

HUMANS OF ST. LOUIS

adapted by Lindy Drew and Joe Hanrahan

1 MUSIC ZEUS

2 WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER: ASH

A few years ago, a friend and I went out into the heart of St. Louis with a camera and a lot of curiosity.

We were social work students, looking for something creative to do outside of the classroom. And we were inspired by the Humans of New York.

That was a photo story project by Brandon Stanton who takes portraits of people around New York City's streets. His blog has led to a storytelling movement - charitable crowdfunding and a range of Humans books all over the world. So we set out to chronicle the people, the streets and the stories in St. Louis.

Sometimes we'd choose a certain place, or an event. Sometimes we'd just wander.

We'd approach people who seemed available to have a conversation.

We'd introduce ourselves, explain what we were doing and start the process with an open-ended question, like...

What are you most proud of?

Or...What's the hardest advice you ever had to take?

Or, maybe...when's a moment that changed you forever?

We listened.

We photographed

And after thousands of interviews, we made a book

As we pieced it together, we engaged a poet who wrote us a lyrical overview of our city. She named it...THE MAKING OF US.

3 POET: BATES

With a curved spine and a steeled smile

A confidence that can be seen for miles

A beauty revealed

In the peace of our dawns

In the way that we heal

And the moving beyond

In the groove of our grit and the ease of our dusks

Festivals, processions, brewery trucks, and pop-ups

Riding bikes with no hands up

Taking shots from imaginary free-throw lines

And invisible signs

Making North-South divides

We speak our truth from the seat of our stoops

In neighborhoods littered with promise

Surrounded by buildings that dissolve into themselves

Taking their stories down with them

4 WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER ASH

We gathered our best work and strung the stories together so people could see each other, hear each other, and learn from each other.

We'd gotten such an intimate view of St. Louis. And we wanted to show what that looks like from those that live here, love here, or, quite frankly, sometimes hate it here.

We met everyday people.

Some poor. Some entitled.

Some well known. Some without anyone.

Some had hope. Some despaired.

These were real people with very real stories.

Straight talk.

Straight from the street.

These were...Humans of St. Louis.

It all starts with a question

What advice do you have for a large group of people?

5WM25 LARRY

Well...I think they ought to get to know one another. Introduce themselves.

Find out about the people around them.

6 WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER ASH

What's your greatest struggle?

7WF40 Parking in St. Louis during Cardinals baseball. DON

8 WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER ASH

How do you find someone to date in St. Louis?

9F 102

Family Functions. PAYTON

10F

Work. MAYA

11F

Gas Stations. ZAZA

12 WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER ASH

Got any pet peeves about this place?

13M 208 HITTAMANE

Merging.

14M

Provel Cheese. LARRY

15M

"Where did you go to high school?" JOE

16 WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER ASH

What's something you've learned about St. Louis that's a surprise to you?

17M38 ZAZA

In big cities there's a lot of hustle and bustle, but there's still people who want to sit and talk with you or stop and help people in need.

18BM 161 DON

I don't like the rap that our city gets. We're listed in the top 10 crime statistics every year and that's not truly St. Louis. I have not had one problem in any part of the city. I love my city.

19BF80 MAYA

There were plenty of times I wanted to leave, but I did end up staying. I'm "so St. Louis." I've been here since day one. I just want to stay, be the best I can be, and contribute, because all of us can't leave. I walk through U. City and see those stars and I'm like, "That's us." This city gave birth to those same people. The city that gave birth to me and my parents. I just want to stay here and fight for it.

20WorBF 284 PAYTON

One lady who had just moved here said that people were telling her not to go north of Delmar, and she was telling us how she didn't think that that was right. That stood out to me because I definitely see a difference in income and race. I just think people are scared, but I don't think they should be. We're all people. All the people who live here have stuff they want to do. And they have families they want to support.

21WM 207 JOE

I love St. Louis. I love everything about St. Louis. But one thing- the divisions among the people. They're too fragmented. It's like "Oh, we don't talk about that." You go past 270 and it's like "What? I'm not racist. There's no such thing as privilege." Yeah, there is. Or even little petty things like "Where'd you go to high school?" That's a classist thing too. "Did you go to Ladue or did you go to Mehlville?" It's really judgmental. And the rest of the world realizes St. Louis has this big disease. That's what it really is. It's a disease.

