

## **Thrive**

Let's seek to thrive, not just survive. In this modern world, we are living in an age of abundance, whether there is advanced technology, many food options, luxury goods, and material things that are at our disposal.

I know that I personally thrive by embracing the simple life, asceticism. I'm reminded of my time as a Peace Corps volunteer, preparing chickens by hand, cooking on a fire, drawing water from a well, and sleeping under a thatched roof. I believe that asceticism increases vitality.

Asceticism is typically viewed as a monk, sitting at a monastery, rejecting the world. Think of the paintings by Caravaggio and the decrepit bodies that he has painted of the saints. I believe in a newfound approach to asceticism in this age of abundance. What I do is fast all day, and eat an insanely massive meal at night. By balancing between fasting, weight lifting, and eating, I'm increasing my strength, and vitality. Maybe asceticism is a good answer to this modern world of too many options.

Also, I was recently in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, looking at the medieval artwork. In a lot of the paintings, you see these royal people with very pale skin, who actually powdered their faces with makeup to showcase that their skin is so white. While the peasants were out in the field, working in the open air, under the sun, the royals sat back in their lavish garments, surrounded by castle walls, enjoying the indoors.

Maybe in this modern world, being a peasant is not so bad after all. I certainly love being outdoors, having tan skin, and increasing my vitality as I thrive under the sun. Maybe pale skin is now a sign of weakness, fragility, and is a sign of anemic people, not royalty.

## **Vitality**

When I'm increasing my vitality, and feel strong, capable, and courageous, I can create from an abundant state. I believe that when you are flowing with this energy that is powerful and curious, you just can't wait for the sun to rise the next day. When I see it peering over the horizon each morning, and my eyes are wide open, I'm eager to head out there into the unknown.

As an artist, this is a great place to be, where you embrace chaos and danger openly, and find yourself out there on the front lines of life. Maybe vitality is merely increasing your power, your physical strength.

### **Imagination and Creativity**

I've always been a very imaginative and creative person. When I was a young boy, I remember drawing little doodles of army men, fighting on battlefields, and even setting up scenes and displays of war in my bedroom using figurines. I spent a lot of my youth traveling to Italy to visit cousins, and remember purchasing these knights, Crusaders, and gladiator toys from the toy store in Piazza Navona. I would set up intricate scenes and create different stories, giving dialogue to the various characters upon my stage. I remember setting up the horsemen, the swordsmen, and different battle settings that were scattered all throughout my desk, bed, and room.

Maybe similar to how I set up these soldiers upon these stages in my room, the street too is a stage. When you practice street photography, you are not only an actor upon the stage, but also the conductor of the drama that unfolds through spontaneity.

Even when I was a little boy, in Catholic school, during chapel, I could imagine scenes and scenarios unfolding all throughout the stations of the cross. I vividly remember these images in my head of pretending that soldiers were fighting in front of the cross, in the vents, or next to me on the benches. Perhaps imagination and creativity is something that we have as children, and then lose with time as we become adults. Personally, I want to hold onto this childlike curiosity, imagination, and creativity, forever.

## **Why I Love Adventure**

The first movie that I ever watched was *The Goonies*. I remember loving the movie because it featured a young group of boys going on an adventure. It was a coming-of-age story where the main characters discover a map that leads to buried treasure. Because the boys' father was about to be evicted from their home, they followed the map to find the treasure in order to pay off their loans. I found that the adventurous story of *The Goonies*, exploring on bicycles, in caves, and unknown places, is something that has been a part of my life all throughout it. I think it's interesting how the movies that we consume influence us subconsciously without even thoroughly thinking about it. I know that I always loved the movie, I would watch it so many times, and I've always been one that craves adventure.

