

## CHRIS JORDAN

My most memorable non-photograph happened at a backyard barbecue about eight years ago. It was a clear, warm May evening and several families were gathered around our patio for a birthday cookout. One of the adults had just laid an array of sausages on the grill, and with a hissing sound a thick cloud of smoke rose into the air, drifting slowly across the patio and into a large apple tree. The sun lay low in the western sky, shining right through the middle of the tree from where I stood. As the cloud filled the tree, the shadows of all of the branches and leaves suddenly cast a spectacular three-dimensional sunburst pattern on the smoke, shooting a thousand rays of undulating light outward from the tree's center where the sun was shining.

I remember opening my mouth in amazement, but before anything came out, in the next instant my three-year-old son, who was wearing nothing but a pair of bright red swim trunks, ran under the apple tree and stopped with his back to me in the middle of the smoke cloud, stretching his arms out wide so the smoky rays streamed through his fingers as his body became part of the sunburst. For just a moment he stood basking in the center of the light like a tiny monk beholding The Answer.

My camera was on the picnic table about two steps from my right hand. I half-turned toward it, then stopped because I saw that the scene was only going to last another second—it was fading already—and now the smoke drifted on through the tree and the sunburst evaporated, and Emerson turned and ran back to his friends. That was it. I looked around. No one else had noticed it. The whole spectacle had lasted just a few seconds.

The image from that moment is one of my personal favorites; but for this one my eyes were the camera, and my memory is the print. It is a portrait of my son, all innocence and hope and wonderment; a private exhibition in a non-archival edition of one, that I enjoy returning to again and again.