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Closer to Home

After Colby, a new perspective

By Edwin J. Torres '12

It's fascinating to think of the images I would have made had I been a child photographer.

Growing up in the South Bronx in New York City I saw a lot of things that I assumed were normal: groups of men with gold chains, loud music, and fancy Cadillacs hanging on the corner of our poverty-stricken block; dozens of teenage mothers pushing baby carriages. And there were good times, like when my grandmother would come from Puerto Rico to spend entire summers with me and my cousins. She made the *best* rice and beans.

Back then I didn't have the perspective to question or appreciate the things around me. My driving ambition was to find a career, earn a living, and leave the Bronx.

I was tired of the crime, the poverty, and the sense of separation in my own family. Colby was going to be my ticket out.

My perspective changed after my first year on Mayflower Hill. Waterville was such a different environment, one that helped me to see what the world was like outside of the Bronx. Colby also provided me a safe haven to actually appreciate education, reflect on my experiences, and form ideas and opinions.

To my surprise, with my broadening perspective I found myself appreciating the diversity and culture in the Bronx. Despite the bad press the area gets, I began to see more of the good—a present-day melting pot of working-class citizens and incoming immigrants, most working hard to find their place in the American dream.

The Bronx felt like the only authentic borough left in New York City; all the others were quickly changing and gentrifying. For me, it was all becoming clear. And clearer.

I was drawn to American studies as a major because it deepened my desire and my ability to examine and understand the social and cultural realities that existed in my own community. Around the same time at Colby I found my love

for photography.

I began to appreciate craft and technique and, more importantly, the medium's ability to give you an instant voice as you choose a subject and frame a photograph. Equipped with these tools, I was ready to return home to the South Bronx and find a way to address issues of inner-city poverty, racism, and misrepresentations.

As a photojournalist and documentary photographer, I found that the best way to address these broader topics was to zoom into the perspective of family life—as in my family and its narrative.

I spent the past year photographing daily life and traumatic events in my family. I wanted to tell *our* stories—stories of aspiration, struggle, and loneliness.

Being immersed in this story pulled me closer to my family and helped me to grow as a documentary photographer. I learned that the most powerful images were made when I shared empathy and engagement with my subject. It was a certain *closeness* that has taught me to cherish human connection—and that a camera was only a tool to document what was being experienced. The result has been a journey of self-discovery, with the lens aimed at my family. And the goal is to show what was there all along: the extraordinary in the ordinary.

The photographs: Edwin Torres '12 Documents a Life in the Bronx



An image of my grandmother hangs in my grandfather's bedroom in Puerto Rico.



After my grandmother passed away, we flew to Puerto Rico to inform my grandfather and make arrangements. He had not seen her for five years. This image was taken of my grandfather on the porch of his home the day of the funeral.



My grandfather, the morning of my grandmother's funeral.

A view of our hometown, Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico.



Consolation at my grandfather's home.



My brother, Justino Sanchez, helps to dress my grandfather for my grandmother's funeral. My grandfather uses a wheelchair because he lost a foot to gangrene contracted after many years selling produce in the hot sun.

“Despite the bad press the Bronx gets, I began to see more of the good.”

—Edwin J. Torres '12

Visiting family before the funeral. It is early in the morning of Mother's Day, and my great grandmother lies in bed.



My niece Ariana crosses the church during her First Communion ceremony. The event, which also included my nephew Javier's First Communion, was followed by a backyard party and a walk in the park.



The view of the backyard during Ariana's party.



My aunt, Titi Wito, who is known as “the salsa queen” despite living most of her life in a wheelchair.

A family crosses the street near the Melrose housing projects in the Bronx.



My mother, Nitza, 57, works as a home attendant for a woman named Ana. She monitors Ana's health issues and assists with Ana's daily needs.



My sister Idzaly, 28, removes a bib from my grandmother in the elevator after a barbecue.

“As a photojournalist and documentary photographer, I found that the best way to address these broader topics was to zoom into the perspective of family life. I decided to turn the camera on my own family to tell our personal narrative.”

—Edwin J. Torres '12



My sister Idzaly readies the bar for an event at Ruff Ryders Club House. She joined the Ruff Ryders, whose activities center on motorcycles, pitbulls, and music, because the club provided her with a support network in the Bronx.



My father, Edwin Torres Sr., opens the door to the apartment he once shared with his wife and three children. My parents separated eight years ago.

