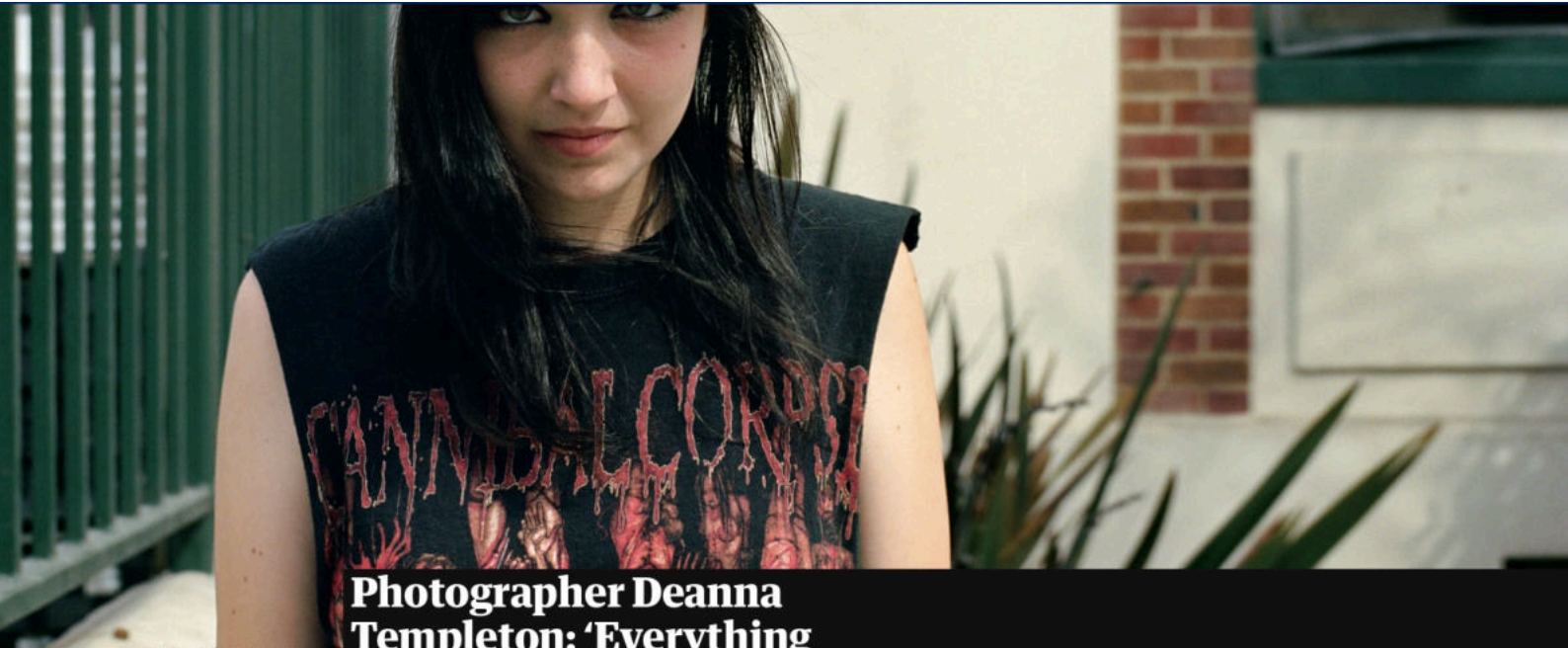


DEANNA TEMPLETON – What She Said, Mack Books, January 2021

'Photographer Deanna Templeton: 'Everything gets mixed up when you're a teenager' by Sean O'Hagan, on January 17th 2021 on [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)



**Photographer Deanna Templeton: 'Everything gets mixed up when you're a teenager'**

▲ Chloé, Huntington Beach, California, 2013. Photograph. All images copyright Deanna Templeton, courtesy of the artist and Mack

The artist's street portraits of young Californian goths and punks took her back to her own adolescence in the 1980s, a troubled period she recorded in an intense journal. Now she's put the two elements together in a new book

by [Sean O'Hagan](#)

**F**or around 20 years, American photographer [Deanna Templeton](#) has shot street portraits of young women who caught her eye, filing them under the heading "Female" in her expansive digital archive. "I've always photographed what interests me," she says, "but it never occurred to me until I began looking closely at them that they all had a vaguely similar look. They reminded me of my younger self - or, at least, what I wished I'd looked like back then."

