

## Embracing the Spirit of Play

### Adventures in Childhood

Walking along the Schuylkill River Trail, I'm taken back to my childhood. Just miles from here, I spent endless hours with friends building forts, swinging from vines, and forging our own paths through the woods. We sharpened sticks into spears, built bridges from stones, and created our own worlds. This spirit of adventure—the spirit of play—has stayed with me throughout my life, shaping how I approach photography and art. Like when we stepped off the beaten path as kids, I seek to forge my own path in art, letting curiosity and a sense of wonder guide me.

### Photography: A Reflection of the Soul

For me, the camera is an excuse to explore the world, an invitation to engage with life in a way that transcends words. Photography isn't just about capturing scenes; it's about *positioning oneself on the front lines of life* and reflecting the world and the self within a single frame. Each photograph is a unique glimpse into reality, impossible to replicate. When you frame a moment, you bring your personal vision, soul, and curiosity to it, making each image a distinct reflection of your inner world.

### Courage in Exploration

Courage is essential in both life and art. Whether stepping into new environments or facing intimidating situations, courage fuels creativity. The story of **David and Goliath** resonates with me—a young shepherd who, armed with only a stone and faith, defeated a giant. This tale reminds me that courage can conquer even the most daunting obstacles.

In Baltimore, I encountered moments that tested my bravery. Photographing in neighborhoods where violence was ever-present, I captured scenes of life amidst chaos. One day, a drive-by shooting erupted while I was at a barbecue. I hit the

ground as everyone else sought cover, realizing that chaos and beauty often coexist in life. This experience taught me the importance of returning to the scene, of not letting fear control the narrative. It's these moments of courage that bring depth to my work.

### **The Power of Humor and Playfulness**

In places where I didn't speak the language, humor and playfulness became essential tools for connection. I remember walking through the streets of Jericho, beatboxing my way through crowds to break the ice. Without fluency in Arabic, I found that humor transcended language barriers, helping me to be seen as friendly, not as a stranger. This openness allows for genuine human connection, something that is often lost in the complexities of adult life.

### **Religion, Culture, and Connection**

Throughout my travels, I've encountered various religions and cultures, each offering a new perspective. In Jericho, I prayed in mosques, learning about the practices of *salah* and *wudu*. In Rome, I returned to my Catholic roots, spending time in the baroque churches near the Spanish Steps, like **Basilica Santa Maria del Miracolo**. These churches felt like the apex of art and beauty, housing divine inspiration within their walls. These experiences reminded me that while religion can divide, it also unites, offering a sense of purpose and a shared humanity.

### **Technology in the Modern World**

Living in this era of rapid technological advancement, I'm fascinated by how AI and other innovations shape our lives. Technology has the potential to enhance creativity and understanding, yet it's crucial to stay grounded in the physical world. While AI assists me in learning and exploring new ideas, I believe it should remain a tool—enhancing our abilities, not replacing our humanity.

Technology has become so ingrained that it risks enslaving our minds. In an age where information and technology dominate, we must remember to control our tools rather than be controlled by them. Modern conveniences can make life easier, but they can also detach us from reality. To stay grounded, I remind myself to spend time outside, to engage with the world around me, and to use technology with intention.

### **The Role of Art and History**

Art, particularly sculpture, profoundly inspires me. Sculptures capture the essence of humanity, depicting strength, beauty, and resilience. Standing before a sculpture, I'm reminded of the achievements and struggles of those who came before us. These pieces of art are not just monuments to history; they are celebrations of the human spirit. They inspire pride, not in a vain sense, but in a way that honors our collective journey.

I often think of **Achilles** from Greek mythology—a warrior driven by passion, strength, and loyalty. These intense emotions, though sometimes destructive, are part of what makes us human. Like Achilles, we all grapple with pride, anger, and love. The goal is to harness these forces for good, using them to create and uplift rather than destroy.

### **Finding Beauty in Everyday Life**

Ultimately, my philosophy is about finding beauty in the mundane. Life offers endless opportunities to see the world anew, and photography allows us to capture that beauty. My time in Baltimore taught me to thrive amidst chaos, to look beyond fear and see the raw beauty of life. Similarly, photographing in places like Zambia, I witnessed the strength of community and the importance of tradition. The structure of these communities, with their emphasis on family, tribe, and land, reflects a deep sense of purpose that modern society often lacks.

Being outdoors, away from screens and artificial light, connects us to our primal nature. As Heraclitus said, "You can never step into the same river twice." Every day, every moment, is unique, shaped by subtle changes in light and perspective.

Photography, like water, is ever-changing, capturing fleeting moments that can never be duplicated.

## **Embracing the Present**

In a society that often fuels shame and judgment, finding strength in individuality is vital. Social media can create a pressure to curate our lives, fostering fear of judgment and a desire for approval. True freedom lies in embracing our authentic selves, free from the constraints of comparison and societal expectations.

***"Have you ever thought about how the places from your childhood shape who you are today?"***

Each experience, each adventure, shapes our lives and our art. Photography is a way to reconnect with the spirit of play, to explore with courage, and to embrace the richness of the human experience. By staying curious and engaged, we transform the everyday into a canvas, painting with light, wonder, and an open heart.

## **Questions for Reflection**

- **What moments in your life have required you to summon courage?**
- **How can you embrace a spirit of play in your own journey?**
- **Where do you find beauty in everyday life?**

In every walk along a river or city street, there's a chance to rediscover life's magic. Embracing the spirit of play, finding strength in courage, and capturing the beauty of the ordinary are keys to a meaningful life and a fulfilling creative journey.