

"Back Me Up"

Mark Nowak

(1.)

Your bartender story
reminded me of

*
* Stan's
*
*
* Tavern
*
*

I was surprised
my father wanted
to go along
while I shot these
photographs.

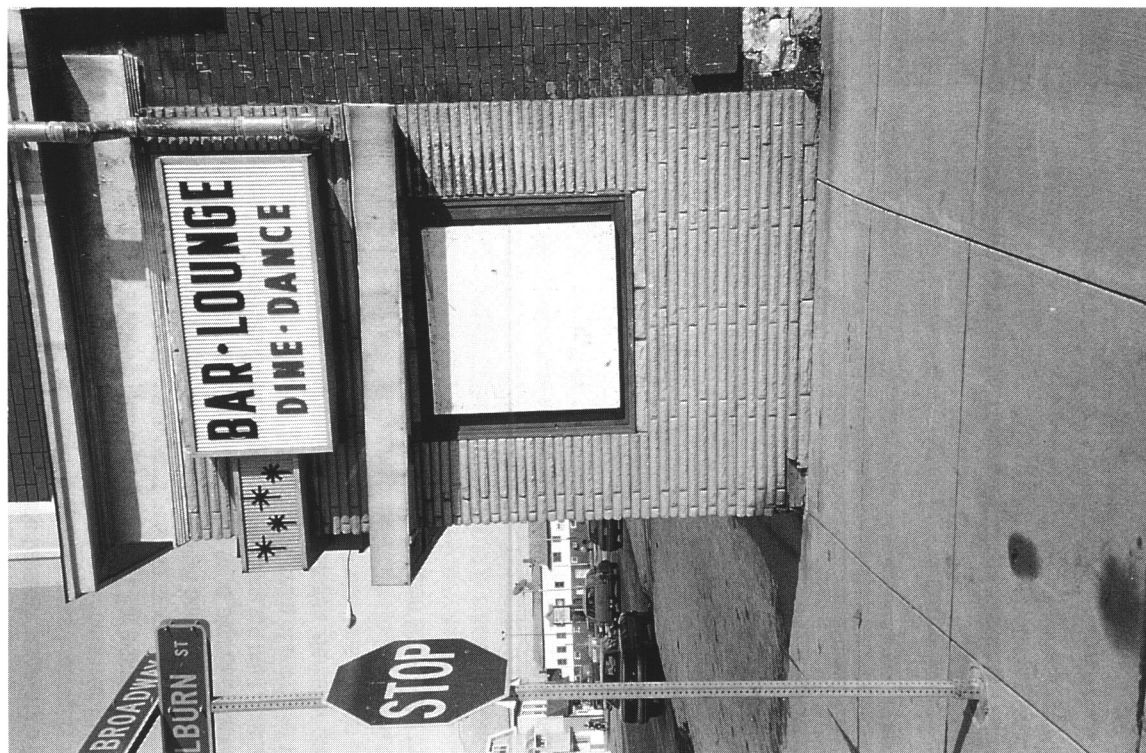
"shadow

"mirror

"the blank piece of paper

"I "went "back

where shots (Wilson's
Union label)
and beers
reigned supreme.





(2.)

"rummaged" "Return
"disquieting" "light

Your Aunt Edna,
when she first got
married, lived
just down this street.

No ice
teas or orange
blossoms here.



(3.)

Bartending is easy in these places.

"e" "evaluation" "eyes"
"t" "translate"
"h" "his" "her" [possessive pronoun]
"n" "native" "nationality"
"o" "organize"
"l" "language" "life"
"o" "outside"
"g" "getting" "getting" "got it all"
"y" "[why]"

My father, in his silver
Oldsmobile Achieva,
is just outside this frame.



(4.)

December 27, 1917:

"I made it a point of honor
"to think about "what I am
"here to do.

The owner
of the bar
across the street from this one
asks, "You the guy
who took
pictures here yesterday?"

My Friend, Hank Lodowski,
had "avoiding to buy a round"
to a science.

I try to explain
my project "About the need
"to collect many documents.

& he starts remembering
"the old neighborhood."



(5.)

Since Hank never worked,
cash was always short.

"outside of" "my work

"seclusion

"something

"I" "looked" "through

"knowing

"reciprocated

Dad said

his father

took him here

to meet his work-buddies
from the railroad.



(6.)