22 BF 401 MARGERY

I told a white friend of mine when we were walking down the street, "You see these people that will smile and talk to us both when you and I are together? When I walk down the street, those same people ignore me or don't look my way." So when people tell me, "I don't see color," that's

false. You can't help but to see it. It's the first thing you notice when you see me. Recognize that. You have the privilege to say you don't see it, but I can't do anything but live it.

23WF 279 PAYTON

Once you have your eyes opened, you are going to have to do something different. Racism is everywhere, all the time. I remind myself that people of color don't have the option to look away, and I try to push myself to use these moments to talk, learn something different and challenge myself.

24BF 326 MARGERY

I had a school superintendent tell me that a teacher told him he suspends Black students more often because parents don't fight them on it. When he suspends a white child, then he knows he's going to have to deal with the parents. But when he suspends a Black child, he doesn't have to worry. That's not okay. So people can argue me down all day about it's not the teacher's fault and how not everyone is racist but we all operate out of our biases whether we want to or not. And that's why it's called implicit.

25 WF 281 ZAZA

You know, I don't think I've had any conversations with my family lately about race. And that might be something that I need to change. I've been posting on social media trying to give them a more intimate perspective of events because if they know I was part of it, it will humanize it for them.

26 MUSIC ZEUS

27 WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER ASH

The racism we see here may not be a surprise to some. Maybe the nature, or the depth, of it, is. Another part of that puzzle is our police. For the most part, we respect our police, and look for their protection. What's been your experience?

28 WF 292 PAYTON

I was 17 and my 16-year old brother was dropping me off at a friend's house in Maplewood. He's Indian. We're both adopted. And he got pulled over for DWB. Driving While Black. The cop made us go through all kinds of ID stuff. When he finally realized I was his sister, a white woman sitting in the car with him - everything was fine.

29 BM 293 DON

I was driving down the street with my wife. Then, police lights. When the officer drove up and asked for my driver's license, I said, "No problem, Officer. Did I do something wrong?" "Let me just see your license." It was this sort of arrogance. I think people deserve courtesy. If you want police officers to be respected, then there's nothing wrong with you telling me why you stopped me. Matter of fact, I think it's required that you tell me if I ask. I said, "Officer, are you going to let me know why you stopped me? Because I'M a police officer, too." The look on his face was just profound. His next question was, "Well, why didn't you tell me?" I said, "I never identify myself as a police officer because I like to see how I'm going to be treated." The officer apologized and was really embarrassed. I take those opportunities to teach officers that we're no better than anyone else. The only thing that makes us different is that when we put that uniform on and we put that badge on, we've taken an oath to protect the constitution and the laws and the State of

Missouri. After that eight-hour shift, I take that uniform off, I come home, and I'm Melissa's dad, I'm Marie's husband, and my mom and dad are still Mom and Dad.

30BM295 ZAZA

What we've done over time is pull our police away from the community. They drive around in 4,000 pounds of glass, steel and rubber and want nothing but the facts. Well, we the public want contact. Do you know your neighborhood police officers? Do they ever stop and talk to you? Everybody's not going to be able to have a beat officer who walks the street. But there are things we can do to put them back in touch with the community. That's going to make them feel better about what they do.

31BF 301 MARGERY

We had a community meeting called "Community Policing: What it is, What It Ain't." There's such a broad range of views about what community policing is. Is it a police riding on his bicycle and talking to you and passing out candy to the kids? Or is it when police are actually being stakeholders in that community? How are we going to have a uniform approach to policing and what happens when those officers don't do that? What happens when they violate their own code of ethics or their own policies? Why are there no consequences when we know people have done wrong and we can't ever get an answer for that?

32 BM 306 DON

As we walk through neighborhoods, we address trash pick-up, abandoned buildings and vehicles, grass needing to be cut. Those are the initial things on the surface that get us in. When we come back, people are more familiar, more comfortable. Now we've helped them. Now we can talk and find out about their issues. We're having to take baby steps. It's always been about enforcement. Enforcement goes hand-in-hand with crime. Engagement goes hand-in-hand with solutions. Imagine every police officer who you encounter has their mindset on engagement, not just on enforcement. You start to worry and care about people, and it's like, "How can I do more?"

33 MUSIC ZEUS

34 WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER ASH

What's your biggest need right now?

