"I PREFER BAKING MY OWN CAKE,
TART, PLUM PIES, ETC.,
I KNOW WHAT I’M EATING THEN."
The Day-to-Day Life of Albert Hastings

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KAYLYNN DEVENEY
HANDWRITTEN TEXT, DRAWINGS, AND POEMS BY ALBERT HASTINGS

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I met Albert Hastings in 2001 when we lived in the same neighborhood in southern Wales. Bert was renting a small flat—in what I imagine was once an elegant building, and my husband Will Richard and I lived in a basement flat nearby. We had packed up our lives in New Mexico to come to Wales so that I could go to graduate school to study photography. Because we had no car, we walked almost daily between our flat and the city center, regularly passing the building where Bert lived.

I think my husband noticed Bert first. Bert could often be spotted outside, watching the world go by or watering the garden that curtained the dilapidated apartment building on two sides. In the absence of a garden hose, Bert watered by filling empty dishwashing liquid bottles. He contrasted with the decaying building. Bert seemed vital and engaged and his quiet presence made me want to know him.

Despite the fact that I have met and photographed many people, I sometimes still find the initial approach a little daunting. At first I felt shy about introducing myself to Bert, but eventually I did walk over to meet him and he greeted me warmly. Not long after our first meeting I asked Bert if he would work with me on a photographic project and soon I began to learn more about aspects of his life, including his experience living through WWII in Britain, his work as a general engineer, and his relationship to the flora and fauna outside his building.

As we became better acquainted I noticed, too, the way he organized his things and his time, and I found his approaches thoughtful. As my photographic studies have evolved I have increasingly focused on ideas and depictions of home. I often seek in my photographs the banal moments of the day—the experiences not usually considered significant enough to warrant a snapshot—the quiet clean up after the birthday party ends or the hour before we go to bed. I look, too, for domestic patterns
and arrangements, practiced daily routines that make us feel at home or that confirm, or conform to, our ideas of what home should be.

Early in this project Bert shared some intriguing thoughts and comments with me concerning my photographs of him. These comments led me to think more about the ways our ideas regarding photography differed. I wondered too how my perceptions of Bert differed from the way he saw himself. To better understand his feelings about being photographed and his reactions to my photographs, I asked Bert to caption small prints I kept in a pocket-sized notebook. Each speaking from our own perspective, we began the dialogue that eventually became this book. Bert’s captions create a new context for my photographs, while some correspond to the thinking that shaped the image, others interpret the image in a different way, thereby adding a critical second perspective to this work.

In his book *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), architect and author Witold Rybczynski explores notions of home. Among his own observations, Rybczynski cites essayist and critic Mario Praz’s ideas concerning “Stimmung” or “the sense of intimacy that is created by a room and its furnishings.” “Stimmung,” he says (see page 43), is “a characteristic of interiors that has less to do with functionality than with the way that room conveys the character of its owner.” I believe photographs of our possessions and domestic patterns can be portraits, just like photographs of our faces. In addition to the photographs of Bert, and the captions he writes, the images of Bert’s folded pajamas, nightcap, space heater atop a biscuit tin, and the simple apparatus he engineered to hold a broken daffodil up straight in a shallow teacup, all speak to me of him.

Made within the walls of his homes, this work aspires to communicate something of Bert’s domestic life, while also recognizing that no book could possibly present a complete picture. I don’t aspire to telling a definitive story of Bert. In fact, I believe it is an impossible goal. Nor do I believe there is a single “true story” about any one of us, but rather a plurality of versions made up from varying perspectives. I consider this work to be highly subjective and only a collection of selected moments and details, but for me these small insights have real resonance.

Some of Bert’s personal possessions are reproduced here: drawings connected to his clock hobbies, his handwritten TV listings, and old photographs of Bert, his wife, and his daughter accompany poems composed by Bert. These items convey information in a different way: some reflect memories, some itemize an aspect of Bert’s day, and others draw attention to his creative interests.

Bert lost his wife many years ago and subsequently lost his daughter and grandson as well. Bert is now ninety-one and has moved twice since I met him, first into a flat in sheltered accommodation not too far from where he had been living, and then, about two years ago, he agreed to move into similar accommodation closer to his granddaughter. She is his strongest support. Over time Bert’s world has become more and more centered within his domestic space. Getting enough breath to walk any distance has become difficult, and he has battled some medical problems. But despite these obstacles, Bert’s character remains strong.

This work is sited where Bert’s autobiographical vision, based in life experience and feeling, meets the new eye of a stranger. Together our visions and versions of his day-to-day experience sit side by side to create a new tale. At the end of this project Bert and I, of course, maintain our individual perspectives, but I think we are richer, too, for being informed by one another. I know I am.
P. Jags drying

Wind broken Daffodil.
Receiving Pension

Bringing my screes from the oven. (18)
A photo of my wife
aged 18, 13 Jun 1915
1 Jan 1958

Feeding pigeons, not
enough in the way.
We were quietly getting
birds accustomed to
camera
My little bit of comfort.

Change of laundry.
Preparing a snack.

The wreckage left of my yucca blooms after an 8 hr electrical storm and 3 1/2 inches of rain.
My inevitable cuppa "chah"
Watching the world (Rat Race) hustling by.
Laundry airing.

Enjoying the sun.
Discussing a book with 
Kaylna.

