

Here I Am!

Portraits of
California
Farm Workers
1960-1966
& 2025

by
Ernest Lowe



Here I Am!
copyright
2022-2023
Ernest Lowe

Compadre Press

"Well, it's one thing to talk about people in a condition; it's another thing to look somebody in the eye. When I did that, I saw me, I saw we. I didn't see them any more. I saw us. So I'm not working on their issues, I'm working on our issues. We're all in this together"

George "Elfie" Ballis speaks for me in this quote. He documented farm workers and the Farm Labor Movement throughout the Sixties and Seventies, as well as the Civil Rights movement.

Here I Am!

Portraits of
California
Farm Workers
1960-1966
& 2015

by
Ernest Lowe

258



Here I Am! Is a book of portraits. Somehow my lens found the spark of beauty and presence that lives within each of the farmworkers and their children that I met.

From 1960-63 and in 1966 I photographed California's farm workers and interviewed them about their work feeding the nation. I traveled along country roads and visited fields and orchards, farm worker camps and communities. I was a freelance activist documentarian, never pretending to objectivity.

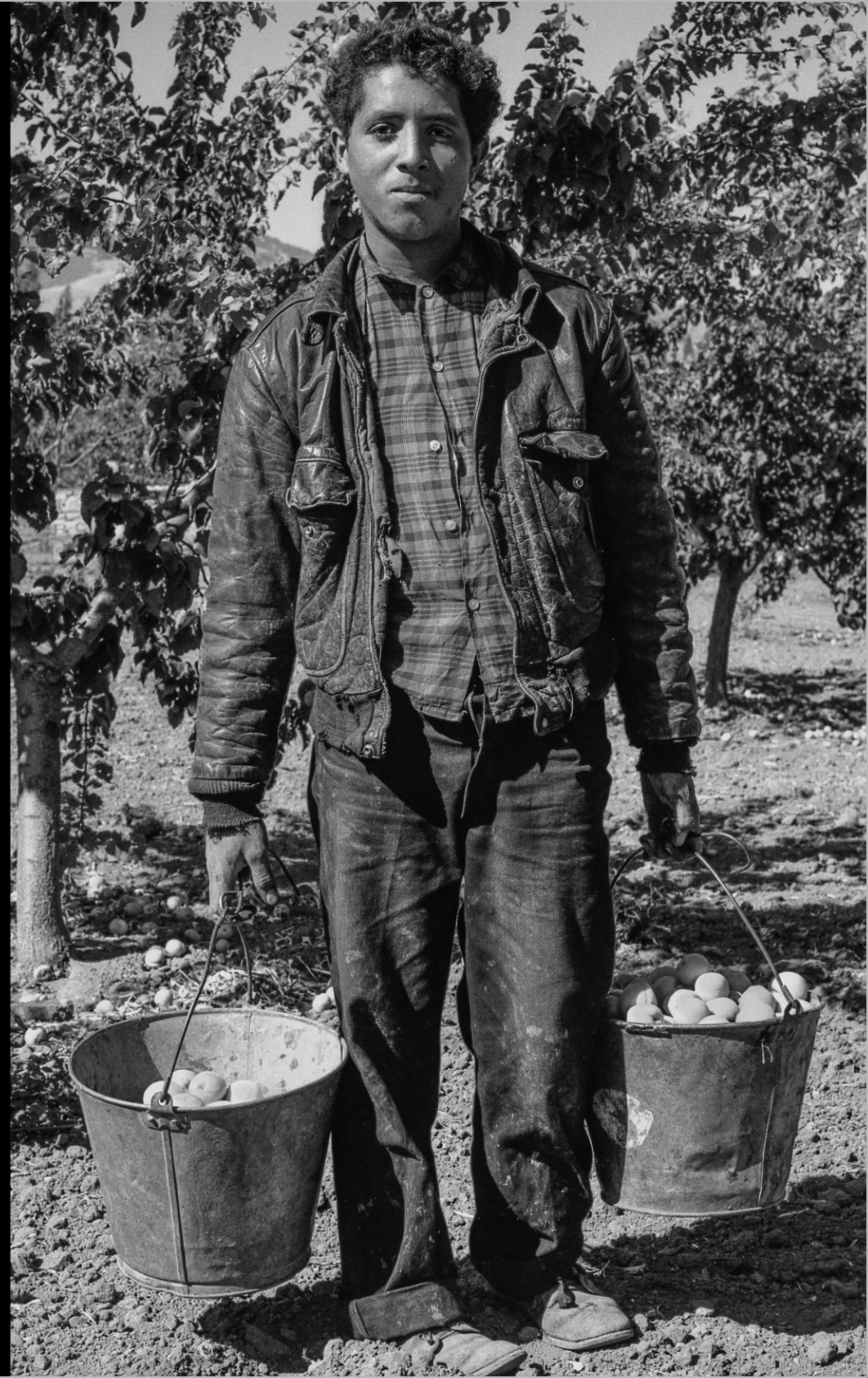
I'd just walk up to people in a camp or an orchard and say, "I hear you folks are getting a raw deal. I'd like to take your pictures and talk with you so people back in the city can do something about it." They very seldom turned me down.

I documented scenes of dire poverty and backbreaking work, but my photos also revealed the dignity and humanity of these hard-working families and loners. In 2015 I returned to two Black communities and photographed some of the people I'd first met as children.

(These photos show a racially and ethnically diverse workforce, very different from today's mostly Hispanic and indigenous workers.)

