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- 1 Aunt Tootie at Aunt Joyce's, Wildomar, CA Images © Glen Erler
- 2 Where John was Shot, San Diego, CA

Family Tree

Memory, family and making sense of one's past through photographs are at the centre of Glen Erler's new book, writes Gemma Padley

All photographs have the power to transport the viewer back to the moment they were taken, but there is something about a family photograph that is especially affecting. Our own images are often significant to us because they recall our experiences; in the hands of a skilled photographer, these images can also resonate for others.

Such is the case with Glen Erler's shots of his family, taken in and around California and published as *Family Tree* by Kehrer last December. On first glance, the photographs are beautiful, often counterbalancing streaming light and dark shadows, and drawing attention to seemingly inconsequential details. They sometimes include semi-visible figures, who Erler later reveals are his family and friends. But shrouded in shadow, these images raise more questions than they answer.

A sense of melancholy and loss pervades the book, not least in the opening sequence, which shows Erler's aunt standing by a tree named after her deceased daughter, Dinah. In the following image, we see only the tree. Near the end of the book Erler focuses on his father's burial in a moving series that is given a name, *The Last Ten Days*. Three images showing a hole in the ground, a patch of freshly turned earth and, finally, the same area covered in grass, are most poignant as they remind us of our inability to escape our own mortality.

Although these images speak to the reader, the book ultimately serves as something of a visual diary – a record of one man's attempt to make sense of his past. Witnessing the process in motion, we see the images offering solace. *BJP*

Family Tree is published by Kehrer, priced at £40.
www.kehrerverlag.com
www.glenler.com