Interview Transcription - David Rees (0:09:38)

**Jill:** What do you really know about the impetus for MPW?

**David:** Well I think that Cliff Edom was a very smart fellow in that he realized that in order to really advance his ideas of photojournalism and to get our students involved in the greater world it was important to somehow connect with the working professionals, many of who were on the east coast at the time. New York and Chicago. But also on the West Coast. And, so Cliff had the idea that if since we were a land locked, you know were sort of here in the middle of Missouri a good way to get professionals to come here would be to invite them to participate in contests or workshops at Missouri. And so he really started that with POY, pictures of the year and then with the College Photographer of the Year competition and then he had this notion that it was one thing to recognize good photographs in a competition but that it would maybe be to everyone’s benefit to try to really work to help to get help photographers become better. Because he say a lot of silly, what he considered silly things going on in photography where a lot of grip and grins and a lot of set up pictures and Cliff had been really influenced personally by the Farm Security Administration. And the kind of work they did photographing the Dust Bowl and the troubles people had in those tough economic times. You know throughout the Midwest. And other parts of the United States. And so Cliff had this idea that that kind of photography was most significant. And, how, what would be a way to help others learn how to that kind of work. And so, forte first workshop he invited Roy Stryker (SP?) who had been the main organizer for the FSA. He invited Roy Stryker to be the director, honorary director, for the first Missouri Photo Workshop. And Stryker agreed and came and helped to pick the faculty and was here and really helped to set the tone for what the whole workshop was. Which was to do an honest portrayal of a community. The town sort of became a laboratory for the photographers to work in. So, that they would not only work on trying to make better pictures, but they would also create some images that had substance. It was like holding up a mirror to the community. And I think for many of the towns that the workshop goes to, including the first one that happened in Columbia in 1949, it was a novelty for people to seriously work to try and make pictures that described who people were what their relationship was to each other what their economic conditions and the social strata of the community. And, so I think that’s one of the things that you know Cliff maybe was surprised about how successful or how powerful it was because people looked at it and thought I really learned something here. And, one of the things that was really, that’s really remarkable about the workshop is that, yeah they did it one year and it was a good idea, but, what kind of courage did it take to say lets do it again. We’ll find another community. And courage, energy, discipline. I think the workshop had been such a success and people felt so energized by it. The photographers felt so energized by it. They’d tell other people. I think the communities felt like it was a valuable, valuable to them to have this reflection of themselves recorded. And, so there was one workshop and then two and then three.

**Jill:** Sixty-six.

**David:** Sixty-six. And we’re planning sixty-seven.

**Jill:** One last thing, you said before how it was the first time photographers had really taken a look at Columbia. What did you mean by that?

**David**: Well I think it was you know a substantial group of photographers. I can’t remember exactly how many, I mean we’ve got it on the website how many photographers there were. But, you know we’re photographers, we’re not taking a snap here or a snap there and just kind of wandering around. It was photography with intention. Where they are really trying to explain in a visual way what they learned about the community. And one of the things that they discovered was that Columbia really had a race problem. There were maybe people in the community that didn’t see it as a problem. But, the photographs showed that there was a real disparity in the quality of life between those who lived in nice white frame houses and on tree lined streets versus those who lived up on the hill. Where there was tenement housing and it was like they were living in shacks. And I think some of the photographs show that disparity between the downtown Tiger Hotel in the background and kids running between the avenues, as were kind of these ramshackle shacks. And, I think people looked at those photographs and sort of had a wake up call. Even though they had seen them and walked past them, or driven past them, many times. Seeing a photograph of it is somehow different. It distills the reality into something that’s more palpable and which sometimes feels very confronting. And, can’t dismiss it. We can’t just turn our eyes. We look at it and for sometimes we see for the first time what’s really going on. And of course that’s the real strength of still photography. And I think that the workshop try’s to harness that in continuing to have as our approach as photographers trying to find their own stories and pitching their stories and then limiting the amount of film, or number of frames they can use in order to make their pictures. Because, we want them to photograph with intention. Not to sort of photograph randomly and just haphazardly. But, rather to think about what it is they are seeing. And then try to make a photograph of what it that they understand.

**Jill**: Okay, did they always have the 400-frame limit? I know they have it now.

**David:** I think earlier, yeah they’ve had. I’m not sure exactly when the 400 frame limit went in. I think early on there was always before they had rolls of film, they were using sheets of film and had some limit then. And, then with the, I think initially the idea 400 frames; it was 10 rolls of film, which would have been 360 frames. That was the limit because that’s about all the darkroom crew could handle in a week. And, so initially it was I think it was the idea of making sure we get the processing done in a timely fashion and not having to, no more than three rolls a day. One test roll, and three rolls, three days. But, people realized by limiting the number of, the amount of film, the photographers could shoot they were having to husband their resources more carefully. And that that was a good thing. So, even when we went digital, we had the opportunity, we absolutely have the opportunity now to let people photography, make many, many more frames, but we haven’t intentionally limited it so that, so as to kind of impose this thought process. And, it’s one of the things about the workshop the photographers find the most challenging, and, most rewarding.

**Jill:** Is there anything else I should know?

**David**: I don’t think so. You’re doing a paper for?

**Jill**: It’s part of the final project for staff. I took some of the photos, there’s the one of the downtown columns and I re-shot it. So, I figured out where they actually were, I got out in the middle of the road and set up. And, snapped the picture. So, I’m kind of writing about what MPW actually was and then I’m still working on the article. But, yes I’m kind of comparing it to now just what’s changed.