Ernest Lowe













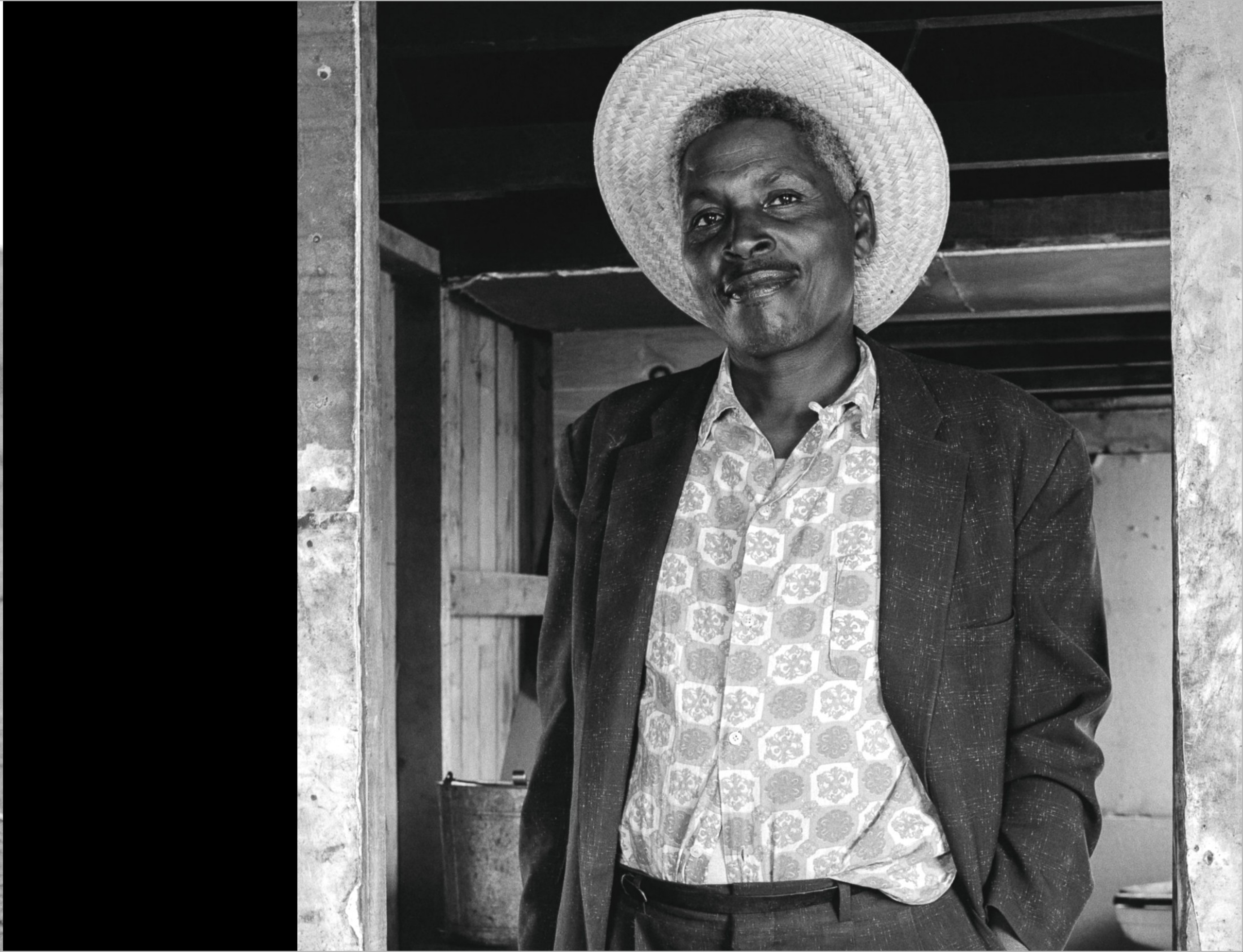


