

IN THE PRESENCE OF
FAMILY

🌿 Brooklyn Portraits 🌿



PHOTOGRAPHS BY **ANN ROSEN**

Dedicated to Elaine Waldman, my mentor and dear friend, and to the memory of Marian Griffiths, always upbeat and inspiring.

Previous page: Atif, Hind, Ramy, and Fatima El-Baghir are from Sudan, Africa. They came to the United States in 1997. Atif is a translator for the United States Government. Hind is a lawyer. Both children were born in the United States and attend Brooklyn New School, a progressive public school in the Carroll Gardens neighborhood.

Brooklyn New School, 2003



Natasha, Ella, Carla, and Ashley are all cousins, born in Brooklyn, with diverse ancestries—Trinidad, Haiti, and Guyana. Caribbean music is their favorite to listen to. “Family means to be there for each other...to be a support.”

Brooklyn Public Library, Grand Army Plaza, 2004

The art of Ann Rosen matters. It matters because it raises our awareness of those around us, of their lives, struggles, and achievements. And since the awareness tends to generate a greater degree of understanding, it ultimately leads toward a higher degree of empathy and tolerance.

Rosen began photographing families in 1992. The series evolved through several stages, starting with hand painting color photographs, moving to manipulating black and white images, and presently exploring the technology of color digital images.

The notion of family itself has greatly evolved since the 1990's. As Stacy Roupas, who is photographed here with her longtime friends and roommates, Kris and Cortney, states: “Family is a concept that can be self-defined.” The nuclear family—father- mother- children—is no longer a prevailing model. The structure is dramatically changing. Newly created families with children from previous marriages, gay and lesbian partners, children within same-sex families, multiracial adoption, and, of course, one-parent families, are all part of our world, and all are documented in the work. Rosen is not seeking out the families. Instead, she sets up a situation where those wanting to have the moment of their family life documented are invited to approach the photographer. The occasions are frequently street fairs in Brooklyn's Park Slope, Sunset Park, Carroll Gardens, or Cobble Hill neighborhoods. The artist sets up a booth comprised of a simple cloth backdrop. She is outdoors, just one more booth at the event. This unassuming presentation encourages those strolling through the fair to have the enjoyable moment immortalized—many want to retain it in a more tangible form than just a pleasant memory of a sunny summer afternoon. During the rest of the year, Rosen sets up several day-long workshops where people

have a chance to select a convenient time to have a family portrait taken. Again, there is the cloth backdrop that adds a certain endearingly old-fashioned quality to the image. The portraits are set up in a classically formal arrangement, as well—frontal views, clearly lit faces, sitters arranged into loose triangular configurations. But as opposed to the historical portraits, there are no props here—the simplicity of the setting makes these images strong and contemporary. They are about people, usually the ones who feel confident and comfortable enough about their life situation that they want to have it formally acknowledged. There are telling gestures, however. From the position of a hand, the inclined posture of a body, or from the look extended to others, we can sense the alliances, hidden power plays, and tensions within the group's structure.

Family portraits have always been a sought-after art form. They also provided testimony about the socio-political climate of their time. Italian Renaissance portraits depicted in an exquisitely detailed manner the powerful families of the era. With the shift of power from nobility to rich merchants, the golden era of 17th century Dutch painting established a different model—an ordinary but affluent family enjoying the everyday events in a multigenerational setting. Similarly, historical American painting described common families often painted by traveling itinerant artists.

With the advent of photography the situation changed dramatically—even the less wealthy could afford to commemorate their special family gatherings. However, it is only recently that we can see the blend of cultures and customs richly documented in the genre of family photography. Rosen is one of the photographers truly committed to the field. By extension, she greatly expands our comprehension of the pressing issues of race, gender, and changing social dynamics of our time.

Charlotta Kotik

Curator Emerita, Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum

**“Our home is like a family. Kristen, Stacy, and Cortney. Long-time friends....
Family is a concept that can be self-defined.”**

Stacy, Kris, and Cortney are Americans. Stacy’s ethnic background is Greek, Kris’s Italian and Spanish, Cortney’s Irish and Scottish. Stacy’s grandparents are immigrants from Greece. She is a teacher.

Brooklyn Pride Street Fair, 2004



“We love each other.”

Benita is a black Detroit. In her family are her son Rush, her daughter Memphis, and her husband Chris. Her family is black, Native American, and Irish-American from Boston. Her grandparents are from Alabama and Mississippi. She is an attorney.

Brooklyn Pride Street Fair, 2004



“As a multiracial family I think it is important to recognize and represent oneself as exactly what you are and all of the things you are, not just how society might want to pigeonhole you.”

Feather was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey. She has been in Brooklyn for 11 years. She is East Indian, white, 1/8 Native American and 1/8 black. She has been married for 14 years. Her daughter Maya was born in Brooklyn. Before the baby, Feather was a professional fashion model. Tomo, their friend, was born in Tokyo, Japan. She has been in the United States 20 years, nine of them in Brooklyn. She is an architectural model builder.

Fabulous Fifth Avenue, 2004



“As a child, I grew up in the wonderful plethora of Chinese, Southern, African, New York, and American cultures. My brothers and sister and I consider ourselves luckier than most because we were exposed to so much diversity from the beginning of our existence.”

