

real life **exp!p**

Jo Ann Santangelo



[by April D. Boland]

If you've ever been asked by a woman on a bicycle if she can take your picture, it was probably Jo Ann Santangelo. Over the last two years, this talented photographer has become a regular documenter of Austin's "weird" culture.

Jo Ann has had a gift and passion for photography for as long as she can remember. She says, "I always photographed as a kid; it's just something I loved doing. I always had a camera with me." After growing up in Boston, Massachusetts, Jo Ann attended school for business, but soon realized that it was not the right field for her. At 21, she and a friend decided to drive down to Arizona and live there for a while. Once there, Jo Ann began photographing more and more.

Eventually, another friend of Jo Ann's landed a six month internship back in Boston. Jo Ann decided to accompany her and upon arriving, she got her first job in the photo industry. "At that point, I had never even used a 35 mm camera," Jo Ann notes. Yet she began working at a camera repair shop that also sold cameras and rented studio space for photo shoots. This gave Jo Ann hands-on training and experience in every facet of the industry in a very short period of time. When her six-month stint was up, her

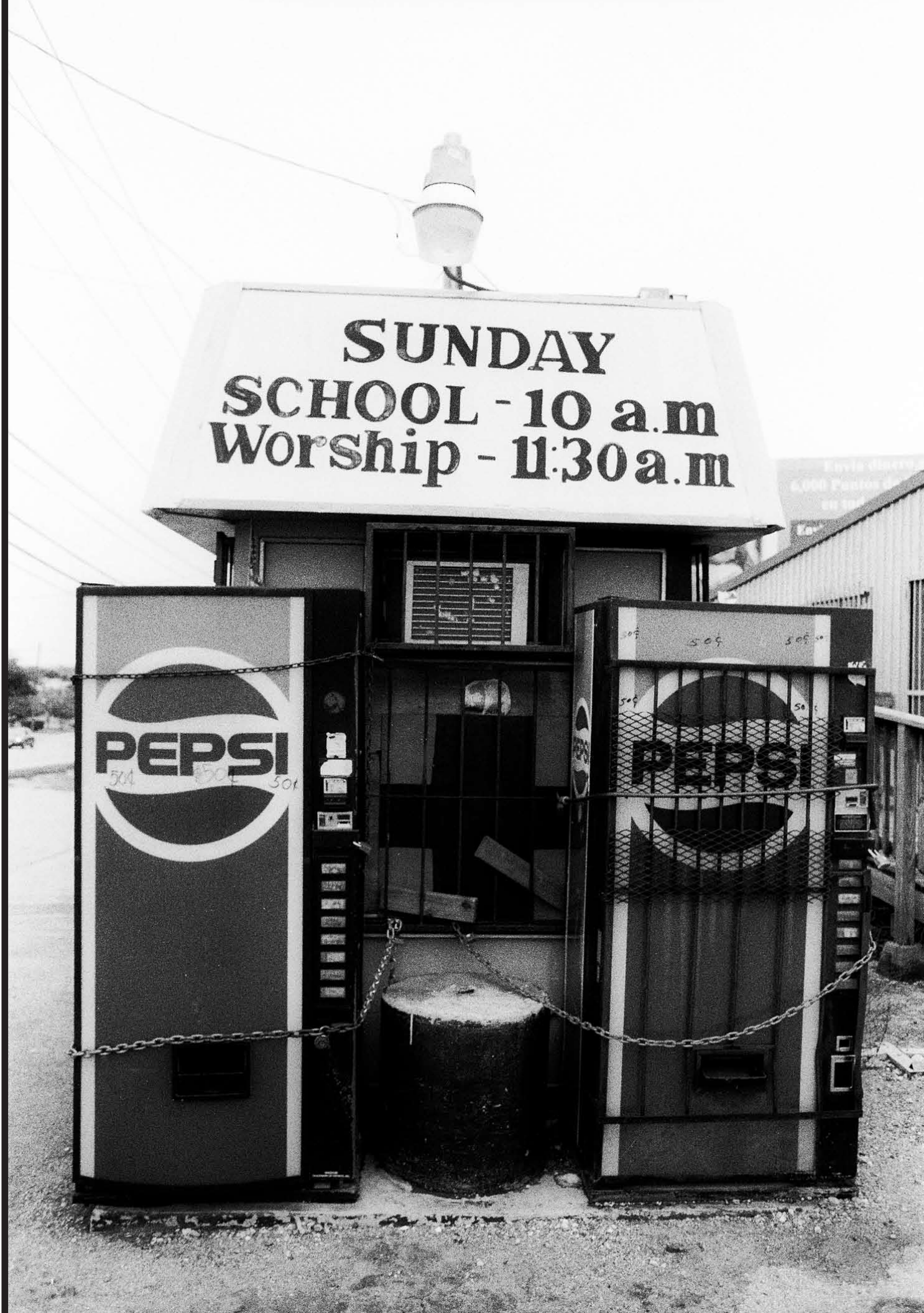


friends pitched in and gave her a Nikon F100, her first 35 mm SLR camera. She still uses it to this day, carrying it around wherever she goes.

Upon returning to Phoenix, Jo Ann got a job managing a photo studio. This allowed her to work with fine art photography for the first time. Pretty soon, she found herself assisting photographers on shoots, a job she would perform off and on for the next five years. Jo Ann eventually returned to Boston and worked as a photographer's assistant on fashion and editorial shoots. "I worked on photo shoots for Aerosmith and the Rolling Stones, and lots of top model stuff," she recalls. "It was a good learning experience, but it never struck my passion. I liked photographing real people living their everyday lives."

Upon visiting a friend in Austin, Jo Ann fell in love with the city and knew that it was where she had to be. She moved here in September 2006 and soon realized that bicycles serve as efficient vehicles of transportation. Jo Ann began to ride, and one day found herself in a troubling situation — her bike broke down. In that moment, she saw an interesting woman and asked if she could take her photo. The woman agreed, and a new series was born: "Austin Seen," consisting of over 2,000 portraits of Austinites.

Jo Ann soon found a way to integrate her love of photography with her love of bicycling. A few



months after she arrived in Austin, she became a pedicab driver downtown. This not only gave her flexibility with her hours — allowing her to spend a good amount of time on her photography — but it gave her a new perspective, one that would ultimately lead to a photo series of her fellow pedicab drivers entitled "Pedicab Portraits." The series was then exhibited at the Kerbey Lane Cafe.

In recent months, Jo Ann has found great success in the Austin art scene. She currently has her work on display at the Authentic City Gallery and Girl Next Door. She is sharing a joint show with Kate Payne at Progress Coffee, and is looking forward to an upcoming show at Thunderbird Coffee. Not only that, but she was once chosen to be one of 12 featured artists in Art City Austin, an annual event put on by Art Alliance Austin.

So what is next for Jo Ann Santangelo? She was recently selected from a pool of 5,000 candidates to be one of 23 students attending the International Center of Photography in New York City this fall. After that, she says, "My goal is to take what I call 'Austin Seen' worldwide — I want to travel around with a bike and photograph people living their lives. It tells a story."

You can find Jo Ann's work at JoAnnSantangelo.com. Also, check out her documentary on youtube directed by Katy Stafford. ■



hopeful INSPIRATION

Art is everywhere and can be recorded in many ways. Everyone has their own style and point of view. You have to find your own style of executing art and make it under your own rules. It's true, you have to know the rules in order to break them, so give it a try. Learn, study and show. What's your drive? ■

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