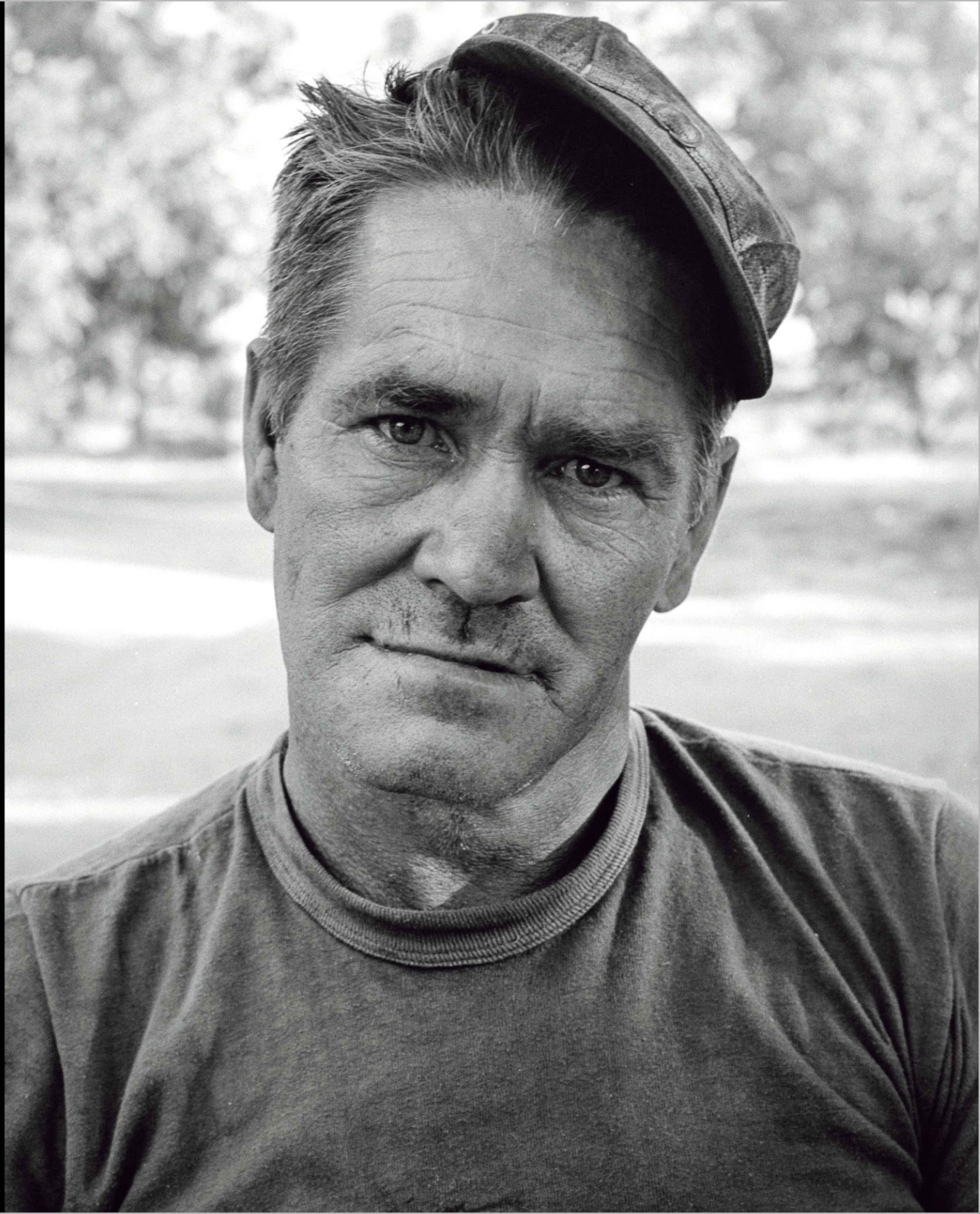
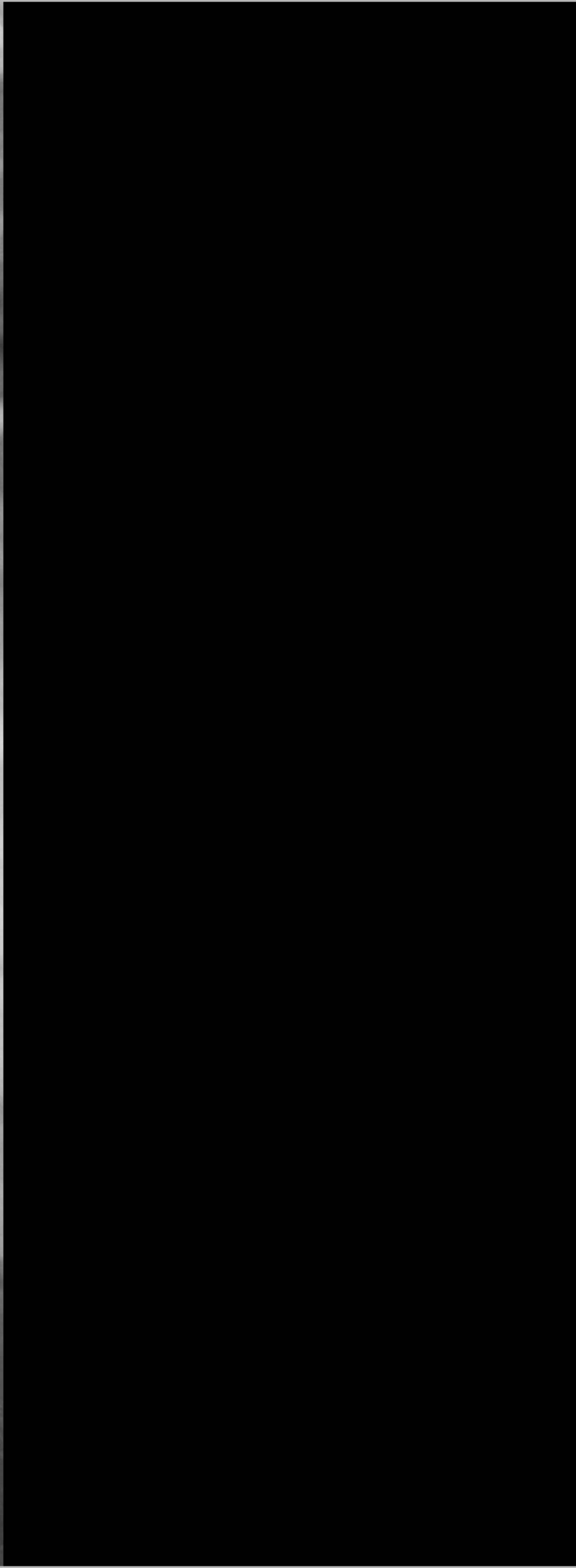


