

SEEING BEYOND SIGHT

photographs by blind teenagers

BOOK | FILM | EXHIBIT

coming April 2007

For five years Tony Deifell taught teenagers to take photographs. His students were blind.

Unusual as the idea may seem at first, putting cameras in the hands of visually impaired children proved to be extremely fruitful – both for the photographers, who found an astonishing new means of self-expression, and for the viewers of their images, for whom this is an entirely new kind of dreamlike and intuitive creation. Even before you know that these pictures were taken by blind teenagers, they are striking in their use of light and composition, and haunting in their chiaroscuro intensity.

Accompanying the images are the students' own words and captions – in which we see how much the taking of pictures came to mean to them and how the creative process works in ways rarely experienced. This is a volume that speaks with rare inspirational power.

Using the physics of light as a metaphor, the images and stories take you on a journey from dark to light – **DISTORTION REFRACTION, REFLECTION, TRANSPARENCY, ILLUMINANCE.** While the book renders the lives of blind teenagers with 100 striking black and white photographs, it illuminates stories of danger, fear, trust, race, and beauty found in all of our lives.

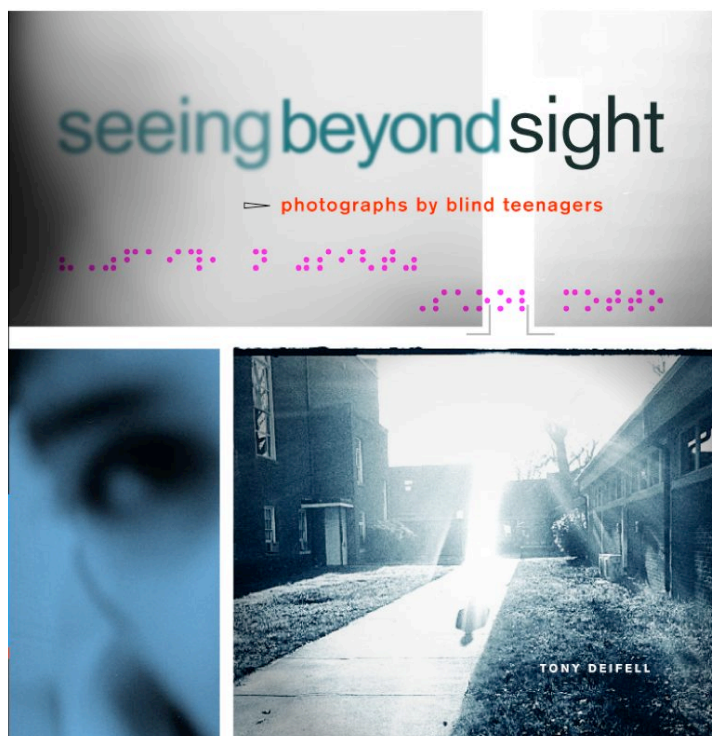


TONY DEIFELL is a visual artist and social entrepreneur. He has spent over a decade creating youth-generated media projects, including From The Hip, Youth Voice Radio, and -ISM(N), which was recognized by the White House as a national model of diversity education. He serves as chief strategist for KaBOOM!, advises film and television projects, and continues to develop participatory media-making productions. Tony was an artist-in-residence at the Headlands Center for the Arts, taught documentary studies at Duke University, and was a national leadership fellow with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. He taught photography at Governor Morehead School for the Blind in Raleigh, North Carolina, from 1992 to 1997. He lives in San Francisco.

Seeing Beyond Sight demonstrates countless new ways for all of us to think about vision, art, and perception, and what it really means to see.

"When you see, you'll find out."

– Antonio, blind photographer, age 14



CHRONICLE BOOKS

By Tony Deifell

Foreword by Robert Coles

www.seeingbeyondsight.com



CHRONICLE BOOKS

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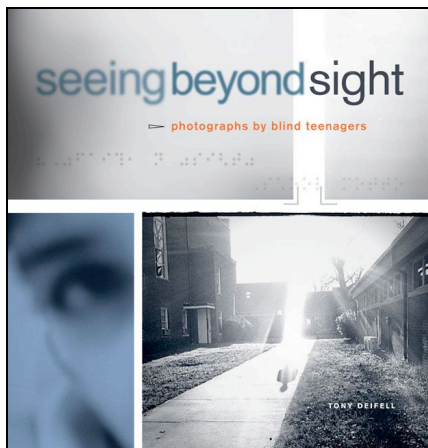
Seeing Beyond Sight

Photographs by Blind Teenagers

By Tony Deifell

Foreword by Robert Coles

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With its ambitious, seemingly paradoxical premise, *Seeing Beyond Sight* challenges our definitions of art, vision, and perception and what it really means to see. It is a book of photographs taken by teenagers who are blind and visually impaired.

