



Media Information

FROM THE BRONX TO BERLIN AND BEYOND

The American environmental scientist Ron Hoffer joined the United States' Environmental Protection Agency in the 1980s, to work on U.S. water quality problems but was soon taken by the task to improve the »ecological understanding« between communism and capitalism. He captured his personal encounters behind the Iron Curtain on film with his 35mm camera, shooting many images of the beauty, as well as of the daily challenges that confronted friends and strangers in Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Hoffer's nostalgic vignettes of everyday life make his book »From the Bronx to Berlin and Beyond« a photographic homage to a now-nearly forgotten period of worldwide optimism.

Bielefeld/Berlin, January 16, 2020 – »Stories and photos from my journey to unseat Communism, clean the environment, and find the best borscht in the remains of the Evil Empire,« is Hoffer's tongue-in-cheek description of the contents of his photographic memoir.

As a member of many different scientific exchanges and development assistance programs, the geologist spent decades with the EPA traveling on countless trips through the communist countries of Europe. Apart from fulfilling his professional duties, Hoffer approached these journeys as a private person full of curiosity and open to the world. It is the personal encounters with friends and strangers that remain in his memory and have lost none of their fascination.

Hoffer did not keep a journal or make notes of events. Rather, he took photos with a Nikon 35mm or a Contax T pocket camera. Unlike standard practice in the age of digital photography, he always carefully and thoughtfully chose the moment to press the shutter release. Without even casting a glance at the photos' geographical or chronological information, Hoffer can easily identify nearly all of the pictures to this very day.

Each photograph has a little story of its own. Hoffer took the trouble to recount these tales in writing for readers of »From the Bronx to Berlin and Beyond«. Once he shot a picture of a smiling co-worker in a Polish laboratory, whose exact recording of pollution conditions never met the eyes of the public without being heavily altered and censored until the fall of the Iron Curtain. Another time he concentrated on teenagers whose bright neon polyester sweatshirts were on the cusp of becoming uncool; in Moscow he was an involuntary witness to the one-day war at the Russian parliament in 1993.

What seems at first glance to be a »simple« photography book is actually Hoffer's documentation of a history of mindsets and an important witness to a time of upheaval, humanism, and optimism. »From the Bronx to Berlin and Beyond« is a must for anyone who doesn't want to forget the existence of the Iron Curtain, even thirty years after the fact.



Ron Hoffer | From the Bronx to Berlin and Beyond

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