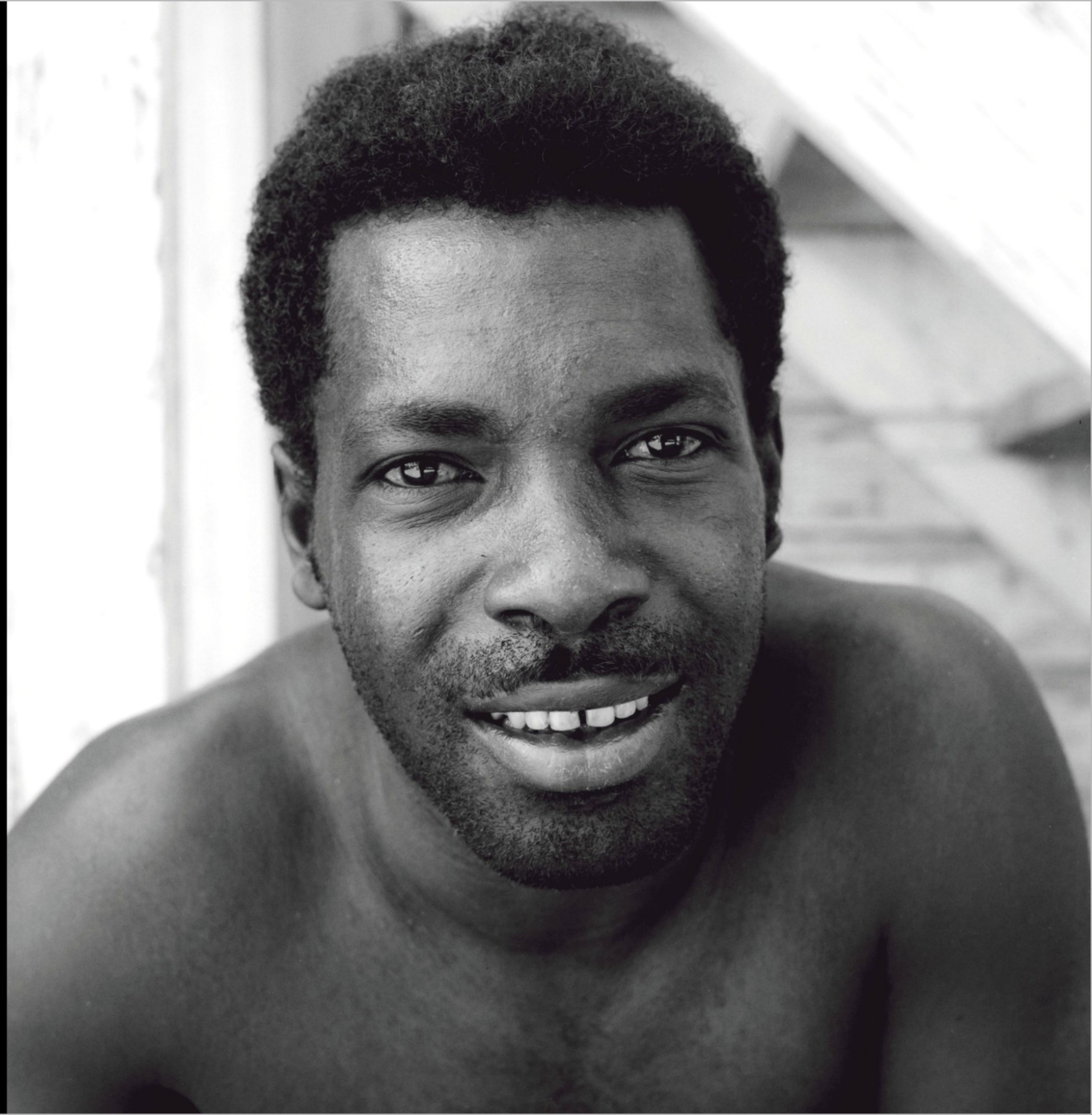
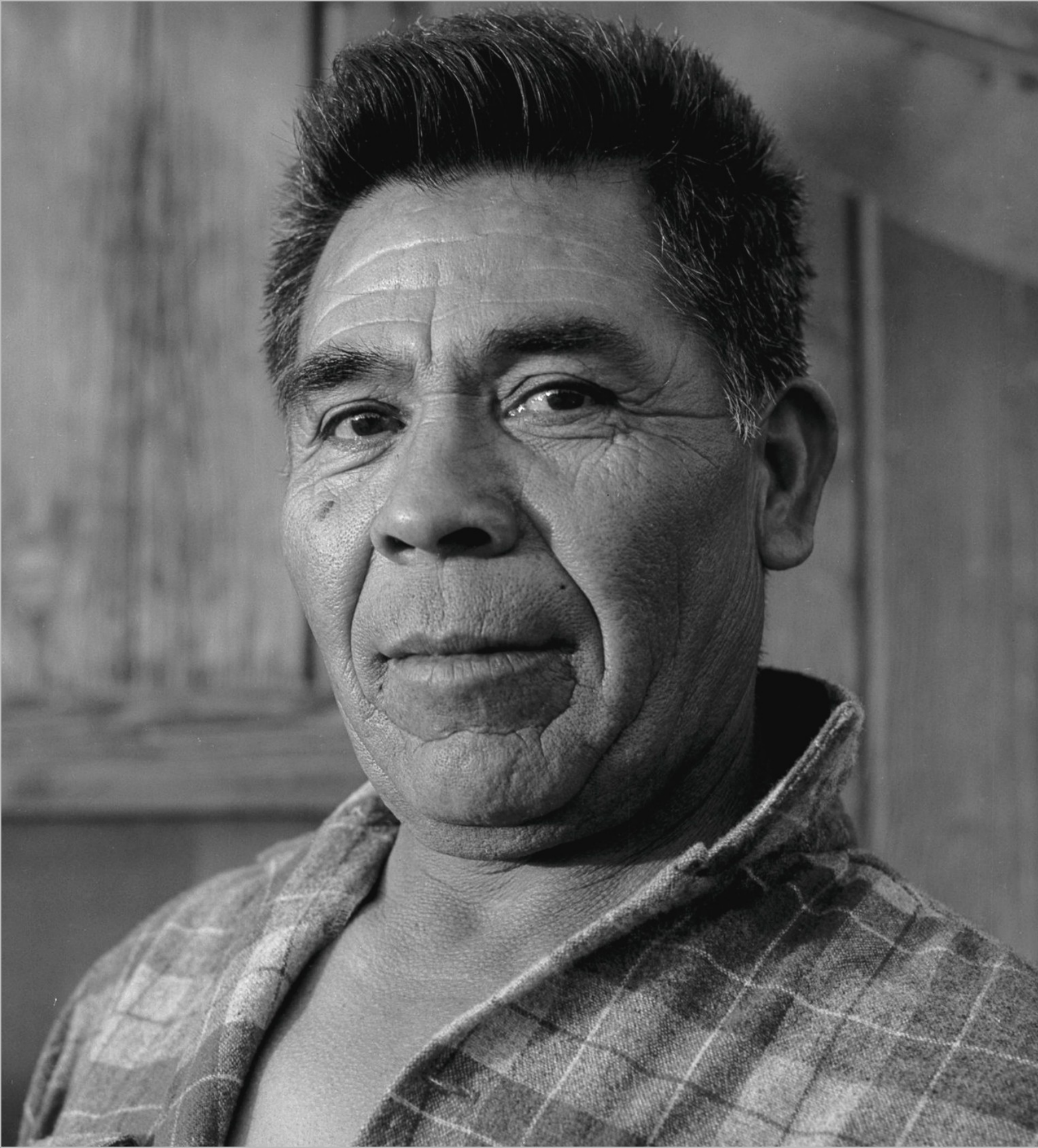


