



SEPTEMBER 10, 2010

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 Selected frames.

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The view from The New Yorker's photo department.

 « Postcard from Russia: The Last Thing They Saw | Main
 | Eye On Culture: The Corkscrew Wave »

AUGUST 27, 2010

OFF THE SHELF: CHRIS VERENE'S FAMILY

Posted by Elisabeth Biondi

THE SAME DAY THEY SIGNED THE DIVORCE PAPERS



A TORNADO HIT THE HOUSE.

The house on the cover of [Chris Verene's](#) new book, "[Family](#)," looks much like my house in Sag Harbor. A very tall, ailing fir tree once stood in front of mine. I had to take it down, as I was worried it would hit my house in the next hurricane, sure to come. Here my personal association with the book's pictures ends.

The cover photograph of Verene's inspiring book was taken in Galesburg, Illinois, in a world far away from Sag Harbor. The town mirrors the economic difficulties of our times: President Obama [cited](#) Galesburg as one of the areas worst hit by the downturn. The Maytag factory closed, and jobs became even scarcer than they were before, accelerating the town's downward spiral. "Inspiring" may seem an odd word to use about pictures of an extended family living in a dying town, but his pictures are always tender, respectful, and loving. We meet cousins, aunts, grandparents, and parents, when they are happy and when their lives take bad turns, when they mourn or when they celebrate. Verene witnesses divorces, families breaking apart, death. His camera is focussed on jobless cousins, single mothers, elderly friends, all part of what he knows intimately. We see poverty, instability, and decline as part of daily life.

Verene describes himself a documentary artist; his pictures are authentic, and so is he. It is courageous of him and his subjects, who trust him utterly, to make these intimate images public. When I look at them, I understand a little better the reality of hard economic times in small towns all over America.

Verene is already working on his next series of pictures, which will center on his son. In the meantime, an exhibit will open at [Postmasters gallery](#) from September 10th to October 16th.