



(Reviews for SKIP)

Photo Eye

Skip

Photographs and text by David Newsom.

Perceval Press, Santa Monica, 2005. 41 pp., color illustrations throughout, 6x9 1/4".

ICP's email newsletter contains a "Photo Tip of the Month, which this past October was all about collecting photobooks. Daniel Thiem (web coordinator and senior sales manager of the ICP Store) suggested that with so many books on the market it basically comes down to taste, collectibility and price. True enough. And for me, this little gem of a book fits the criteria. I could get lost in the photographs of snowcovered thistles that blanket the endpapers, the warm sunlight and blue skies. But the heart of this book is the story of Skip, a 50-something-year-old child who has finally found his place in Idaho, and of a family who has finally found a sense of peace. SKIP, in many ways, is a personal letter with photos from actor and photographer David Newsom to us, his audience. He describes the book as a kind of poem in images and words, about [his] oldest brother, [his] family, and the pursuit of home. It is also a flat out love letter to the Teton Valley in Idaho. The vibrant color photographs taken over a span of ten years portray a world of reverie that the lens of his plastic Holga camera enhances. Skip, a man with mental disabilities, probably never knew the beauty that would await him in Idaho. There is such a stark difference between the walls of institutions and group homes of New Jersey and the majestic landscape of the West, and clearly the influence of the expansiveness of the landscape has done wonders for him. David and Skip— brothers who grew up divided by fourteen years of age, geography and understanding—exist in the exact same world of the eternal moment of the photograph. With a print run of only 1000, Perceval Press has indeed made this personal and visual narrative a collectible.

-Larissa Leclair

Pop Matters

Melissa Fischer

***Skip* _Photographs by David Newsom**

David Newsom's *Skip* is a photographic essay that tells the story of the photographer's brother, who is his elder by fourteen years. Through images that work conspiratorially and in conjunction with text, we gradually perceive that there is something strangely unique about Skip; our suspicion is confirmed with page 11's revelation, "He was born with a learning disability that made him 'The Skipper' of his own ship." Newsom goes on to describe Skip's 17 years of living in an institution, a stay that would taint him with fearfulness and distrust, as institutions do so well. By the time he's released and eventually moves to Idaho to live with his sister, he's capable of walking the dogs, but still hasn't learned to brush his teeth.

Looking at some of Newsom's images, one strains to determine whether the structures presented are truly houses and not plastic models photographed in such a way as to look as though they were real landscapes. "Little Shack" is one such image, and Newsom's perfect focus on the foreground's dried and brittle plant life creates an almost supernatural contrast with the hue of blue sky in the image's background. Page 4's "Picnic in the New World" reads like a photo-realistic painting, and shows Skip in profile, sitting by the water as he looks at a map.

Newsom succeeds in creating a moving, thoughtful, and provocative collection of images that cooperate with words to form a unique object in the format of a book. After its last page, one has an experience similar to that felt after finishing a great novel, in that somehow, we've divined more substance than what words alone are capable of conveying.



(**Reviews for SKIP**)

PLAYBACK : stl

David Newsom *Skip* (Perceval Press; 104 pgs; \$35)

David Newsom, who has graced many a television screen as an actor on popular network shows, has turned inward and crafted an expressive family album in *Skip*, the effusively colorful photographic story of his developmentally disabled brother Lloyd (Skip) Curtis Newsom Jr. In the concise snippets of essays accompanying the images, Newsome relays his brother's struggles, giving readers a narrative to fill in the vast spaces of landscape in southeast Idaho that fulcrum the book. Skip's troubles began early, as Newsom writes, "Excitable and prone to grab or push, Skip more than once placed his baby sister in the doctor's office, so he was moved to a state facility in south Jersey." Like it does to so many, such confinement left Skip with irreparable fears and a sense of distrust. "He still keeps nearly all he owns in his pockets—a Bible, the broken flashlight, his flashcards, some breath spray, an old bottle of cologne, his ball cap—the nervous habit of a boy protecting what's his."

The photographs in *Skip* succeed in presenting the vision of a damaged being without any of the fetishized voyeurism sometimes celebrated in documenting broken lives. Newsom, as maybe only a brother could have done, enraptures the images around his brother, so that Skip is perfectly at home in each frame, an organic part of the environment that gives Newsom's images a distinctive otherworldly feel, like 2004's "Untitled," which is colored with hope, rays of sunlight filling the backdrop, as Skip stands with his hands on his hips looking off into the distance. Others, like 2003's "Untitled," are brewed with paranoia, as Skip looks off to his right, seemingly ensnared by his own shadow. *Skip* is a perfect marriage of narrative and picture, a family tale sketched in melancholy hopefulness.

- Shandy Casteel