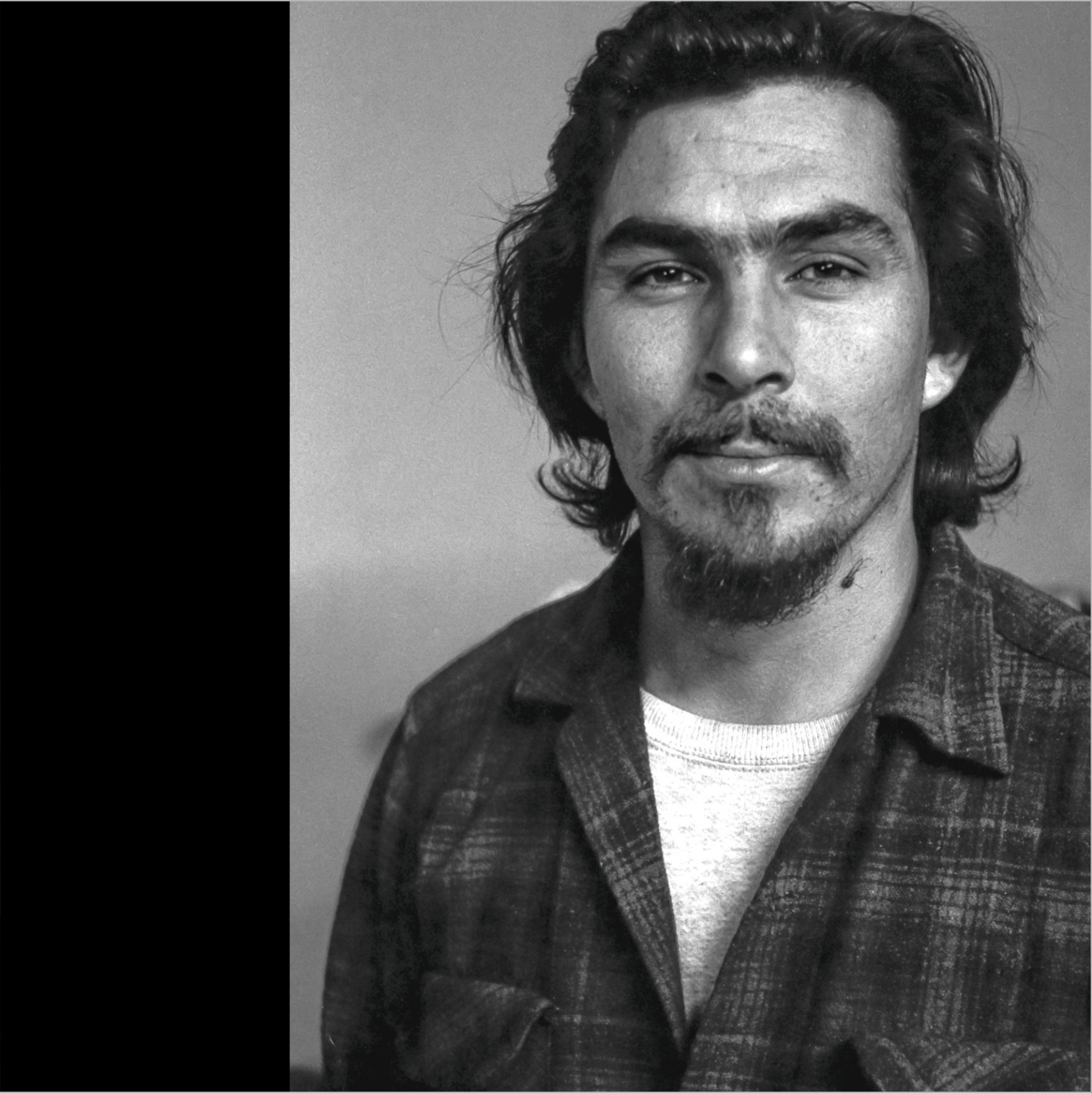




















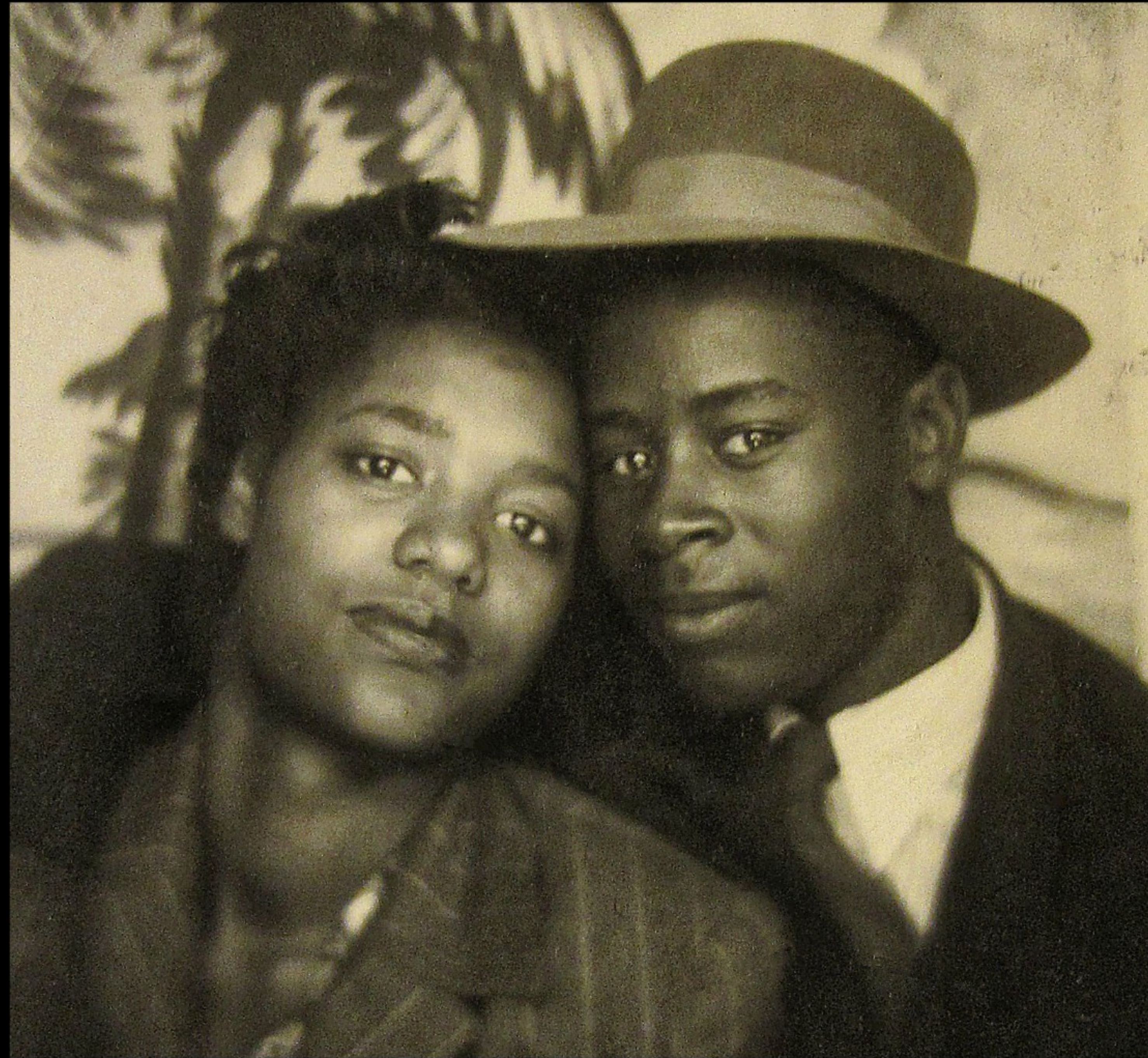






In 2015 I revisited two communities where I had photographed in the 60s, Teviston and South Dos Palos.

In Teviston I photographed eleven of the children of Benjamin and Bertha Mae Beavers. This was a remarkable gift, to find this close-knit family living well and no longer in the punishing work of farm labor. Benjamin Sr. had died by then, after a life of spiritual and community leadership. (Teviston is on Highway 99 between Tulare and Delano)



Bertha Mae and Benjamin Beavers in an Oklahoma photobooth portrait.
1948 courtesy of Annie Beavers Ellis



Bertha Mae Beavers



Charles Beavers



Ruth Beavers Jones



Annie Beavers Ellis



Mae Beavers



Benjamin Beavers Jr.



