

Joni Lohr

"Buildings serve as a mirror in which the inhabitants see their own character reflected. They are built with meaning, used with purpose, and ultimately come to illustrate the spirit not only for their architects but of those who live, love, work, and suffer within them. Even in their disuse they are symbolic and show shifts in values, finances, and ambitions."

~Matthew Christopher, "Abandoned America"

I am a visual storyteller who is deeply compassionate about the people and places in my world. My photographs are a legacy, my way to document and preserve moments that will never happen again, to bear witness to what has existed and will, ultimately, disappear forever. I am always observing, always searching for a strong statement of the changing human experience that I can capture and share.

My interest in urban architecture, particularly cities in transition, often draws me to the grittier parts of cities or towns where people have left forlorn and empty spaces open to the elements. The reasons for abandonment are many perhaps fire, flood, or foreclosure due to unpaid taxes; disuse, unpaid loans, death or family disputes. Discovering and exploring these places, now devoid of people and commerce, is a fascinating, frightening and often sad process.

Stepping into an abandoned structure brings a sense of adventure tinged with melancholy: The first things I notice are the damp coldness, the deep quiet, and the absence of people; then I am awestruck by the devastation yet drawn to the beauty of these shattered spaces and the untold stories of lives interrupted. My heart quickens as I venture further into their interiors. Some are blank canvases, shorn to the studs, but others contain tantalizing remnants of the people who once occupied these spaces.

I sense the spirit of these places, magic totems that resist the rust and rot of their circumstances, and I am moved to document their stories. I look beyond the inevitable ruin of these buildings to honor the memory and legacy of those who went before, to reflect upon our fleeting presence in the universe, and, hopefully, to create meaning out of that experience.