35BM186 JOE

I left the shelter after I woke up at four this morning. They turn the lights on at five. I had to be out by six. If I had my own apartment, I'd be cleaning up, watching soap operas, getting ready to fix myself something to eat. But bottom line, I'm glad I'm still here. That is what I'm happy about.

36BF239 MAYA

I don't know. My brother is 23, and he's been using heroin for five years. He doesn't want to come around the family. He prefers to be alone. I was talking to another of my brothers about it, and he kind of woke me up. He said, "He just needs to feel loved. Regardless of how you

display it, if he doesn't feel it, perception is reality. I thought "Wow. He just needs to feel love. Everybody just wants to feel loved. Everybody." I went to where he hangs out, and told him if he ever needed a shower, or something to eat, let me know. I told him I loved him, I'm there for him, and I'm going to come back. Sometimes when you're in a space, it's hard to come out. I'm sure there's a reason he's there. There are things that lead to being in that space.

37WM107 LARRY

Know what got me off heavy drugs and probably saved my life. Hockey. When the Blues first came to town in '67, I was doing crystal meth. I said "Know what? If I want to play, I can't keep doing this crap." Told my friends, "Don't come around me if you're doing it. I'm staying with hockey." Now I'm happy with my beer, hockey and music.

38 WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER ASH

What's the best advice someone gave you, or you gave someone else?

39 BM 123 HITTAMANE

My mom told me to be my own man at all times and here I am. When I was 19 I was walking out the door and somebody called me a "faggot." I walked back into the house, ran to the mirror and said, "What am I going to do?" And the man in the mirror said, "You cannot hand somebody your phone bill, electric bill, or even your rent, like, 'Will you pay these for me?' Bitch, get it together! When you walk outside, use the sidewalk as a runway. And you let them have it!"

40WF125 PAYTON

One night I was getting ready to close, and this old man comes in. 60s-70s, nice suit, walking with a cane, good-looking old man. And he's looking at the thigh highs. He bought some and we wound up talking. He said 'You know, these are for me. Back in my day, I couldn't tell anybody. I feel like a woman. I always have.' To hear him talk about it, it broke my heart. Five months later, in comes this older woman. Long, beautiful dress. Nice perfume. Makeup, done really well, walking with a cane. She said "Remember me?" When she left, I broke down in tears, because at her age she only has so many years left. But she's going to live out the last part of her years being how she wants to be.

41 BF 465 BATES

I was talking to a pastor of the church. He said "You're a lesbian woman, and you're going to hell and God's not happy." I told him "Have you ever thought that God could make me this way?" I quoted scripture. "Do not judge, or you will be judged.' You, being a man of God, how can you stand there and judge me? You don't know. You're not God. You're just a man." I didn't mean to be disrespectful, but I said, "You're just a man and I'm not following you. I'm following the Man above."

42 BM 126 DON

I got a daughter, and I've never disrespected her by saying "Why are you that way?" She finally came to me and said "Daddy, why didn't you ever say anything about it? Mama did, brothers, uncles, aunties. But not you." I said, "Baby, I can't choose who you love and who you want to be with. That has to be your decision. I love you for who you are. As long as I love you and you love me back, that's enough for me."

43 POET: BATES

We nod and wave
Crack toothy grins at strangers
Move in time to musical drive-by
Hold thick-textured names
and give our children the same honor
Or burden
Depending on whom you ask
We claim blocks as if they too bear our own names
For these streets be the keeps of our histories

44 WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER ASH

Can you tell me a secret?

45 BM 68 ZEUS

A lot of people don't ever come up to me. They walk past me. And I'm a friendly person. All the time.

46 WM 160 LARRY

Coming from a smaller town, I like to say "hi" to everybody that passes. Some people don't even want to look at you or they look at you crazy, like, "Why are we talking? What's going on?" Everybody says St. Louis is dangerous and it's a bad place to live, but it's really not. So far, I like it.

47 BF72 MARGERY

I can make anybody feel comfortable. I can make people feel like they can talk to me about anything. The only thing you have to do is listen.

48 MUSIC ZEUS

49 WRITER PHOTOGRAPHER ASH

What's a moment that you knew would change you forever?

