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The Sydney Morning Herald

Mike Brodie's polaroids embellish and deconstruct the mythology of the US nomad

By Ella Rubell
August 14, 2015

Mike Brodie was 18 when he hopped his first train.

It was there that he met an eccentric crowd of other train-hoppers, the vagrants and bohemians of the US road.

Brodie became one of them and began a four-year journey, compulsively photographing the people he met and the places he saw. The lush polaroids in his recent book, *Tones of Dirt and Bone*, carry a rawness and an honesty that both embellishes and deconstructs the mythology of the American nomad.

"In my mind, I kept thinking, one day these trains will stop, or one day these people will stop riding them, they will grow up and move on. So I just kept digging deeper and taking the photos until I was satisfied with what I had," Brodie said in an interview with *Mass Appeal*.



Olympia, Washington, from Mike Brodie's series, Tones of Dirt and Bone.
Photo: Mike Brodie

Born in Arizona, Brodie began photographing in 2004 when he came upon a polaroid camera and taught himself to use it, adopting the moniker "The Polaroid Kidd".

Shooting on the now discontinued Time Zero film, he had only ten precious frames per box, which enforced a photographic discipline on his practice from the start. With its peculiar hues, the Time Zero also lent a poetry and a romance to the often haggard faces and disordered scenes.

The creamy tones and silky texture of his images lend a calmness to what was in reality a very perilous existence. His train-hopping days were numbered and when he returned back home, he hung up his camera too.

"I always 100 per cent felt like an observer, it was unfortunate, but how I felt. Now, by putting down the camera, I can be a 100 per cent participant and really truly enjoy life," Brodie said in an interview with *Vice Magazine*.

Tones of Dirt and Bone is available from Twin Palms Publishers.