## **Why I Thrive Alone**

I believe I thrive alone because I'm always looking to improve myself. I think that you can improve yourself in recluse, but also be connected to society at large. The city offers me the perfect balance between being alone and also around other people. I know personally that I thrive around others, and need the stimulus of chaos on the street corners. This is where I thrive, mostly, but do so alone. While I am alone, it gives me places to think, clear thoughts come to me, and I'm able to further understand who I truly am. Without the influence of others, I can fully become my authentic self, and express myself openly.

## **Destruction is Creation**

I believe that **destruction is creation**. When I destroy my old ways of working, past self, beliefs, and create anew, I'm able to fully become myself. I returned to shooting with my Ricoh GRIII for over a year and a half now, using black-and-white, as a way for me to thrive as a photographer because it was the first camera that made me fall in love with photography. I found a way that works best for me, simply snapshotting my way through life, not putting too much thought into the photographs that I make.

I've always spent my time traveling, hunting for the next best photo, but now I know that my next photo is my best photo. I know this because of my newfound process of embracing the simple, the mundane, and my immediate surroundings. I'm just snapshotting my way through life, photographing what is closest to me, and means most to me—my hometown.

Philadelphia is a great place to practice photography, and I believe that I can create anew here. In order to create anew, I had to destroy my past way. I had to destroy my past beliefs about photography, and life itself. Now I can break free from these old ways, and fly freely like my favorite bird, the pigeon.

## **Spontaneity**

The spontaneous nature of street photography is what makes it so beautiful and liberating. When you set your body in motion without preconceived notions, you really will be surprised by what you find. To remove any external expectations, whether it's the photograph itself or even the audience, it will allow you to make work with the spontaneous mindset.

I've always been one that takes the road less traveled, exploring without too much care or thought. I don't do much planning, and I've always been a spontaneous person. I just think of something, and then go do it. Maybe it's even better to just not think, and just do. The less that you think, the more that you will shoot. For instance, throughout all of my travels, I've never made a concerted effort to research the place beforehand. I simply look on the map, point to it, and visit it. I never really cared about what I would find, but merely was curious about the places through my intuition. Perhaps going forward we should embrace our spontaneous nature more, and follow our intuition.

## **Why I Love Pigeons**

Pigeons hold a special place in my heart. I remember exploring the various Palestinian cities all throughout the West Bank, climbing to the rooftops, and observing pigeons in flight. Each house in these Palestinian cities holds pigeon

coops on their rooftops. They eat pigeon, and keep them close to their homes so that they always have a source of food.

I find that observing the patterns of pigeons becomes majestic, following their spontaneous patterns, and understanding them through observation. Maybe this enhances our clairvoyance as street photographers, by predicting the patterns of pigeons in flight, as they are very abundant within the urban environments.

Another funny thought I have about pigeons is that they taste way better than chicken. Maybe because chickens just peck around and don't fly, the pigeons become tastier. The pigeons are beautiful, active, and flow with spontaneity. I say we should be more like pigeons, and fly freely and spontaneously.

### **Follow Your Fear**

I've recently been thinking of this notion of following your passion, or even better, following your joy.

Perhaps it's wise to **follow your fear**, and overcome it. When I consider all of the places that I've been, even in my own hometown, it requires an overcoming of fear. Courage and curiosity must be at the forefront in order for you to thrive as a photographer. In order to go out there into the unknown, you must embrace fear openly. I believe that fear is what holds a lot of us back. Fear of rejection, fear of the repercussions of making a photograph of a stranger, fear of confrontation, fear of external validation, and fear of the unknown generally. By letting go of all of these preconceived ideas, embracing fear head on, you will thrive.

### **Life is Motion**

Let us not forget that **motivation is within your legs**. It is within the movement of your physical body, where you find inspiration. Life is motion. Everything is moving, the water never stops flowing in the river. Like the water flowing, we too, should be in a state of change, motion, and embracing this. I believe that in order to thrive, we must move. We must not forget that we are physical beings, and to increase our physical strength, vitality, and to move endlessly, it is inevitable that we will thrive.