In nearly 140 remarkable photographs, *Seeing Beyond Sight* documents how visual artist and social entrepreneur Tony Deifell taught his blind students to take pictures as an innovative, multi-sensory means of self-expression. Their intuitive, dreamlike images are often surprising and beautiful in their composition, light, and chiaroscuro intensity. Complementing the photographs are the students' own words explaining what the process and images mean to them.

Unusual as the idea may seem at first, putting cameras in the hands of visually-impaired children proved to be extremely fruitful – both for the photographers, who found an astonishing way to express themselves, and for the viewers of their images. As a photographer, Tony Deifell had always feared losing his sight, and wondered, “If I were blind, could I still make photographs?” He decided to find out.

What began as an experimental after-school photography club grew into a five-year project that impacted Deifell as much or more than his students. Compiled into five chapters—distortion, refraction reflection, transparency and illuminance—*Seeing Beyond Sight* is about seeing in the broadest sense. The photographs and stories tell of danger, fear, trust, race and beauty found in all our lives.

A rare book of visual art, *Seeing Beyond Sight* speaks with inspirational power, not only to the visually impaired community at large, but also to anyone who has ever considered what it means to see and perceive the world.

About the Author

TONY DEIFELL is a San Francisco-based visual artist and social entrepreneur. He has spent over a decade creating youth-generated media projects, including From the Hip, Youth Voice Radio, and ISM, which was recognized by the White House as a national model of diversity education. He serves as chief strategist for KaBOOM!, advises film and television projects, and continues to develop participatory media-making productions, including www.wdydyd.com. Tony was an artist-in-residence at the Headlands Center for the Arts, taught documentary studies at Duke University, and was a national leadership fellow with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. He taught photography for five years at Governor Morehead School for the Blind.

ROBERT COLES has dedicated much of his career to exploring the moral, political, and spiritual lives of children. He is a child psychiatrist, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, James Agee Professor of Social Ethics at Harvard, and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

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Seeing Beyond Sight Student Spokespeople Profile



Cassie Knight

Eyesight: **No vision.**

Cassie finished a job-placement program at Governor Morehead School, where she learned to be a receptionist. She has taught herself to dance the tarantella, and dreams of going to Italy one day.

Cassie has been blind since birth. She sees photography as a means to communicate her dreams to others. She describes taking pictures as a way to “**illustrate her dreams.**”

She lives in North Carolina with her Mom and loves to play music and dream as often as she can.

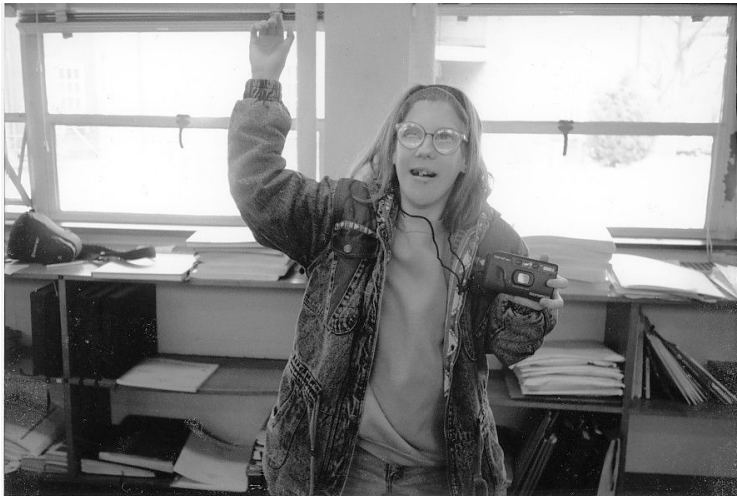
Leuwynda Forbes

Eyesight: “Have you ever stood outside and the sun was behind the person you’re looking at, so all you could see was a shadow – no face, no eyes, no mouth – that’s what I see. **It’s like a tunnel** and I can’t see far away.”

