurturing friendship. The Gallery has represented his artwork since.

"I suspect that we all have "ways of seeing" because each of us carries many stories within us. Through our stories we see ourselves, others and the world around us. These images are merely some of the ways in which I see".\_Julius

From our Gallery workshop participant Karen Lemoine, "Julius is very down to earth about his images. That is really refreshing. I was also impressed by the way he politely kept his own voice and intentions clear even when other people were guessing at his intentions".

Julius continues: "None of the (NEW) images have been published or even shown previously. I want my images to be available to whomever and whenever. Plus, I doubt that demand for any single image would be that great, so anyone buying an image now could be pretty sure that they had something that almost no one else did. And, after I'm dead, I don't think anyone will be making prints from my digital files".\_090608

"Nonetheless, it was a big step for me to show you what I was doing. Your enthusiasm was the confirmation I needed

that my visual excursions in many directions were journeys worth taking”.

“In addition, I learn a lot through your comments on various images. Seeing these images through your eyes has also been very important to my growth as a visual artist”.

“I am deeply grateful for your whole-hearted support. It makes me want to do even more than I’ve already done visually”.\_\_100510

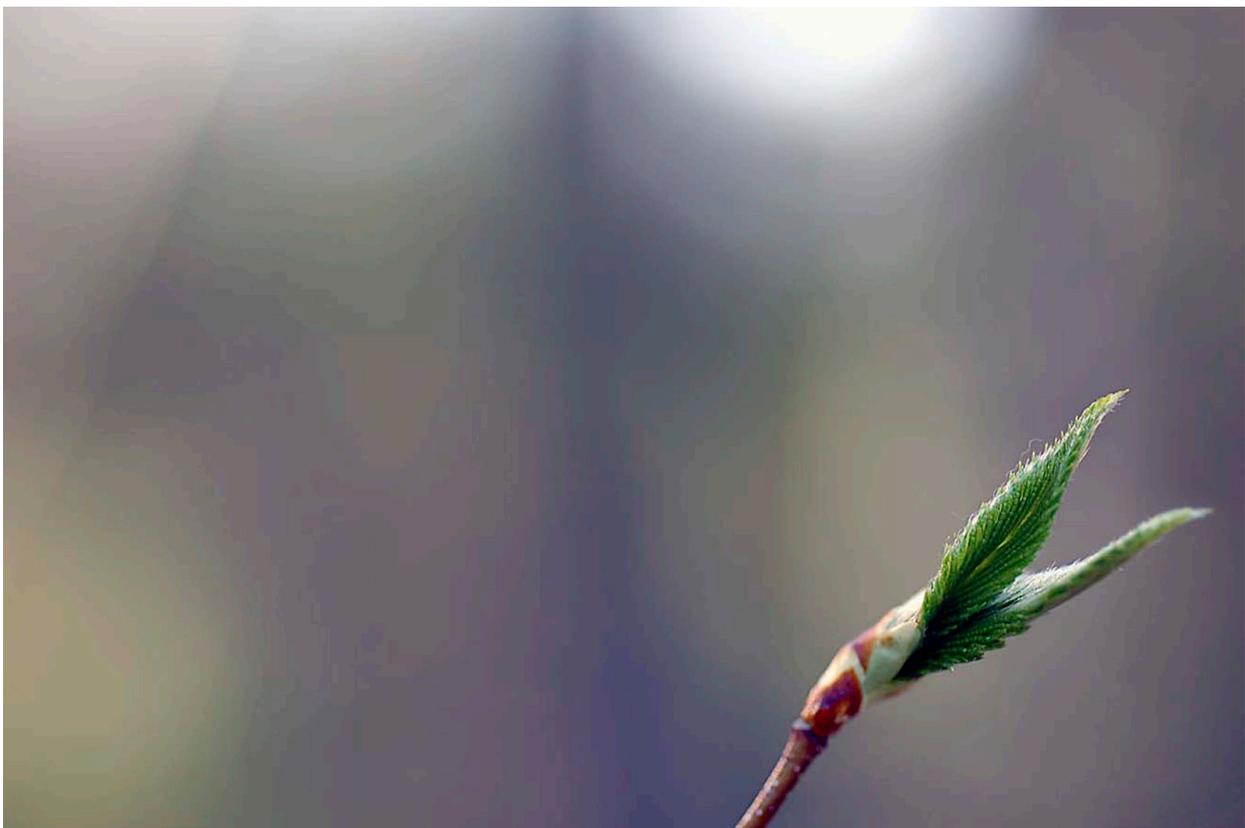
Julius so appreciates the early support of our admired Stan Sherer. Thank you, Stan.