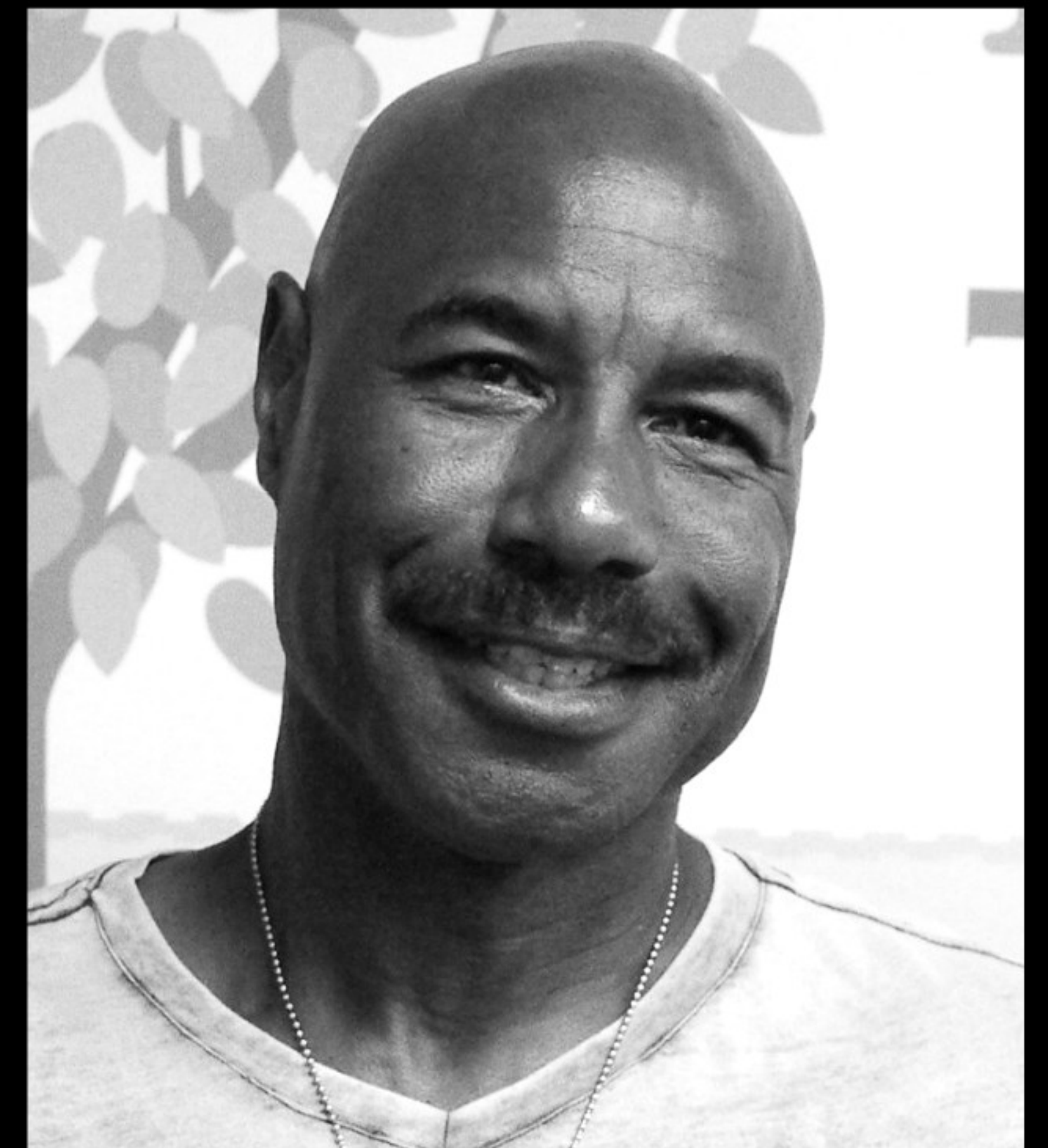
Connie Beavers



Goldie Beavers



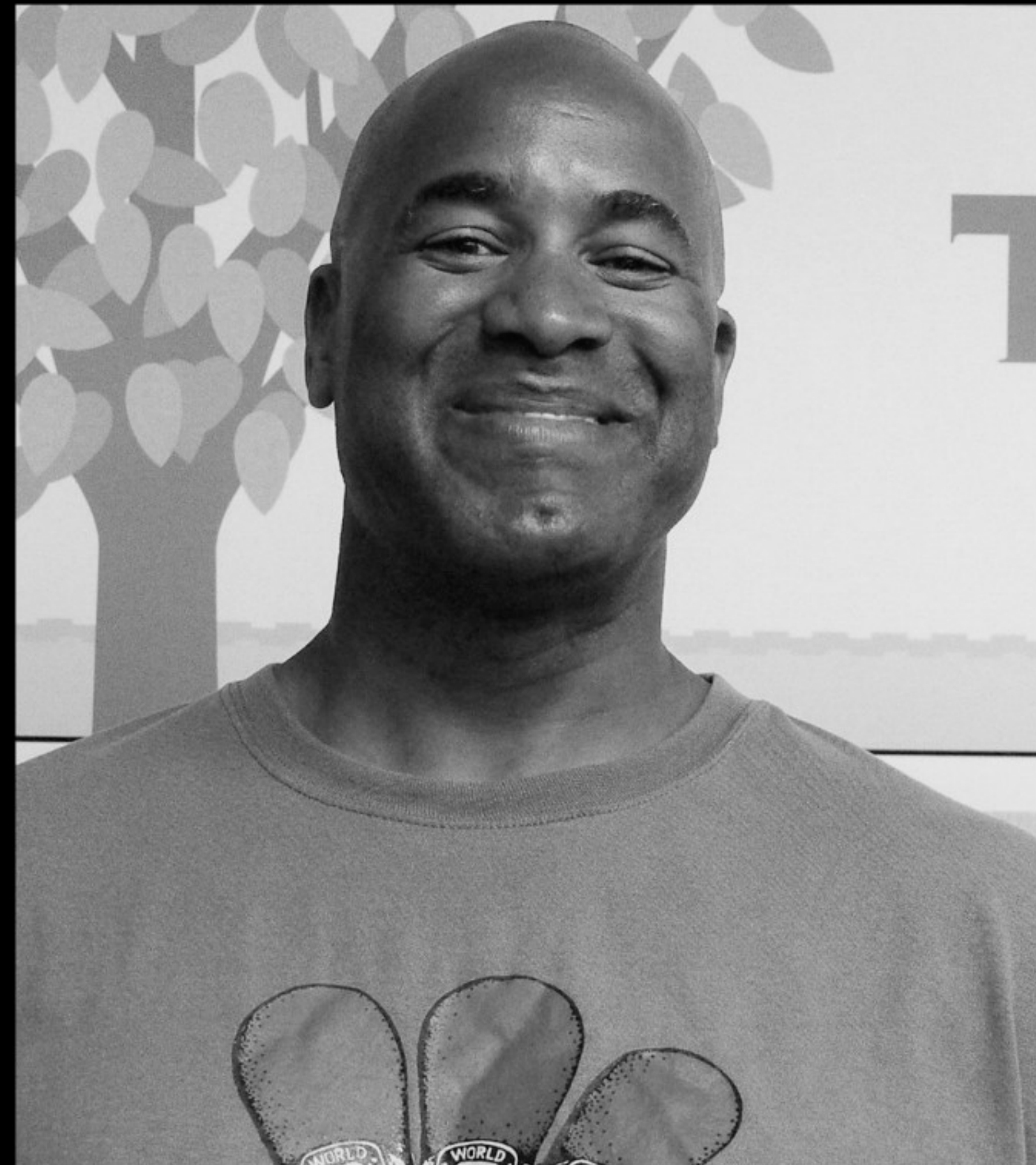
Barbara Beavers



Donald Beavers



Gloria Beavers
(not photographed in 60s)



Roger Beavers
(not yet born in 1964)

I had photographed children from several families in South Dos Palos in 1961. When I returned in 2015 an Anglo woman said there were no Blacks living here any more. Around the corner I found a mostly Black neighborhood with a few kids playing in a front yard. Their grandparents were the Marshalls and others I had photographed in the 60s! Soon family and friends from the neighborhood were identifying themselves in the prints I'd brought. (South Dos Palos is on hwy 33 on the west side of Merced County.)

Group portrait 1961 left to right: Clarence Marshall, Joe Marshall, ___ Marshall, Zella Mae Marshall, Vincent Marshall, Lee Marshall,
(bottom row) Marilyn Marshall, Timmy Marshall, David Marshall, Willie Brewster.





