FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ SOCIAL SCIENCES

DownTown USA

Susan Madden Lankford
Human Exposures Publishing (November 2009)
Softcover $29.95 (203pp)
978-0-9792366-2-4

If a single picture says a thousand words, then a book of carefully crafted photographs accompanied by written testimonials and personal accounts can convey a tremendous story.

Susan Lankford, author and professional photographer, rented an empty jail in a rundown section of San Diego for a commercial project. The neighborhood soon dominated her attention. Her camera, keen eye for detail, and receptive ear soon began to absorb and chronicle the lives of the curious local residents. Most are downtrodden and homeless; many suffer from substance abuse problems; others prefer life on the street at a self-imposed distance from societal conventions. Their homes are often no more than cardboard boxes, and they push their possessions along the street in shopping carts.

Lankford's goal was to break through the stereotypes foisted upon these outsiders and learn who they really were. She shares her findings in this book.

The 326 black and white photos are powerfully considered. They range in size from standard snapshots to full-page images. The most detailed give us a close-up view, revealing wrinkles in the faces of these weather-beaten individuals. The author's comments and observations accompanying these pictures reveal much about these denizens and how they got to this point in their lives.

"Their expressions as they shared their stories were etched in my mind, a part of my life," she writes.

Jed, one homeless character with a lengthy police record, was raised by a mother with a drug habit. The author's photos of Jed share the page with a glimpse of his past, as told in his typewritten account.

"I feel that if my dad had been there longer, I would not be like this," Jed writes. "He wasn't there for the times that got you straight. After he left, I went to a crooked line and stayed there."

Without preaching, this photo essay is a warning that society cannot ignore its fringe elements. The book is the second in a trilogy chronicling life on the edge. The first, *Maggots in my Sweet Potatoes*, addressed the lives of women in prison. The third, *Born, Not Raised*, will explore young people confronting life in juvenile hall. A Web site, humanexposures.com, contains several excellent multimedia essays tied to the books.

KARL KUNKEL (September / October 2009)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author provided free copies of his/her book to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the author for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love and make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.