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Bill Owens, "We're really happy. Our kids are healthy, we eat good food and we have a really nice home." From the series *Suburbia*, 1971, printed 1977; gelatin silver print, 6 5/16 in. x 8 1/16 in. (16.03 cm x 20.48 cm); Collection SFMOMA, Gift of John Berggruen.

Looking at Bill Owens' *Suburbia* pictures, I wonder how his people grew into their lifestyle, into their houses, and into their skins. Decades have gone by since this photograph was taken; is this family still happy and healthy? Did their home maintain its property value? I sincerely hope so. Sympathy and relatedness hang in Owens' images—they're journalistic, and kinda neighborly.

I like these people for their bohemian turtlenecks and their modest self-inscription. I suspect, though, that things are more complicated than they admit. The woman wears Beat black, a string of beads, and the weary eyes of a new mom while she feeds her infant. Notice that her husband, with a bemused expression, holds his highball in the same position as the jar of baby food in his spouse's hand.

Those are the only comestibles visible (those grapes look plastic, and that kitchen is suspiciously tidy), so their claims to eating well are dubious. Hopefully they grew into the regional foodie culture as they matured. Chez Panisse opened in 1971, when this picture was taken, and Berkeley isn't so far from Livermore— at least not in miles.

But what about the cats? Owens captures longhairs lounging on the counter, the dinner table, atop the fridge. The feline lifespan doesn't match the human, but I want to believe people like this replenish their pets. Cats make for a warmer, happier home.

-- Glen Helfand