Minutes before one of Julius’ Gallery Conversations, a Gallery Visitor asks me about one of Julius’ prints. The room filled to capacity including a seated Julius, I begin to critique the print... outloud for all to hear.

I have everyone’s attention, proceed to hold up all the prints in the portfolio, one at a time, and share my comments with all. 45 minutes go by. People are here to

listen to Julius, not me. Julius so enjoys this. After, I share nuances of art elements, composition, leading lines, repeating forms et al, Julius announces, “I have no idea what Robert is talking about.”

Julius Lester broke the rules of composition and the like with great success...an art in itself. One time I noticed a print of his with a budding stem way over in the corner pointing the viewer out of the print. I gently asked why? He responded immediately with such youthful energy and delight, “It was a-l-i-v-e!”



“Leaf Opening” © Julius Lester

(I hold the print high for all to see.)

Julius continues...“When I am asked what I photograph, I say anything that strikes my eye. What I should say is anything that strikes my soul. Whatever I photograph -- objects, people, or creatures -- I am not only photographing what I see, I am photographing my relationship with what I see. In a sense, then, I am photographing myself”.

Julius Lester ~ truly the most creative photographer I have ever met/heard of/read about. His styles so vary. His approaches to subject matter rival anyone’s.

Every visit to his home produces great conversation, tea, and more art prints. He cannot sleep at night so he processes his images somewhere between midnite and 5 am. He creates his artwork by play, processing in photo software. Then forgets how he did it not wanting to create something similar ~ in far contrast to most photographers.

His home ~ his inner sanctum. Rich in books, art, and life. His sincerity humbles me. He shares stories on his travels to Cuba, North Vietnam, Manhattan, and the Deep South, so matter of factly. I have him all to myself and often role-play a talk show host asking any question I dare.

I handle each print, admire it, decide if it comes away with me to The Gallery or stays. Tough choices.

I love making him laugh. Sometimes he simply shrugs his shoulders. I quickly move on to another conversation point. Julius teaches me. I soak up much, like a sponge.

To know him and have a close working relationship with him in a separate field from all his other worldly involvements, is one of my higher achievements and joys. My lifemate, here in the audience, Linda Emerson of 19 years this month is my highest achievement.

Linda and I drive 50 Julius' artwork to Princeton University for his Deep South exhibit there last year. The gallery director, Ms. Mary Hamill, serves us lunch. Fabulous. Music

plays. WOW! She asks if I know the artist? I shrug my shoulders while Shadrack is being sung by? Yes, Julius Lester. I share my amazement and fun moment the next day with him.

Later, an email from Julius...

Sent you something to the gallery. Forgot to include a note. The note would've said

"For Robert, my friend. Because I love you." Julius

It was his CD and we play it weekly at The Gallery.

In DEC, I email him, "In my conversation with this friend, client, and colleague who is no stranger to you and your artwork, Ms. Pat Crutchfield, we forged a concept. The Gallery is invited again to be hosted by Monson Arts Council in MAY at their House of Art in Monson. Our theme was "Nature in New England" this recent OCT. I want the exhibit next year to be "Social Injustices" or something better phrased. (We crafted a better title since: "Moving Towards Social Justice.") Your Ancestral images will be the

highlight. (Julius gave funerals to lynching victims combining historic lynching photos with his creative placement of flowers, people, and the like.) I will reach out to Boston, Manhattan, and beyond with advanced publicity. Photojournalism as art. I'd like to reach out to newspaper photographers who have a collection of images based on social injustices. I believe in this very much.'

'Sounds good to me. I think it definitely opens up/ broadens the concept of "art" photography. I like it a lot.' \_Julius\_\_171204

In DEC, I suggest his heavily snow laden birch trees inspire him. "The birch trees are not an inspiration but they are a comfort. A landscaper offered to take them down, but I told him that just because they were bent over, they were still alive. Indeed, they look like I feel many days, and I'm nowhere near ready to be "cut down." So, I guess they are an inspiration in a sense to continue weathering whatever storms come my way and to see the beauty in the storms and in the weathering of them".

Mirrors are for faces, photos for the souls. We look at Julius Lester photo prints and clearly see his soul.



“Leaf Opening” © Julius Lester

NOTE: I hold up this print high again and state through my sobs:

‘Julius may not be here physically...yet he is a-l-i-v-e!’

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