50 WF 89 ZAZA

I was on this dark journey that I had going on. Negative mind chatter. Very little belief in myself. Absolutely no dreaming. And literally said to God, "Today's the day you want me to go? Please take me because I'm done." And that was the day I picked up the phone and called my good friend and coach and said, "I need your help. I have no tools. I don't know how to handle this any longer." When I got off the phone, I said to God, "Could you hold on to that, because I found some hope." And I never looked back.

51 BM 88 HITTAMANE

My daddy and my mama got one child together, and that's me. My daddy's got eight kids, and my momma's got eight kids. I'm the second oldest on my daddy's side, and the second youngest on my momma's side. My daddy's got six boys and two girls. My momma's got six girls and two boys. And if you think I'm lyin, I can name all of them. Yolanda, Terry, Carmen...

I'm naming my momma's side...Yolanda, Terry, Carmen, Mary, Becky, Skinny, Me and Charles. On my daddy's side Ashley, Nala, Johnny...I got three brothers named Johnny on my daddy's side. All the baby mamas named their first born Jonathan. So three Johnnies, Ashley, Nala, Travis. Who didn't I name? Me. And did I say Charles? So you got to think of all the people I can run into at any times. It's A LOT of people.

52 WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER ASH

When's a time you've gone above and beyond to look out for St. Louis?

53 WM 501 LARRY

I'm a sucker for second-tier cities. If you look critically at St. Louis, we're truly a second-tier city. We're not San Francisco or New York. But St. Louis is a city where if you just want to try something, you just do it. That's what I like about these funky little cities, and I run into other people who want to do the same type of stuff. They're like, "If you see something that's broken, go fix it. If you see an opportunity, go seize it."

54 BF 388 MAYA

Oh yeah! Like, I was in my car, at a light, and I see a kid sitting on a bench. He throws his cup across traffic to a trash can, he misses, and it bounces in the middle of the street. I say "Hey! You're not gonna pick that up?" He turns away. My daughter says "Mom, don't!" I say "Fuck that!" I park, I get out of my car, he's got three friends with him, but I say, "So you're just gonna mess up our neighborhood like that?" He says "Maaan, I was finna get up and get it." My daughter's glaring at me through the window, but I say "I'm gonna get in my car and drive off, and I'm gonna just trust that you're gonna do the right thing and put it in the trash, baby."

55 WF 391 PAYTON

I became the neighborhood chauffeur on our street. I didn't have a car, but I had a driver's license. Some of my neighbors didn't want to drive anymore or they didn't feel good, so they'd call me up. One had both a Mercedes and a Hummer. They said "Which one you wanna drive?" I said "The Hummer." Some neighbors started saying to me "Dang! How many cars you got?" One neighbor was going blind and can't drive anymore. She'd call and say "I don't want to bother you." I'd say, "You're not bothering me. I'm blessed and thankful to be able to do something to help somebody."

56BM 379 DON

I give certain kids bikes based on their grades if I know they can't afford them. I check their attitudes and their speech and if everyone's correct with me and their grades go up, I let them choose any one off the lot. They bring me their progress reports. If they had a D and bring it up to a B, "WHOA!" I tell them, "Pick one." Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays I try to have all the bikes out. Prices are very cheap and negotiable. If you have a kid with you, it's automatically \$5 off.

57 WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER ASH

Tell me something special about your relationship with your kids?

58 BM110 HITTAMANE

At my kids' school, they have what's called "Donuts for Dads." I can count on one hand how many dads show up. I'm at every event they have. I take off work. Yeah, it costs me. But I tell my boss this is an opportunity I can never get back. If I don't show up for PTA meetings, for "Donuts for Dads," or their graduation, if I don't show up, I can't get that back.

59 WM 250 JOE

We knew nothing about Down syndrome, and it was scary when our daughter was born. But you find out she's more like every typical kid than different. She loves anything a child her age would like doing. Now that we know something about Down syndrome, and we know her, it doesn't seem like anything to worry about. She never gives up. It takes her longer and it is harder for her to do some things, but she will not quit and does not get frustrated. She's also made me a better, patient, more caring person.

60 BF 311 MARGERY

I was at a school, we were doing a group, talking to kids about how people perceived them, and how they perceived their community. And one of the kids said "Look up." The ceiling had water stains, plaster was loose, cracking. And the kid said, "Every day I walk in here and the condition of this building tells me what people think of me and my community." These kids. They know. They know more than we know, and more than we give them credit for. You know, kids can shut you up.

