



OPPOSITE AND ABOVE: **Eastern Kentucky, 1972**

The first time I saw these pictures, in 1972, I was sitting at Bill Gedney's kitchen table in his cold-water flat above a store on Myrtle Avenue in Brooklyn. I was twenty-two years old and deeply impressed by both his photographs and his lifestyle. He lived the nearest to a monk's existence that I've ever seen, surrounded by books, records, the materials to make and store his photographs, and little else. I'll never forget his proudly telling how he defeated the IRS auditors by producing a receipt for every purchase he made one year. He had declared so little income that IRS agents had to come to his apartment to see for themselves how he lived. Bill became a role model for me. He created a life where he

could spend a minimum amount of time earning a living so that he could be free to do his work.

And that is the life he lived for nearly forty years, producing an extraordinary and original body of work in India, Europe, and throughout the United States. Yet very little of this work was ever published, and no monograph exists. When Bill died in 1989 at the age of fifty-seven, all his photographs and writings were left to Lee Friedlander and Bill's brother, Richard, who in turn donated the collection to the Special Collections Library at Duke University. Over the next few years *DoubleTake* plans to publish other photographs from the Gedney collection, and in 1998, to publish a book and organize a traveling exhibition of his work.

The excerpt published here is from the trips Bill made to eastern Kentucky in the 1960s and 70s. There he spent most of his time photographing one extended family. In his life in Brooklyn, Bill was an eccentric; he was even described as a kind of recluse by some of his friends. But as a photographer he made profound connections with the people he photographed. In these Kentucky photographs we can see that he is fully engaged with these hill people, with the lives played out in and around their cars and porches. The sensuality in these pictures reminds us of our sameness and, in fact, what is beautiful about our sameness. —*Thomas Roma*