

Disciples in the Marketplace – Jack Corn Episode

Transcript of Audio from the Video

[DitM - Jack Corn - Final Cut 1.mp3](#)

00:00:06 I wanted to photograph what I called the underside of life. I think there were times when I got discouraged and gosh, I got to get out of this. I'm going to get killed, but I wanted [to photograph] everything, you know. I wanted to photograph the good and the bad.

00:00:41 Well, I milked our family's cow. That was the first job. I started getting did that for quite a while and then I carried a paper route. The paper was important to people. It just was important. People were nice to me. They'd offer me food a lot of times and were all very kind, most people were.

00:01:03 Well, my mother always took pictures. She had an old-timey, camera roll film camera. They bought me a camera and I started taking pictures. I really got into it. Then I went into the Air Force and they sent me the photo school. During that time, the Tennessean hired me. We covered crime a lot. And there would be robberies and different things.

00:01:25 And it would be families that were suffering and in need and somebody would call and say, "If y'all would get a picture in the paper, maybe people will help them out." Which did – they did. It was a good thing. Well it wasn't called photojournalism then, it was just called photography and it was for one still picture. They wanted to pose everything at first. I was trying to get them to catch real life as it was, you know. Every situation you tried to get the full story of it, not just how it happened, but how did it happen and why and whatever. It was hard for 'em, but they finally got it, got to understand it.

00:02:02 My work is a witness and it's a witness of what you see – and then what you did about it. I think it changes you to realize that the world is really varied; people are different. I always wanted my photos [for] people to look at that and say, 'Wow, is that the way it is?' And every photograph is not going to be that way. But a lot of them can be.

00:02:29 He was on a Tennessee State Student* and he had gone in and was waiting to sit down. And back then they couldn't go in to the restaurants and sit down. Well, they were just protesting segregation, and they were smart, they were educated kids. It made people stop and think. And there's a mob outside – I say a mob, a crowd of people. And he was nervous about that. I thought I was doing a good thing. But I tell there were times when I got discouraged and [thought] 'Gosh, I gotta get out of this. I'm going to get killed and I'm going to get beat up or something. But I stuck with it, thank goodness. You grow up with segregation [and] it's all you've ever known; somebody wants to change it, you don't like it. But we did change it and change it for the better and I know I had a hand in it – small but a hand. It was an interesting time. I'm glad I witnessed it.

00:03:30 I wanted to photograph what I called the underside of life. Because that's part of us, and we're bragging about what a great country we are. It is a great country. I served in the military. I served for four years in the military and I think it's a great country, but we also have flaws in our caring for poor people.

00:03:52 Most photographers won't go into neighborhoods like I was going into, and of course I'm going into areas that, it's just, people are poor. I'm going into areas where most people wouldn't go, really – not that it was brave or anything. They just, nobody went. And nobody much bothered me ever.

I mean, they were nice to me. Most time they offered me water and whatever. Yeah, I don't know, a lot of people just don't want to photograph that. I want to [photograph] everything. You know, I want to photograph the good and the bad.

00:04:27 And I think we need to see this kind of thing. And the Tennessean was very liberal with me letting me do what I wanted to do. A lot of newspapers might not have done that. Giving me the freedom that I did, and then run the pictures, too. I mean anybody could have taken the pictures if they'd been there. You just got to be there – that's, the being there is the thing and taking the time to do it. And I'm still taking pictures but not like before. Take [pictures of] grandchildren now.

00:04:59 I saw grace in my work when something good came out of it. I'd want to change things that aren't good. I'd want them to be better. But all I wanted to do is take pictures of life as it was. And I wanted the public to see it. My pictures are some of them are in the national museums and that's a great honor for a photographer to have that happen. I've had a really good life, had a good time. I'm a Methodist and have been one. My family was Methodist. I had some ancestors that were Methodist ministers or preachers, and they in general were very receptive to helping people. It's getting something doing is what's hard.

00:05:43 And I hope, what I hope, see was my pictures would be that boost that would help them, if they saw it [and] enough people saw it and said, 'You ought to do something about that,' you know. That was the goal. I know for a fact that my photographs caused some help in Appalachia. I know for a fact that that's true. You know, if you say much else you sound like, you're bragging. I'm not bragging, I'm just saying what I thought I was doing. And history will be the judge. History can be a hard judge too. I did some good. I hope I did. That's an enough reward for me. I've had a glorious life and very happy and had a lot of fun. Now if that don't make sense. I'm sorry.

00:06:35 My name is Jack Corn, and I'm a disciple in the marketplace.

*Congressman John Lewis helped organize and participate in the Nashville sit-ins with other student protestors from Tennessee State University, Fisk, and other schools and was actually a student at American Baptist Theological Seminary in November of 1960 when this photograph was taken by Jack Corn.