“I have always considered my family lucky to have more than one culture to draw resources from for our personal growth. Growing up multiracial during a time when it was not so commonplace and often not accepted helped us as a family and individually develop a strong sense of self, inner strength of character. It gave us a flexible mind set—and respect, tolerance, and openness to people, views, ideologies, and cultures different from our own.”

Ying is a native New Yorker and Brooklynite. Her mother was born in Charleston, South Carolina and was Chinese and black. Her father was born in Shenzhen, China, just outside Hong Kong. She works for the City of New York Parks and Recreation, and is also an avid quilter. She has had the honor of having her work exhibited at Lefferts Homestead, the Botanical Gardens, Medgar Evers College, and the Arsenal Gallery. Her daughter, Moi Kwei, her son, Simeon Shou Ming, and her granddaughter, Maya Le Xing, were born in Brooklyn.

Christmas Studio, 2003



“Our mixed heritage—Italian/Scottish/Ukrainian and Japanese/Jewish—add to the richness of our family life.”

Beth, of Italian/Scottish/Ukrainian decent, was born in Brooklyn. Justin, of Japanese/Jewish decent, was born in Manhattan. They have lived in New York City all their lives. Beth, 32, has always resided in Brooklyn, while Justin has been there for ten years. They have been a couple for 14 years. Beth is a teacher at Brooklyn New School and Justin is an architect. In this picture, Beth is pregnant, expecting in three months.

Christmas Studio, 2003



“I am 90 years old. I was the only child of ten to leave Pennsylvania and stay in New York. My parents had 18 children, but eight died in the diphtheria epidemic. I love Brooklyn and have lived in Park Slope in the same apartment for 63 years. I’ll never move from here. It’s the best neighborhood.”

Mary was born in Duryea, Pennsylvania, near Scranton. She’s been living in New York City for 70 years. Both her parents were from Warsaw, Poland. She is a retired long-distance operator. Her daughter and great granddaughter are pictured here, as well. Her daughter is in real estate and her great granddaughter is an EMS worker in Mt. Kisco.

Fabulous Fifth Avenue, 2004



“Happy Family!!”

Kaoru was born in Tokyo, Japan. She has been in Brooklyn since 1992. She is a business assistant for energy trading. Aja and Aya, her daughters, were born in Brooklyn. They are Japanese and African American.

Fabulous Fifth Avenue, 2004



“I love my little family!”

Vicki was born in Seattle, Washington, and Jim in Roanoke, Virginia. They have been in New York City since 1978 and 1981. They have been together eight years, married almost six years. Vicki is a teacher, and Jim is an artist. Vicki is Irish, Scottish, and English, and Jim is Irish and German. Their son Jacob was born May 8, 1992 at Beth Israel hospital, and Sam was born August 10, 2000 at St. Vincent’s Hospital.

Brooklyn Pride Street Fair, 2004



“My grandparents are Koreans and they immigrated to Japan in 1932. They are proud of being Koreans, and my parents did not become Japanese citizens even though they were born in Japan and so was I. When I grew up, I had a deep identity issue as a third generation Korean born in Japan, and because of that issue I became conscious about equal rights, justice, and fighting against racism.”

“Now both my husband and I are citizens of the United States and I am proud to be a citizen of this great country. My husband is in the U.S. Army National Guard and he is currently deployed in Iraq. We are against the war and it was very hard for him to go to Iraq and for me to understand why he needs to go there. I stopped asking questions about why my husband had to go to Iraq, and I support him for his safe return. There are soldiers out there who are hoping and fighting for peace. I am happy to live in Brooklyn and send Miu and Dan to Brooklyn New School, which is a public school where families of different backgrounds cooperate, stimulate, and educate children together in harmony. I believe that peace and love start from the family and community.”

Rie is Korean Japanese. Her husband Carl Hosannah Jr. is from Guyana, South America. They both moved to the United States when they were around 20 years old. Rie came to the United States to see the world outside Japan after graduating college. Junior, her husband, came to the United States after his father had immigrated there. Rie is an office manager and Junior is a social worker. They have two children, Dan and Miu.

Christmas Studio, 2005



“We try to keep our Philippine heritage alive in our lives—through food, customs, traditions, and stories. We enjoy living in Brooklyn and New York, partaking in its artistic, cultural, and creative outlets.”

Fabiola and Dave were born in the Philippines. Fabiola has been in the United States and New York for 25 years, and Dave for 13 years. They have lived in Brooklyn for eight years. Fabiola is a daycare owner, and Dave is a hospital registrar. They have been together nine years. Their children Gabriel, Casielle, and Julian were all born in New York City.

Gowanus Studio Tour, 2003



“My mom’s side of the family tossed a coin to decide whether to leave Scotland for the U.S. or Australia. That’s how they came to America in the early 1900’s.”

Rose is of Cuban-Irish/Scottish decent and Doug is Polish/Italian. Their daughter, Lily, is 100% Guatemalan. Her paternal grandmother came to the United States in 1919 and settled in Chattanooga, Tennessee. There she met and married her grandfather, who was from Bolivia. Rose is a clinical social worker. She loves her work at St. Vincent’s Hospital.

