

TORONTO AS COMMUNITY FIFTY YEARS OF PHOTOGRAPHS



VINCENZO PIETROPAOLO

Reviewed by Diana Fancher

A new photography book from Vince Pietropaolo is always a treat for the eyes and the intellect. His 10 previous books and numerous exhibitions, both here and abroad, focus of the human condition within specific thematic boundaries. This one is an exploration the photographer himself as he looks back on how his experience as a young immigrant in a warm and supportive community led him to choose his subjects and subject areas over the years.

And of the medium too, an exploration of the changing methods of photography, from the stark contrasts or subtle shadings of black and grey, developed and printed in the darkroom, to the vibrancy of digital colour, edited and printed from a computer.





It is also a retrospective of the changing faces of our city of neighbourhoods and the events that shaped both the photographer and his subjects, growing and aging together, a reminder that whatever the gathering or event, march or demonstration, that we are all neighbours as we look to the camera to witness of our joys and sorrows.

Looking at these photographs of neighbourhood interaction, I am reminded of how much there is to lose in the current provincial government's continuing attack on this city that does not support it. Like the Tennessee state government that cut the Nashville city council in half as punishment for being too liberal and ousted two of its representatives from the state legislature on a pretext, our conservative provincial government continues to show contempt for city council and the democracy it represents, to punish us for being too neighbourly.

The forty stories and 207 photographs in this book are a wakeup call from a former city planner who reflects, in his own words, "If it is not to become a broken, dysfunctional metropolis but a liveable and equitable place, new paradigms of city building must be explored and embraced." He finishes the book with two memorable pictures from the pandemic, along with a quote from Jane Jacobs, "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."



Toronto As Community: Fifty Years of Photographs by Vincenzo Pietropaolo, Hard cover with dust-jacket. Publisher: Cormorant Books, Toronto, 2023

From the jacket:

Vincenzo Pietropaolo is a photographer based in Toronto, where he immigrated as a child with his family. Self-taught, he became active in photography in 1970, documenting the people of his newly adopted city. He attended York University and the University of Toronto before he interrupted his studies to pursue a career in city planning. After fifteen years as a planner with the City of Toronto, he returned to his first love and passion — social documentary photography. He holds an MFA from Toronto Metropolitan University.

Vincenzo has published over a dozen books and numerous other publications, including seven monographs of personal work, and has received numerous awards including the Heritage Toronto Award and the César E. Chávez Black Eagle Award. Vincenzo collaborated with Jane Jacobs by providing photographs for an exhibition based on her seminal book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