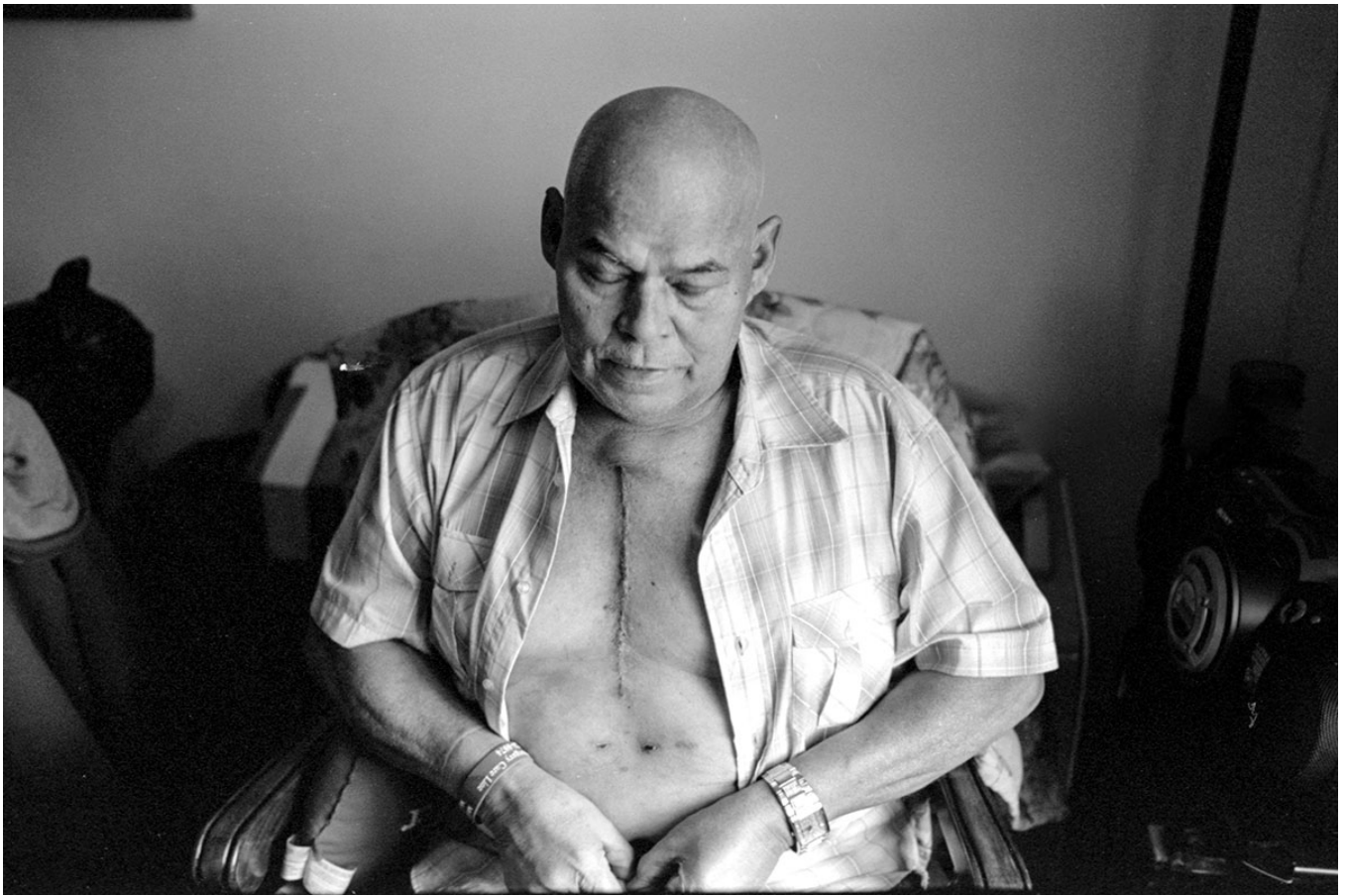


My grandmother, Abuela, in her hospital bed a few days before passing away. My uncle hugs her goodbye.



My cousin Sonja knocks on the front door of her home in the Willis Avenue projects. The door is kept bolted shut from the inside.

My father, Edwin Torres Sr., recovers at home after open-heart surgery.



My father, Edwin Torres Sr., presents a flower to Coua Vang, my girlfriend and a new member of the family.

Edwin Torres '12 is a freelance photographer whose work appears frequently in the *New York Times*.

To see more of Edwin Torres's work go to edwintorrespf.com

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Beautiful photography; something I doubt you learned at Colby.

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Steven Fruh · Cornell University

From: Paul Marsolini '64. Congratulations Edwin for these photos.

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Schrie Elliott · Beočić

Edwin the story of your life was so touching it made me cry. I am born in raised in the Bronx. you have showed me a new way to look at the life and times for the good old days seeing it through your eyes was amazing thank you for telling your story I am a big FAN

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