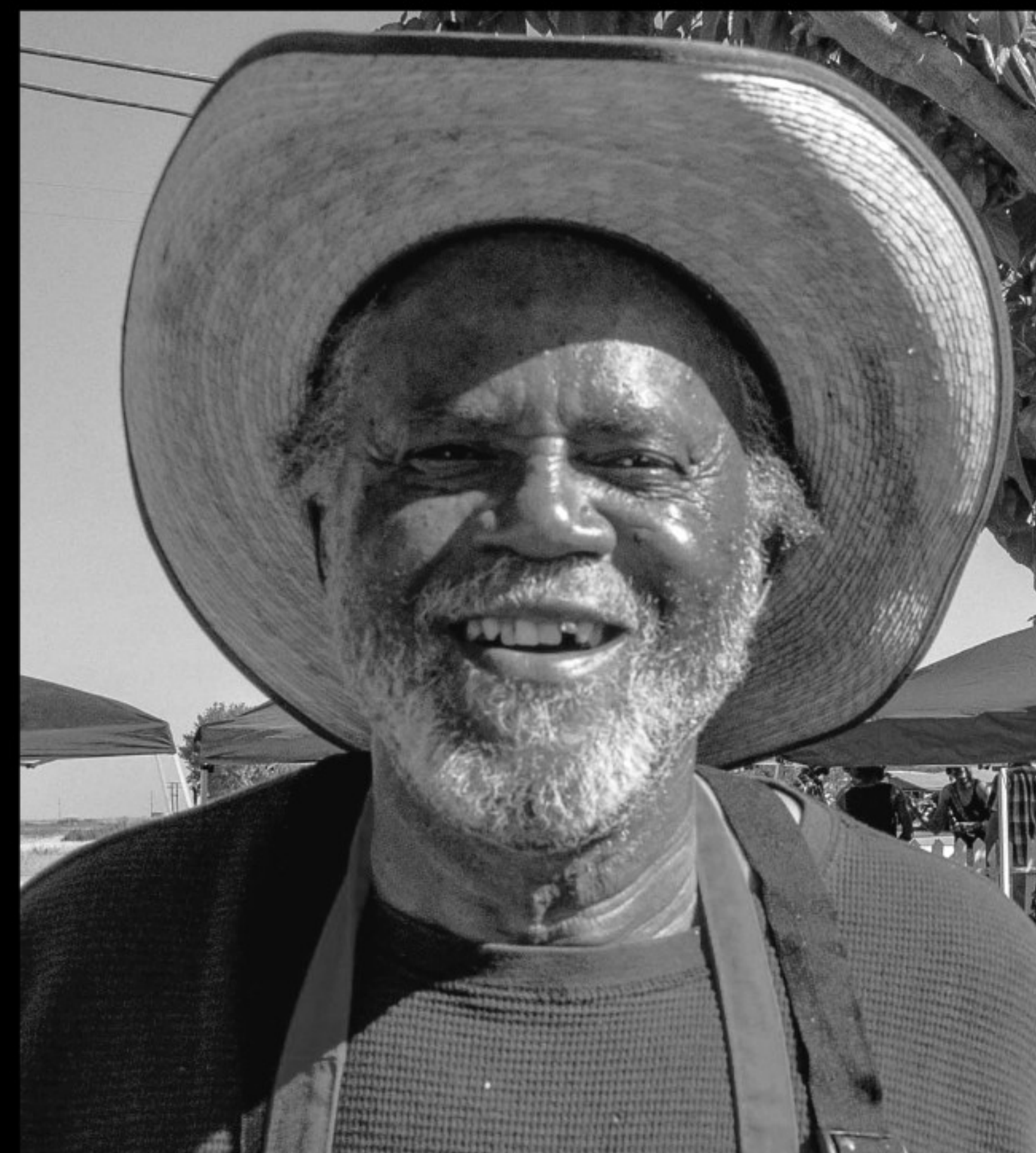
Marilyn Marshall Austin



Joe Marshall at the Fresno Art Museum Black Okies Exhibition, standing next to his younger self in the photo.



Lee Marshall



Zella Mae Marshall with her younger self and brothers
Photo by Joel Pickford

With much appreciation of the folks who made these photos possible:

The farm workers & their families
The Beavers, Marshalls, & Wilsons
AWOC & NFWA organizers
Bard McAllister
John Collier Jr.
Dorothea Lange
Henry Anderson
Ellen Margron
George Ballis
Matt Herron
Joel Pickford
Mark Arax
Donna Gaetano
Jeanine Flaton
Sandie Krutz
Michael Eissinger
Ken Light
Richard Street
Phil Greene
Laurie Coyle
Najib Joe Hakim
Virgil & Esther Lowe
Grace Lowe
Martha Lowe
Ralph Kanz
Bill Ricco
Bill Ram Esher
Trevor Thomas

(Mark Arax, Joel Pickford, Michael Eissinger, and Jake Arax joined me on the 2015 visits.)

Resources for Ernest Lowe's farm worker photos

The Library of the University of California at Merced is the digital repository of all of my farm worker photos, under a Creative Commons license. This site has 2,767 of these images online: <https://calisphere.org/collections/27647/>

My personal site has images from my farm worker exhibitions: <http://www.ernestlowe.com>

Take Stock is my photo agency: <http://www.takestockphotos.com/imagepages/folioframes.php?FolioID=9>

A selection of my photos is available on the stock photo agency, Topfoto. <https://www.topfoto.co.uk/search/?searchQuery=Ernest+Lowe>

My photos appear in two independent documentaries broadcast on PBS:

The Fight in the Fields, Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers' Struggle: www.fightinthefields.net/cesarchavez.html and Adios Amor, The Search for Maria Moreno: www.adiosamorfilm.com/

Black Okies is a documentary on Teviston, produced by Mark Arax & Joel Pickford <https://vimeo.com/user25968631/blackokies>

