

America: Our First Impressions

Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Age: 70 (both)

Occupation: Artists

Arrived: February 1964

Hometown: Gabrovo, Bulgaria;

Casablanca, Morocco (respectively)



Our first two and a half years here, we were illegal aliens. Every time we saw a policeman, we turned around. We were so afraid of being sent back to France.

We were living below our studio in a loft where we were not allowed to be living. But we were very organized. There was a sign at street level saying "Photo Studio Fourth Floor," so above our door we built a box with a red light, and if we thought it was either the police or the building inspector at the door, we would plug in the light as if to say, "Attention: Photo. Don't enter." We built beds that could be folded up into the cupboards. And since we had a young son, Cyril, and there were toys around, we would say we were specializing in photographing children.

Only twice did the building inspector come up. The first time, everything was fine. The second time...problem! He saw all these photographs of children on the wall, which we had put up to make the space look more like a photo studio, and he said, "I have a very cute little girl. May I bring her sometime so you can take her portrait?" The problem was that neither of us are very good at taking photographs. But he never came back.

—AS TOLD TO HOWIE KAHN