**‘Food Heroes’ – Photography Exhibition**

**Interview with Julie Howden. April 2021**

**Can you tell us a bit about your background as a photographer, and career trajectory up until now?**

*I started out wanting to be a photojournalist but that ended up with working for newspapers, magazines and producing images for The Times / Guardian in England. When I moved back home to Scotland I worked for Herald but have been freelance since 2014 and moved from ‘news’ to taking photographs for museums / galleries and public sector clients. But the desire to do my own work is strong too and lockdown provided a chance to be a photographer again and get a bit creative.*

**Is there any artist or photography style that has inspires or appeals to you particularly?**

*Fine art photography. I’ve not done a lot of but would definitely like to explore it and find out more about it. It appeals to me as it’s much slower and more considered than some of the ‘news’ images I’ve produced in previous situations.*

**What does ‘photography’ mean to you and what do you find most rewarding?**

*Photography has been in my life so long it is hard to pinpoint its exact value. It’s become so integral to my life that when I see something curious or beautiful my impulse is just to reach for my camera. The most rewarding part is creating a successful image in a situation that was tricky or I didn’t expect to work. It’s always nice to be surprised in a positive way. The best part of being a photographer by far is meeting and chatting to interesting people***.**

**What makes a good picture stand out from the average?**

*Lighting is key. Understanding Lighting, even if it’s natural light and being able to capture the subject at its best and how it affects the work. Composition, also key and should be considered. A good photograph shouldn’t be a happy accident. Colour and everything in the pic should be justified if that is possible. Get the best you can in any given situation was what I was always taught when training*!

**How would you describe your photography style?**

*I think my style is pretty editorial, my instinct is always to try and tell a story. Given my background this has become pretty much second nature. In my Food Heroes series I’ve tried to steer the portraits into a documentary style where the subjects are in the centre looking straight at the lens. I felt the direct gaze helped create a moment where the people behind our food production pause what they are doing, invite the viewer into their world and share their story with them.*

**What was the real light bulb / catalyst moment that inspired you to idea to create a ‘food heroes’ exhibition?**

*I think the key moment was when people started turning up to the door with food parcels, something I found quite emotional given the unsettling times we were living in. It was hard to believe what was happening and every commission I had for the next three months was cancelled. So it was a frightening time of uncertainty in many ways, financially and health wise. We began frantically ordering seeds!*

*When the box from ‘Stirling Neighbourfood’ arrived I was really pleasantly astonished by the quality and I felt so grateful to the people who brought it. I slowed down and began to enjoy the seasonal food and take note of what I was consuming. I found the food beautiful so I began photographing that and spoke to the people who delivered it. One was a forager and asked if I could come into the depot to take pictures. By photographing one I began to find out more and more and so it began…*

**I feel your/ photographs tell a positive ‘story’ of a community pulling together during the pandemic are there lessons to be learned here do you think, with how we approach our neighbours and wider community going forward?**

*Food security is becoming a bit of a hot topic and there are fears, following Brexit, about not being able to get certain supplies. Maybe as a country we do need to look at starting to produce some of our own food.*

*Going forward I plan to continue spending my money more locally. The food quality is better, I trust the suppliers more and they use much less plastic which makes me want to spend more.*

*I am also concerned about jobs and the economy and if money is spent locally it stays local. It would be nice to see a food market which is just that bit broader and not have to rely so much on supermarkets.*

*Also, in regard to Climate Change, which does worry me – if we shop locally our carbon footprint will improve.*

**Your photographs seem to illuminate a profound connection with the community and those in it, how did the experience impact on your own relationship with others in your community?**

*I know more people now and find it really comforting to get to know your neighbours and bring people together. By talking to suppliers you do build a relationship and trust and they might source things for you that might not be readily available.*

*I feel I can put my trust in these local people that I’ve gotten to know, when it comes to food. The standards are high and they have a vested interest in making sure it remains so.*

*I photographed Start up Stirling Food Train as part of the project and found it really reassuring the amount of people willing to give up their time to be involved.*

*I feel the people who stepped up to make sure supplies kept going in the pandemic deserve a bit of loyalty as life goes back to the ‘new normal’.*

**What lies ahead for you and the rest of the year regarding your photography? Any interesting projects lined up?**

*Not at the minute but I am working on some ideas and am quite drawn to the Old Town in Stirling at the minute and would like to explore it further.*

*Top of the Town has so much history and fabulous architecture that could be captured.*

**Any advice for those wishing to get into photography?**

Have an Instagram account, start photographing your food, make things, bake things and experiment. Go out and pick some wild garlic and look at the many different ways to photograph it, look for props to dress up your subjects. Experiment different angles and if you are photographing food you can eat it after which is a real bonus! Also just keep experimenting with your photography, try new things and find ways around set-backs. Making mistakes and doing it every day is the best way to develop, just like everything else.