To be able to
drink yourself into oblivion

"intenser than
"before

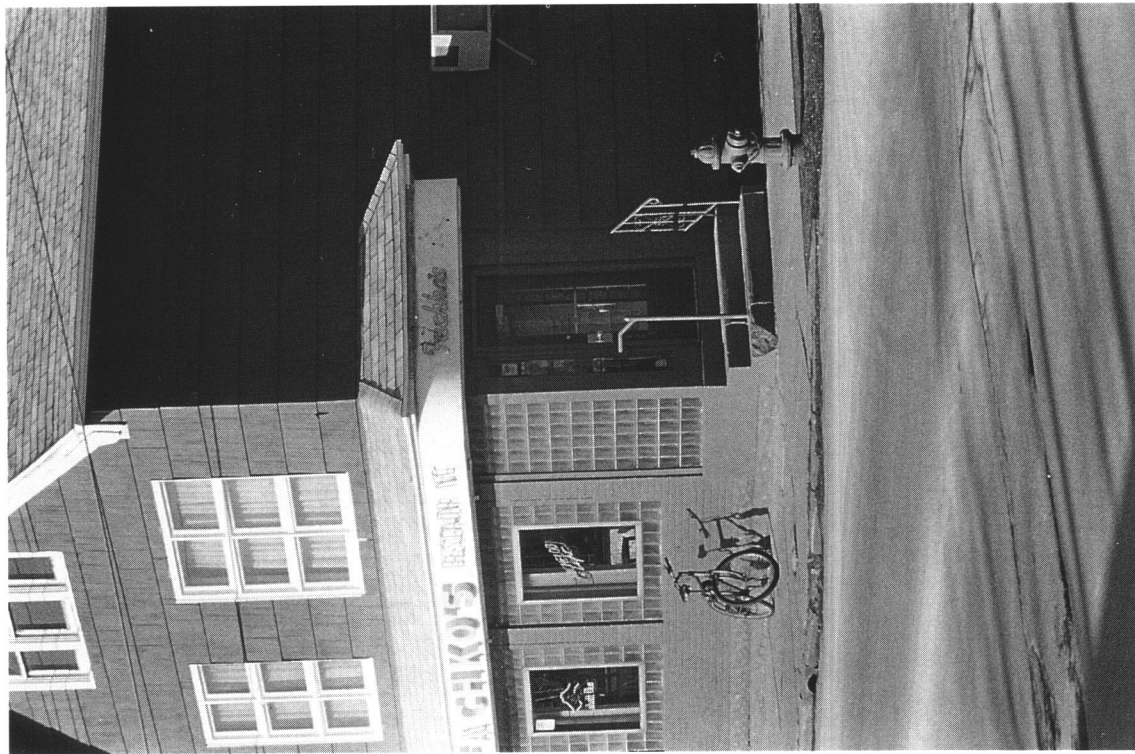
over a six

or seve[n] hour period
and with p-ssing off
your buddies
took some guts,
thought, preparation
and a system.

This is more
my old neighborhood
than theirs,

"taken down the day before

where I came
around midnight, when
I got off from work
at the restaurant.



(7.)

We shot this photo from the parking lot of a car wash.

to start, Sonny (Hank's nickname) came in early before most of the guys arrived.

Trains rolled back behind the camera.

December 29, 1917:
"Eyes tired (field of vision like a screen).



(8.)

December 27, 1917:

"I have a general idea
"about their life..."

**He bought an early
round when only
1 or 2 guys were there.**

"...and some acquaintance
"with their language..."

Asked inside, we
talk about our project
& have our first Labatt's Blue
of the afternoon.

"...and if I can only
"somehow 'document'
"all this, I'll have
"valuable material.



(9.)

We're asked
what we're doing here
but not asked
inside.

"alternate

"social

"representations

From then as new people
joined the group
they bought rounds.



(10.)

Hank payed close attention
to everyone's drinks

Here's the church

and drank accordingly.

Here's the steeple

Almost all the bars
down this street
have closed.

Open the doors

Fewer folks working
at the market, fewer
downing a couple
shots & beers at the end
of their days.

See all the people

"The clear sky

"the promise he did not keep

RAY'S

(11.)