Brooklyn Pride Street Fair, 2004



“Our religion is important to our family. It is the nucleus that keeps us together during all phases of our life—through the good and tough times.”

Carlos’s grandparents are from Puerto Rico and his wife Chezerin’s are from Peru. They have three children, Sarah Katelyn (pictured here), Natalie Marie, and Carlos David Jr. Carlos and Chezerin are very close to their extended family, especially their grandmothers and great-grandmothers—Gladys (‘Nana’), Rosa Ines (‘Mama Rosa’), Juanita (‘Abuela’), and Angela (‘Mamita’). Carlos’s great grandmother was originally from Mexico. In the early 1900’s she immigrated to Puerto Rico, where she married his great grandfather and had his grandmother, who subsequently immigrated to Brooklyn. Although he was raised in Brooklyn, his grandparents made sure that he experienced the rich Puerto Rican culture—the food, dances, music, art—alive in New York city. Carlos is in banking. He’s a risk management and legal regulatory compliance officer. His profession is important, but his faith and family come first.

Christmas Studio, 2004



**“Hay qué vivé la vida!
Family is the moment in which we live!”**

Liz and Victor are of Puerto Rican/Portuguese decent. They were both born in Brooklyn, New York and have lived here all their lives. Liz is a manager for the MTA and Victor is a mechanic. They have been married for 18 years. Divi is their daughter.

Fabulous Fifth Avenue, 2004



“I love eating foods that I grew up with. Although I don’t cook many of the foods I ate back in Jamaica, my mom, who lives close by, will cook such dishes as ackee and saltfish or curry goat with rice and peas. Then, it’s like I am back home in Jamaica.”

Both of Jacqueline’s parents were born and raised in Jamaica. They had four children, of which she is the youngest. Her mother came to the United States in her mid-30’s, leaving Jacqueline and her siblings to be raised by their great grandmother, great aunt, and grandmother. This was common among many immigrants, especially those from the Caribbean. Jacqueline immigrated to the United States in 1974. She became a teacher. Currently, she lives with her younger son, William, and her elder daughter, Zindzi. She has a large extended family with whom she is close.

Brooklyn Pride Street Fair, 2007



“To acknowledge what happens to us, between us, as families, is to win life’s wisdom, an existential, personal wisdom, claimed no other way.” (*The Art of Family: Rituals, Imagination, and Everyday Spirituality*, Gina Bria, Dell, NY, 1998)

People in familial relationships, their gestures, their expressions, their connections are my subject. Through the medium of photography, I explore issues of race, gender, class, and family diversity.

As patterns of immigration affect socialization in our cities, the construct of family transforms. In my photography, I unveil the interactions and relationships between individuals in families from Brooklyn neighborhoods.

In the Presence of Family began in 1992, when my older son began kindergarten. In the public school he attended, I saw, for the first time, a wide variety of families. I was fascinated by this heterogeneity and felt that this was important to document. Thus, this project was born. In the subsequent years, I have photographed many families, each with a unique blend of cultures, customs, and heritage: Sudanese, Puerto Rican, African American, Caribbean, Japanese, Chinese, Native American, Philippino, Caucasian, Scottish, Polish, Cuban, and Italian.

The photographs are color digital images. Originally, family members came to my studio for portraits and to share their personal histories. Over time, I felt that I wanted to reach more people, so I decided to set up a booth at street fairs in Brooklyn. My first fair, supported by a grant from the Brooklyn Arts Council, was ‘Fabulous Fifth Avenue’ in Park Slope, in May of 2004. Every summer since then, I’ve set up booths to photograph families. Inspired by these experiences, I developed a workshop at the Brooklyn Public Library, at Grand Army Plaza, at which I continued to photograph families. In August of 2007, I expanded my project to include families from the Five Myles Gallery summer block party in Crown Heights. All the images in this book were taken at these venues. The statements and family histories were written by each family.

Ann Rosen
Brooklyn, New York
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Back cover: Our family lives in Scarsdale, New York. I am married and have two children—Jacob, born in 1995 and Hannah, born in 2000. We are a family of four generations. My grandmother, who currently lives on her own, was born in Russia in 1910.

In 2008, I organized a sixteen-person family trip to Romania to investigate our roots, in honor of my son Jacob's bar mitzvah. My paternal grandfather was born there in a small village called Turga-Lapus, in Transylvania. The area was part of Hungary at that time, but was later transferred to Romania. When we explored Transylvania, we found the house in which he grew up. We also had a bar mitzvah service in Dej, Romania, in the one remaining synagogue in the region. In 1944, my great grandmother and her extended family were sent to Auschwitz from this town. We had the first bar-mitzvah in that synagogue since 1944 with the chief rabbi of Romania and the remnants of the Jewish community from the entire region. Both Jacob and Hannah grasped the importance of this trans-generational and trans-cultural experience.

Jacob attends Scarsdale Middle School and Hannah attends the Quaker Ridge Elementary School. Hannah wants to be an Obstetrician when she grows up.

Gowanus Studio Tour, 2003