61 BM 519 ZEUS

During the 250th anniversary of the city, the Missouri History Museum did a time capsule, and I wrote a note, a letter to the city to be opened 2064. I wrote this letter to my daughter, and what I expect for her 50 years from now - where, hopefully, she'll be living in a community that fully embraces all of the talents that diversity has brought - racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation - all of it. Hopefully our city will embrace that so she can feel she can be all of herself.

62 BF 365 MAYA

I sit in the shade of trees I did not plant and drink from wells that I did not dig. People were doing work before I got here. The cycle continues. And there's always something the next generation is doing that the former generation found inappropriate. For us, it was hip-hop. Before that rock 'n roll. There were hippies with long hair, not it's dreadlocks. How quickly we forget were in the same seat long ago. Same things you wanted people to do for you are the same things people are crying out for now, even if they're not using the same words to do it.

63 POET BATES

So we cast our lot into community gardens
Organize struggles through the heart of our artists
Like the swift way that hips sway
To merengue and djembe
We celebrate and play; meditate and pray
With hard rock ground into a solemn blues
A litany of symphonies, jazzy beat-infused
Freedom chants from bass-filled amps
The aroma of mocha, samosas, and okra
Scent of magnolia

Old sofas, reupholstered
Becoming new seats of power
Living room convenings, town hall meetings
We build institutions from grassroot movements
Opened up to "Shut it Down!"
Gave a bird's-eye view of being "on the ground"
Our missions are strengthened by mounds of conviction
Unbound by convention, unwound, and unflinching

64 BM 509 HITTAMANE

St. Louis is a love-to-hate kind of city. They say it's one of the worst cities in the country to live in. If it is one of the worst cities, it doesn't feel like that. I feel it makes you a stronger individual. It makes you humble, and everyone out here's a got a purpose. There are a lot of go-getters. And we're living good lives here.

65 BM (But can be a female) 513 ZAZA

If you're not from here and you come here, you will be from here. You'll become one of us. There's no way around it. If you can go to a neighborhood, and they accept you, they're not going to let anything happen to your kids, or you, or your yard. I wouldn't trade it for the world. I might go to other places because I'm open to suggestion. But I know I'll always come back here because of the people.

66 BM 171 LARRY

I've been all over this country, Canada, and Mexico, driving a tractor trailer truck for 18 years. Sometimes I'd be so glad to get back here and see that Arch.

67 WM 514 JOE

If this city ever starts to feel small to you, just try to bike down every street. Somebody showed me a post by a guy who did that down every block of Manhattan. I finished the same thing in the City of St. Louis. It ended up being 1,800 miles of streets. It took me about three and a half years of daily grinding: 1,304 rides and over 914 days. For the last six months, I was doing what I came to call "cleanup rides" where I'd bike to a neighborhood five miles away just to hit three or four one-block streets I had missed. I had a blast and learned so much. I woke up knowing that rain or shine I was gonna go out and see a part of our city.

68 BF 374 MARGERY

St. Louis is a body, and it has a heart. And it's kind of split. See what I'm saying. You have to take that heart from it being split and put it together. And that's what this city needs. It needs to be put together. It's a beautiful city.

69 POET BATES

We play nice with our vices
And find kindness through crises
Like bricks and the mortar
we build the future from disorder
We cultivate kinships and navigate our past
To stand at the intersections of our connectedness

In the shared spaces that gather us
Wearing capes that match our vigor
And a pride as deep and wide as the river
Like an ancient brick mansion
This pride lays our city's foundation
A calloused hand, beautifully rough
This pride
Takes pride
In the making of us.

70 WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER ASH

HUMANS. This project...at its simplest...is the practice of inviting someone to be comfortable enough to tell their story, and then listening so they feel heard. It's creating a space for somebody to divulge and unload, to reminisce and to see their own story reflected back to them. Sometimes subjects were surprised they opened up to a stranger in such little time. Sometimes they cried or asked for a hug. Sometimes they said yes to be interviewed in person but no to sharing it online. Other times, the roles reversed and I was the one they'd look up and down, wondering, "Where are you from and what are you doing in my neighborhood?"

And that became our book. These wildly different...markedly distinctive...truly one of a kind... Humans of St. Louis.

71 MUSIC ZEUS

END