"Return

"around

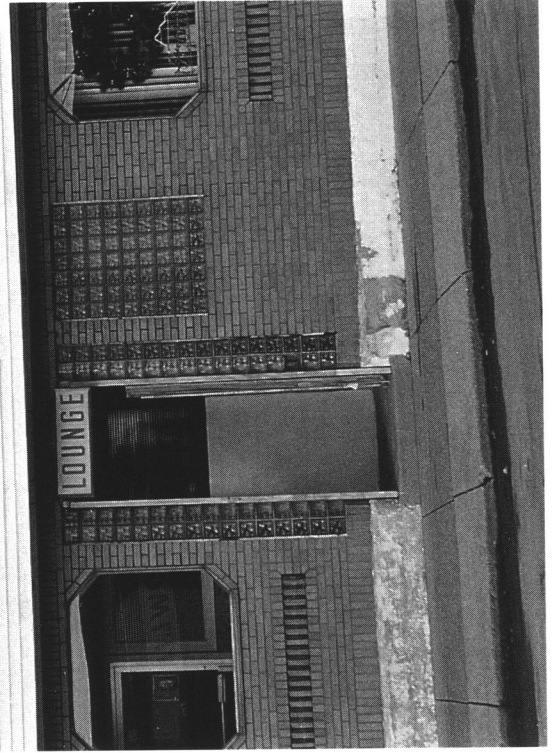
"y[our]

"story

The trick was to have
just enough to ask for another

I used to dance here
all the time, polka dances,
with your mother.

and not enough to need one
when someone
finally bought a round.



(12.)

Sonny's famous words
for which we remember him
to this day (with fondness

for his ingenuity) was
"back me up".

The film ends here. "vanishes

We decide to shoot some

pool & have a few more Blues.





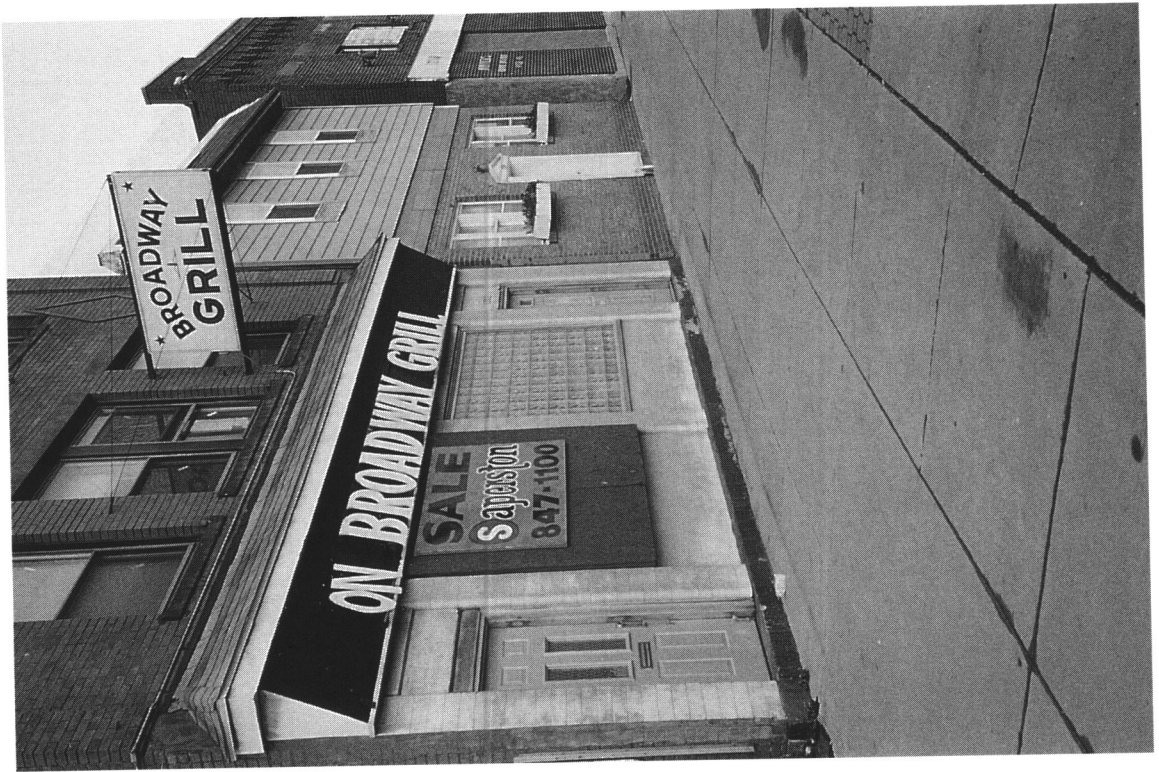
(13.)