Leuwynda told me that she “fell in love with the camera,” and now has a digital camera she uses often. She lives in her own apartment in Florida and works at Food Lion grocery, where she can bring in as many as five shopping carts at once – which, she explains, is quite a feat since cerebral palsy causes her to fall out of balance.



Leuwynda thinks it’s important for blind people to take pictures because, “it shows people who have 20/20 vision, how **blind people can see**. It’s kind of like a way for sighted people to see what blind people see.”



Melody Heath

Eyesight: “I can see stuff, but I can’t focus. I can’t see out of my right eye at all,” Melody said when asked about her eyesight when she was 15. Now 27, Melody is completely blind after her doctor discovered she had cornea cancer in her left eye in 2004 and corrective surgeries failed to bring her vision back.

Melody now is a communications major at UNC Greensboro and has a five-year-old daughter. Her name is Arianna, which means “**from the most holy**.” Arianna is mildly autistic and is also visually impaired.

Melody thinks it’s important for blind people to take pictures because it allows them to show others their **dreams**, their **memories** and their **experiences**.

Melody received a guide dog in the fall of 2005, after she lost her sight completely. She lives with her daughter and plans to work in public relations after graduation.



Reba Drew

Eyesight: “If I looked at you, I’d have a black spot in the middle, but I could see on the sides. I can read regular-sized print in a magazine, but I just have to tilt my head.”

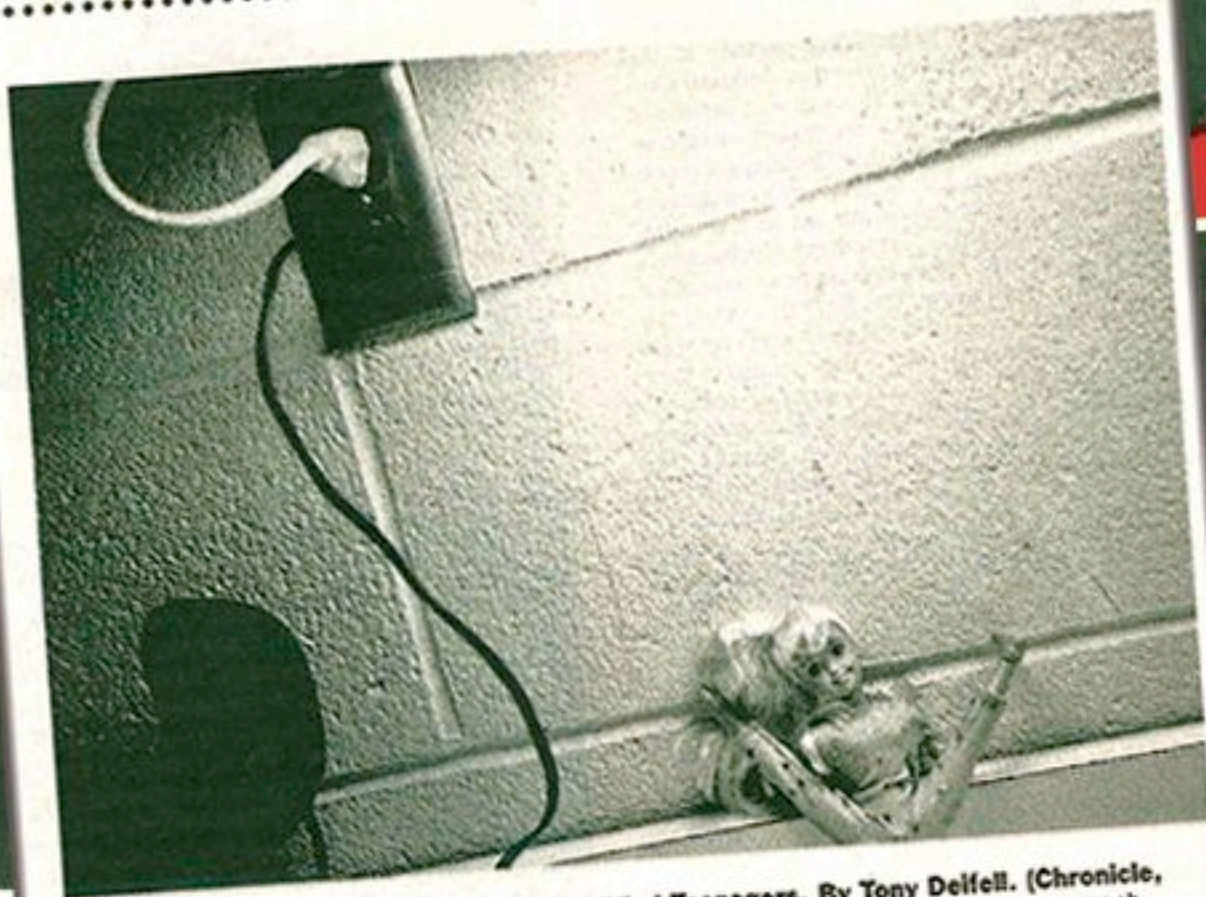
Reba is best friends with Merlett Lowery, another student whose work is featured in *Seeing Beyond Sight*. Reba and Merlett are the ultimate pair. “We talk almost every night – and we’ve been friends forever,” Reba told me, “Merlett can be a real handful.”