Many of the young women in her photos have a hybrid style that sits somewhere between punk, metal and goth: dyed hair, dark eyeliner, torn jeans and T-shirts that profess allegiance to a favourite group - Sex Pistols, Black Flag, Subhumans, Suicidal Tendencies. Some are more chic in head-to-toe black and matching cropped hair; pale, stylish goths who proliferate even in the California sun. "I'd often just run up to them and say, 'I've seen that band on your shirt', and we'd get talking," says Templeton. "I noticed that they mostly tended to be more happy and contented and confident than I was at their age."

In her new book, *What She Said*, its title taken from a characteristically maudlin song by the Smiths, Templeton has contrasted these portraits with journal entries from her own disaffected adolescence in the 1980s. Back then, surrounded by images of idealised female beauty, she began, as she writes in her introduction, "to resent my reality".



Megan, Huntington Beach, California, 2016.

Shot through with the heightened intensity of adolescent self-absorption, her diary entries veer from the melodramatic - “Hate Life, hate me, hate you!! Wanna die when I’m 18” - to the deeply unsettling - “I want to be anorexic!! I’ll never be truly happy till I’m skinny.”

Her weight, her height and her skin are the main sources of her frustration and simmering self-loathing. “I’m on the shorter side,” she says, “and, as a teenager, all the supermodels on my wall then were tall and skinny. I realise now it’s an impossible ideal for most, but, back then, it was hard to accept that I wasn’t getting any taller no matter how much I wanted to. My thinking was that I could at least control my weight. I could make myself thinner. It was an intense few years.”

Was it hard to revisit that troubled time, that troubled self? “Well, I experienced a lot of different emotions when I reread what I’d written,” she says, quietly. “I’m in such a better place now, so it really caught me off guard, just the intensity of it. As you get older, you tend to block out the bad times. I guess I forgot how depressed I was back then. I was really sad.”



Amid the abiding sadness, though, there are moments of high adolescent melodrama, including a hand-written page entitled “My Will”. It begins: “I leave all my records and single [sic] to Joey, my brother. All my dolls to orphan children.” An accompanying note addressed to her family and “anyone else that matters” ends thus: “PS Can I please have a big funeral, with all my friends and stuff, and let everyone no [sic] it was a suicide, otherwise this dying was a waste.”

It was equally brave of her, I suggest, to include these more exaggerated and almost comically self-absorbed entries. “Oh my goodness, the will!” she says, laughing, “and the fact that I left instructions! But, you know, that goes along with the darker stuff, it all gets mixed up when you’re that age. There were definitely some dramatics, but there was the real stuff too. I still have some of the scars on my skin.”

I ask her about one image in the book that caught my eye: the torso of a skinny young girl in skimpy pants and the words “Feed me” written on her bare stomach. Its power resides in its provocative and unsettlingly ambiguous message. “That’s southern California right there,” she says, “Seeing those words on that body hit me to my core. Even though it strikes me now that the girl might simply have had no money and needed a free lunch, for me it had a deep resonance.”



Growing up in the anonymous sprawl of suburban Huntington Beach in California, Templeton writes in her introduction that she was ignored by her parents on weekends, but soon realised that her “invisibility equalled freedom”. She escaped headlong into music and, at 15 and with “no curfew”, began hitchhiking regularly into Los Angeles, often sneaking into gigs or using fake ID. In California, the dark energy of post-punk and hardcore drew kids who were alienated above all by the superficiality of their relatively privileged upbringings. The flyers she includes in the book are testament to her dedication: Meat Puppets and Bad Brains at the Roxy; Butthole Surfers and the Jesus and Mary Chain at Santa Monica Civic Auditorium.

“I leaned heavily towards goth and punk,” she says, “but I also absorbed a whole range of music from my older brother, who liked it all. I remember going up to a sales clerk at the local record store with records by the Damned, Motörhead and Madonna and he just looked at me and shook his head.”

Throughout, the banal and the intense sit side by side in her journals, of equal importance to her adolescent imagination. She composes her own punk anthems, including Snow White’s a Whore, the lyrics neatly handwritten in schoolgirl script: “Lay out the needles, fix the spoon/ Watch out veins, I’m flying to the moon.”



The entries change in tone towards the end of the book, around the time she first meets [Ed Templeton](#), a skateboarder who has since become a street photographer. A snapshot shows them embracing in front of a wall of neatly arranged skate ephemera. She looks inordinately happy.

“We’ve been together for 30 years, but I was still so nervous with the idea of him looking at the book,” she says. “He was incredibly supportive, of course, but with this work there’s an element of laying your life bare.”

Having done just that, what advice would she give her younger self? “Oh, I’d just tell her: ‘Go easy on yourself. Give it some time and you will get through this.’ That is what the book is about in a way. Maybe someone who is struggling like I did to find themselves will look at the work and take some hope from it.”

*[What She Said by Deanna Templeton](#) is published by Mack on 27 January (£40)*