

Julie's Family Portrait Project



Annie Dlugokecki, photographer and artist, greets the guests at the Julie's Family Portrait Project (in the background) at the Artists for Humanity EpiCenter.

A poignant, affecting series of photographs, created and assembled by photographer/artist Annie Dlugokecki, was exhibited at the Artists for Humanity's EpiCenter last week. The theme: the members of Julie's Family Learning Center.

by Rick Winterson

The work done by Julie's Family Learning Center needs little or no explanation to residents of South Boston. Julie's has been here since 1974 - 33 years of service to the old hometown - in the name of St. Julie Billiart, the "Smiling Saint". The Center carries on St. Julie's work of educating women, by offering programs that enable mothers and their children to become self-sufficient members of their communities.

Photographer/artist Annie Dlugokecki graduated from Duke University last June, with a degree in Public Policy. She also holds a certification from Duke in Documentary Studies. This led to her becoming a Lewis Hines Documentary Fellow, meaning that she had the support necessary to work with a community-based organization in New England. Julie's was the organization where she ended up.

Dlugokecki's work consisted of creating a stunning series of photographs of the members of Julie's Family Learning Center - both the women and their children. The women who were the subjects of these photographs handwrote their feelings about Julie's around the margin formed by the photographs' matting. The result is a series of intense black-and-white portraits of Julie's women and their children, encircled with the poignant sentiments of the women themselves.

This effort is entitled the "Julie's Family Portrait Project". It was exhibited at a reception on Tuesday evening, June 19, at the Artists for Humanity EpiCenter on the corner of A and Second Streets. Hundreds turned out; they were enthralled.

In commenting on her work, Annie Dlugocklecki said, "The Portrait Project has been a wonderful experience, filled with awesome stories. I found such a oneness between what the Julie's mothers say and their photographs."

Dlugocklecki is a midwesterner. Now that the Julie's Family Portrait Project is complete, she plans to relocate to Los Angeles, where she'll teach ninth grade math and science in a charter school. You may already have realized that will require extensive course work, since her degree from Duke is in another field. But Annie Dlugocklecki is resourceful and energetic, so she'll do very well.

Julie's Family Learning Center has roots that are older than 200 years. In 1804, Sister Julie Billiard formed the order of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Their mission: teaching useful professions to young women left destitute by the ravages of the French Revolution.

Then the New World called. Sisters from Namur jour-

neyed around the Horn to the Northwest, up the Mississippi to Cincinnati, and came to Boston in 1849 at the request of Fr. James McElroy, a priestly educator who would eventually be instrumental in establishing Boston College. The Sisters had made a journey that would have put Lewis and Clark to shame.

Julie's is still carrying out a mission that hasn't changed for two centuries.



The Julie's Family Portrait Project, a creation of photographer/artist Annie Dlugockecki, viewed from the mezzanine of the Artists for Humanity's EpiCenter.