Could this be a presumptive
picture of my futuristic soul
regarding a past world
and friends?
In my garden at sunset
Listening to my radio
Going out

Having a drink in a beautiful country pension pub, more like a tiny Hamlet. It is called CWRT BLEDDYN.
I prefer baking my own cake, fast, plum pies, etc., I know what I'm eating then.

My dentures after being mugged by mugger, in '97, it cost me £120 for new set.
Looking at something small.

Death of a Cynic.

Not an awful mood I'm leavin;
Let it be short quick or sharp.
Then I can go up to my 'ooman
'learn to play me bloody Afl.
Then I'll see "But Deaf Davy!"
Oh, how happy I will be
I will clap my hands saying
To Hell with Radio B.B.C.
Fealty

Oh hurry dear please,
said he desperately.
Don't be so ceremonious.
Well, said she, laconically.
We'll catch next train,
the ten to two to Toledo.

Oh dear reader, please,
refrain from cynical jesting.

Enjoying my
evening whiskey.
Dampness at my entrance.

Making my bed up.
My tea warmer.

My 5 day trip into Royal Gwent Hosp... chest playing me up.
Checking my medication.
Vising the eustachian tube
for my knee. I damaged
the cartilage on an
airplane engine test
when I was an engine
test bed maintenance
in 1942.
The blaze of bluebells by the main entrance.

I think that laughness on my lower left rib cage is where I broke 5 ribs 40 yrs ago.
Catching up with the news.

Giving my niece June the bouquet for my sister Iris (aged 91). Bless her.
Preparing my list of T.V. programmes for coming week.
THUR 18
3-15, MIDSOMER COUNTDOWN
5-00, R.T.I. 6. FRIENDS
6-30, HOLLYOAKS
7 NEWS
9-00, BROOKSIDE
8-30, DRIVEN, THE LOST GIRLS
9-00, FRIENDS
10-30, MAKE MY DAY
H. 8-5, SOUTH PARK SUPERSTAR
11-30, THE BOOK GROUP

FRI 19
1-30, FILM, E 8-5 PET R 4. 15-1
4-15, C. DOWN
5-17, FRIENDS
6-30, HOLLYOAKS
7 NEWS
8-30, WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP
9-00, TALES FROM THE GRAVE
9-30, FATHER TED
9-30, THE BOOK GROUP
10, FRASIER
10-30, DOES DAVE KNOW
11-05, JACKASSES
11-35, PASSENGERS
11-45, MAKE MY DAY

Watching C 4 T. V.
(Richard & Judy)
Time I bought a new curtain.

My cuppa by footlight
Just me and my shadow

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My evening nightcap.

Raising up courage to go out between showers.
A souvenir picture of Pavlova and Nijinsky in Swan Lake. An old clock from my clock making hobbies.

Pigtons getting used to the camera now. One on my head and one about to fly up to my hand.
Washing up. The picture has also captured the post card my niece in Oregon sent me.

Closing the outside doors, at sunset. We had a glass inside door smashed on one occasion.
In Royal Guest Hospital Bay, waiting for a bed in the ward. A stroke on my left arm and hand.
Cutting bread up for the pigeons.
*Fringes of my table lamp.*

*Ironing my laundry.*
The settee Kaylyn gave me. It is marvellously comfy.

Shaving before going out.
Shopping in Sainsbury's.

My evening snack.
The net, curtaining my window is in the cat's path.

One alighting on my hand.
In the supermarket lift.

Poorly lit, as usual.

Sitting at my table.
One of my favourites
Gladoli.

Non reposé
Reflections.

My bedside pictures of my wife and my deceased grandson.
Working up in my kitchenette.
Cottage Clock, with verge watch movement. (19th century) Height approximately.

Peeling potatoes in my kitchenette.
These Boots were made for walkin'.

Drying a bit of Laundry.
One of my bookcases

I'm having my dinner.
My little bedroom.

Patience

I saw your beautiful eyes,
I saw your beautiful face,
I saw your beautiful smile,
and wished for your fond embrace.

Kingdoms may come,
Kingdoms may go,
but captivating love lives forever.
Life is like a crystal stream,
flowing on forever,
neath every bush and every ridge
die dusty trout of sifting,
gazing at sun of stars above,
waiting for the enchanting love
which means their well being.
The Barmaid's Lament

Oh, what a damp and dewy day!

said my poor barmaid with a sigh

as she stood upon the doorstep and
gazed up at the sky.

The rain is simply dripping down

and splashing up knee high.

I shall not sell much beer today,

she mused with a sigh.

Whosoever ventures out in this

will be a silly clown.

But then, said she with a laugh

it will be the same right thru

the bloomin' town.

My 75 year old lady

at 8:00 am.
My T.V. and my fan, (one of my lifelines)

One of many visits to Royal Gwent Hospital
Watching 'The Box'

Bandaging my damaged cartilage.
I am now housebound.

What a pickle to get into at 97 years of age.
I'm not talking to a ghost.
I'm opening the curtains.
First and foremost, my gratitude goes to my friend, the incomparable Albert Hastings, and to his lovely granddaughter.

Next, for his love, friendship, integrity, incredible advice and for living his life in a way that has made my photographic life possible, my love and thanks to my husband, the very wonderful Will Reichard.

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KayLynn Deveney
“WE WERE QUIETLY GETTING

BIRDS ACCUSTOMED TO CAMERA”