Reba loves photography. She also loves video. She “scrapbooks” her family using both video and film, and when asked how often, she replied, “I stop when the battery runs out.”

She’s written her first novel and is hoping to have it published. It’s called “Life’s Lessons” – a thirty-two chapter, eighty-seven-page book about her school days that she likens to Dawson’s Creek.

Book Review

Source: T. Copyright © 2007 The New York Times.



SEEING BEYOND SIGHT: Photographs by Blind Teenagers. By Tony Delfell. (Chronicle, \$24.95.) In the introduction to this collection, Delfell explains that he got the idea to teach photography to visually impaired students after hearing a radio show about Henry Butler, a jazzman who is blind and takes pictures. "What would children who are blind show us about the world, if they learned to take pictures?" Delfell wondered. The photograph above was taken by Katy Singhas, at the age of 13.

By Jim Lewis

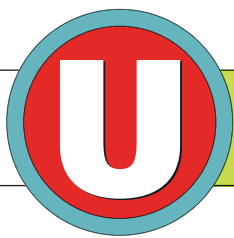
one concerns themselves and the gathering rumble of the Revolution, all playing out in a gorgeous city. Is there more in the way of material than this? A great narrative, an el-

and "Dancing to 'Almendra,'" her ninth novel, lovingly translated by Edith Grossman: a flawless little book with a deceptively light touch, that covers exactly those years.

Montero's novel is narrated by a man named Joaquín

Continued on Page 8

Kathryn Harrison: Joan Acocella's artists | Joseph Lelyveld: Family secrets



Visionary Photographer

Tony Deifell

TONY DEIFELL'S phone rang late one night in 1998, and rather than let the machine pick up (as was customary at such an hour) he decided to answer it. To his shock, a child immediately demanded, "Why do you do what you do?!"

To his greater shock, Deifell, a 36-year-old Harvard MBA, activist, photographer, consultant, teacher, and leader of a successful nonprofit, didn't know how to answer the question.

"I had become good at talking to funders and writing grants with big theories and detailed plans," he says. "But I had lost touch with the simplicity behind all this complexity. I had to dig deep inside [that night] and try to explain to a 12-year-old why I ran an anti-racism program, and why it was important—in the most essential ways."

The late-night call from a stranger prompted Deifell to pose the question to others and chronicle their answers with photography (www.wdydyd.com). It also forced him to examine his own place in the world. That's no easy task when you've studied business and divinity simultaneously, as he has, or your career straddles the often-contrary intersection between for-profit and nonprofit business, as his does. He felt like he was always on a cusp, and he soon came to refer to his passions as "the power of paradox." It's an idea clearly embodied in Deifell's newest endeavor, a book of photographs by visually impaired children titled *Sound Shadows*, which is due



out from Chronicle Books in 2007.

The book has been brewing in Deifell since 1992, when he decided to find out whether vision was necessary for photography to be meaningful. "As a photographer, I was afraid of losing my eyesight, as a pianist would fear losing some fingers," he says.

After teaching art to blind children in North Carolina for six years, Deifell discovered that not only was sight unnecessary for creating photographs, but the images produced by his students were uniquely powerful. The children shot them by being attentive to their remaining senses—feeling their subjects, listening carefully to their surroundings—and viewers take

away both an impression of how the blind "see" the world and new ways in which we might take each other in.

Deifell puts it another way: "It's blind kids teaching the sighted world how to see themselves better."

—Chuck Terhark

CAFÉ UTNE: Why do you do what you do? Join the discussion with Tony Deifell in the WorkMoney forum: cafeutne.org

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MARDIE OAKES