

A magazine targets hope and humanity

By **LAWRENCE TOPPMAN**
Staff Writer

DoubleTake is the sort of magazine for which a 10-year-old boy from India could write. Or French essayist Andre Dubus. Or Florida Slone, a Kentucky bingo player and folk poet. Or long-dead Carson McCullers, mistress of the Southern Gothic style, whose new story will run in the summer '96 issue.

This high-class but not highfalutin' journal also prints photographers whose visions stretch from cottonwood trees in Texas to ghettos in border-town Mexico to cheerful faces in Kerala, India, a district that has created one of the Third World's few safe havens from overpopulation and poverty.

The longest article to date has been a 16-page photo essay about children's dreams in Vol. 1, No. 1, which sneaked onto unsuspecting newsstands last summer. And that's appropriate: The Durham quarterly came from two editors' dreams, and they've always focused on the interests of children.

Robert Coles, a child psychiatrist, teaches at Harvard. Documentary photographer Alex Harris has worked with him for two decades, most recently on the Center for Documentary Studies, which they helped found at Duke University in 1989 and where Harris now works. Together, they edit this quietly revolutionary publication.

It doesn't fizz with dazzling graphics. It doesn't keep watch on Madonna's stomach. It doesn't point-counterpoint Washington pundits. Its roots are in the work of James Agee and Walker Evans, who documented American poverty in the 1930s. But DoubleTake is just as willing to document hope.

"We did no demographic studies to determine whether there was a market," says Harris. "We published what our hearts told us to publish. If we had worried about the (current right-wing) political climate or the idea that the Internet's replacing print journalism, I think we'd never have gone ahead.

"What we're talking about is building a community around this magazine, trying to reach enough

of a critical mass of people to be a voice in the life of this country."

That dream seems a lot more achievable with the backing of the Lyndhurst Foundation of Chattanooga, Tenn. The magazine lost \$1.5 million in its first year and survived with the help of a \$2 million gift. The foundation came to the rescue again last month with a \$10 million gift, honoring DoubleTake for its multicultural vision.

"You'll find a real mix of voices," says Harris. "We're not interested in things that stand out as grotesque or exotic. We're interested in the ways people live their lives, but rendered in a compelling fashion."

That means poems by Donald Hall and Seamus Heaney, fiction by Joyce Carol Oates, photographs by Helen Levitt. It also encompasses a clear-eyed essay by 7-year-old Kristin Graves about life after her mother's death.

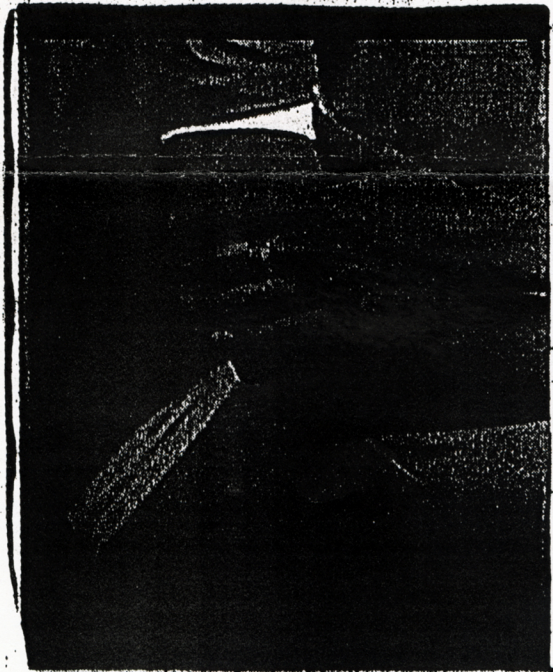
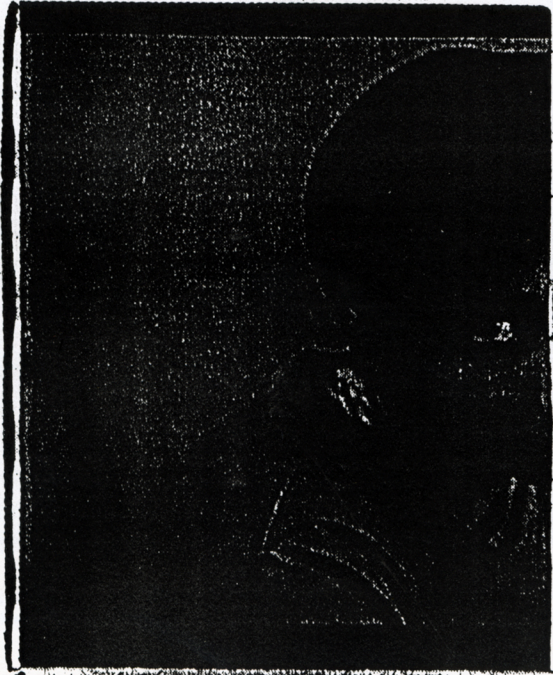
"Our 'Exploration' section presents people in their own words. Florida Slone came to us through novelist Lee Smith, who met her teaching a class in the mountains of North Carolina. Kristin's story was sent to Robert Coles because he's interested in children's writing. Luck's a big part of it."

Harris and crew hope to meet the public in a DoubleTake Out Loud series: Authors and artists may visit Portland and Los Angeles this summer, the East this fall.

"The tour will go to libraries and bookstores and community centers," he says. "We want to reach as diverse an audience as we can. We know our magazine will be on coffee tables. But we'd like it to be in libraries and offices, where people don't have to buy it to read it."

IF YOU'RE CURIOUS

DoubleTake issues cost \$10, but you can get a four-issue subscription for \$24. Make checks payable to DoubleTake at P.O. Box 56070, Boulder, CO 80322-6070. Or call 1-800-964-8301, anytime.



"Amishi, 1993," by Dawoud Bey, is from a large-format, multiple-panel series on family members and high school and college students. "It is important to me that an intensely human image of them exist . . . to challenge some of the stereotypes that often describe young people of color," says Bey.



Bill Bamberger's "Manuel Carreiro by the glue machine, rough mill," was taken in Mebane.



This Thomas Roma photo of religious services in Brooklyn churches is in a current show at the Museum of Modern Art.



"Bridesmaids, 1991," by Paul D'Amato, is from a series on two Mexican communities on Chicago's South Side.