I shot photos from this angle
on several consecutive days.

December 28, 1917:

"(I felt weak, exhausted,
"my brain didn't function properly).
"Then disorganization..."

By the time the party
broke up and we were all
broke, Sonny
at times with great
generosity offered to buy
the remaining guys
a drink
with the upside down
shot glasses
before him
(his back-up drinks).



(14.)

We used to go see
Stan himself
wrestle at this place,

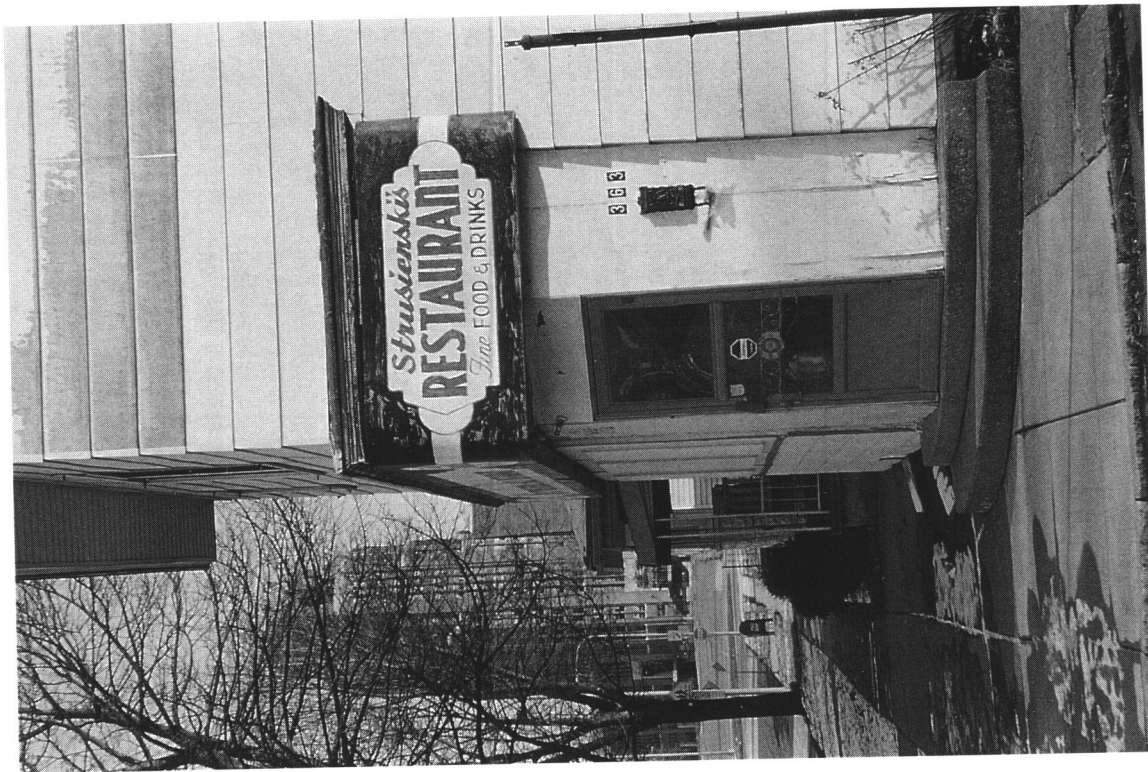
"paper

Sometimes he said
goodnight and goodbuy
and stayed to polish off
his backups himself.

"shadow

they used to wrestle
right there
in the front window.

"wandering around



(15.)

December 27, 1917:

"But the packing took

"a long time.

"After lunch I again

"rummaged in my things.

Before I left to catch

the train I took

this photograph.

Sonny

was a genius.

Note: Boldface quotations are a direct transcription of a story communicated to me (via e-mail) by Ed Michalski. Underlined dates and italicized quoted materials are taken from Bronislaw Malinowski's 1917-18 journals, published (posthumously) in *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (Routledge, 1967). The dates of the journals themselves that material is taken from, December 26-31, 1917, correspond to the exact dates (in 1997) I shot the accompanying photographs and did fieldwork in Buffalo, NY. A Super-8 film of this collecting experience, *Only Ask the Sick* (directed by David Michalski), is usually shown as accompaniment to any reading of this text/viewing of these photos. All other material in the text is taken from my fieldnotes and from memory. Names, as standard practice dictates, are pseudonyms.