

feature

Enterprising student pursues dream in black & white

by Tammy Rogers

I wanted to provide a healthy alternative to the tacky tourist card and in so doing make myself some money."

Such were the goals of Angel Figueroa, a Dalhousie student, photographer, and new Halifax postcard entrepreneur. This summer Figueroa started his own business, Nova Foto/Post, to produce artsy black and white postcards featuring Halifax scenes. In doing so he filled a gaping hole in the Halifax tourist trade which until now only offered cliché prints that did not reflect the city's charm and grace. At the same time he created a niche in the market for himself, the first rule in being a successful entrepreneur.

"I always wanted to be a photographer," says Figueroa. "It was my passion; I loved it; it was more than love because I lived and breathed photography." Upon studying the photos and biographies of great photographers, Figueroa says he discovered a

you reacted."

Youth Entrepreneurial Skills (YES) sponsored the venture. The program is for students who want to make money over the summer using their own skills but require capital investment to start. YES verifies entrepreneurial ventures and facilitates loans through the Royal Bank. The loans are interest-free for a certain period of time to help small summer businesses get established.

"I realized in the coming years the only way we are going to be able to survive is to put everything in your own hands."

If the loan is paid back by September 30, Figueroa will receive a 12.5% rebate of the entire loan from the N.S. government. "It's all an economic development incentive program," says Figueroa. "It not only provides a service

ing many students these days, lack of decent jobs and increasing financial responsibilities, Figueroa decided to create his own niche in the job market and at the same time start establishing himself as a reputable photographer.

He took up photography in high school and by the time he graduated he knew he wanted to be a photographer. He applied and was accepted at Ryerson Polytechnic Institute, a rare thing for a program geared towards students with previous training or degrees.

Living, working and studying in downtown Toronto didn't quite click with the quiet Figueroa who had grown up in sedate, suburban Edmonton. Although Ryerson taught him the "nitty gritty" technical side of photography it didn't satisfy his muse.

"I realized you can't institutionalize passion. I've said it a million times and I believe it to death now, because after my second year there I realized, 'This is bogus — why am I studying this?' The only way to grow in any real passion is to do it on your own within yourself and to study it is like flogging it to death."

While at Ryerson he was writing for the school newspaper and realized the perfect setup would be to write and photograph concurrently. Around that same time he became interested in his exploring his Spanish roots. His mother is Cuban and father, although Jamaican, is of Cuban ancestry as well. Spanish had been spoken in the home but Figueroa had never really learned it and was now compelled. That factor along with a natural growing interest in Latin American history and literature prompted him to reconsider studies of a more academic nature and continue the photography on the side. The idea was to become fluent in Spanish, develop a good understanding of the history and culture and then pursue a photojournalist career in South America.

In an effort to escape the "bad trip" in the big city, he left for a smaller one by the sea and began studies at Dalhousie. Since then, in addition to studying, Figueroa has worked on the Dalhousie Gazette as a raving soccer writer and photographer and has also been published numerous times (including a cover photo) in Pedal magazine, a Ca-

nadian bicycle racing newspaper.

After three years he is speaking Spanish competently and made his first trip to Mexico last spring break. On a working holiday, he did nothing

least with our generation, the only way we are going to be able to survive or do anything half decent is to put everything in your own hands. I realized I do have the skills that I could grind into a



Typical of Figueroa's eye for architecture is his postcard of brackets on Morris Street.

but shoot, for himself as well as to cover the "Ruta Mexico" for Pedal. His next travel plans are to write a travel book on Cuba based on his own discovery of his roots while travelling from Havana in the west along the southern coast to Manzanillo (where his mother was born and raised) in the east.

"It's great to have a dream but unless it's really marketable in terms of money it's bullshit."

"There are many historical things along the way that I'd like to depict through writing and photography," he says. "I want to try and discover the Cuban soul and in so doing discover my own ancestral beat. I think it would be a great trip, not to mention the fact that it's marketable. It's great to have a dream but unless it's really marketable in terms of money it's bullshit."

That same motivation got Nova Foto/Post off the ground this summer. Although he has a real love for postcards, as evidenced by his large personal collection, Figueroa admits this venture was more of a capitalistic one than an artistic one.

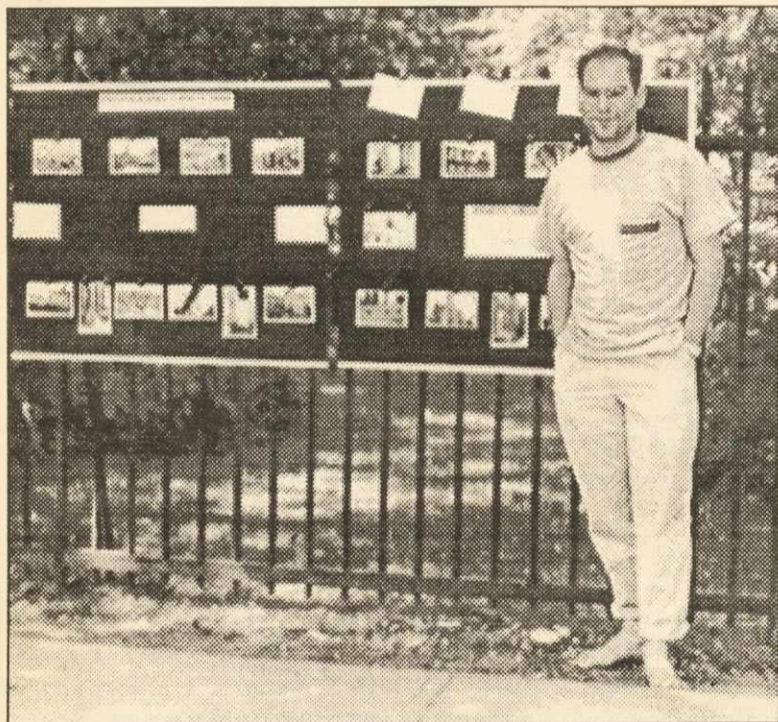
"I realized in the coming years, at

money-making situation, and I realized now is probably the best time to do it because being a student you're already on a budget and diet of KD. I realized I was in the best situation that I'll ever be in to start an operation like this."

Figueroa's pictures range from angular shots capturing the elegant lines and unique architectural detail of Halifax's homes and buildings to airy shots of the Public Gardens and Point Pleasant Park. They share a visually poignant perspective of Halifax that will certainly be appreciated by longtime Haligonians and visitors alike.

He has gone from personally pedalling the postcards on the sidewalk outside the Public Gardens to wholesaling them to various gift and bookstores around metro. Now that direct sales are taken care of he can concentrate on other ways of pedalling himself as a photographer.

"I want to turn some of my extra energy into becoming better known as a photographer, have some shows at a good gallery. I want to move on in terms of actually selling my prints whether they are of Halifax or not." And in the long term, "I can't deny I would love to be well-established well-respected photojournalist with a social bend shooting real human issues."



Portrait of the artist at work at the Public Garden fence.

commonality that went beyond sharing a hobby. Being a photographer was "not only holding a camera and looking through it; being a photographer was the way you saw things, the way

but also an incentive. They encourage any summer business to continue going. [The postcards] are definitely a permanent venture."

In light of economic difficulties fac-

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