

Life is on the Street

Real life is on the street, in the unknown, in the chaos. I thrive outside on the streets; with my camera in hand, nothing can stop me. The streets are there to conquer this realm. Through street photography, I become closer to the moments that are fleeting, the essence of life itself, and find joy and meaning in the mundane.

Dream on

The other night, while asleep, I had a dream of myself on a small ship from a third person perspective. The ship crashed, the scene panned out, and I was looking down at the ship. It was just a small popsicle stick. I reached down with my hand, picked it up, and put it back in the water.

Remove all limiting beliefs

I prefer walking aimlessly without any destination in mind. I think we limit ourselves due to our external circumstances, depending on what camera we own, where we live, or even how we see the world. Let's remove all limiting beliefs about what we deem a photograph should be, what life should be, etc. Let's go boundless and limitless with our approach, freeing ourselves of any limiting beliefs we have about our location, gear, and remove all of our expectations. Just let go, let the chips fall as they may, and embrace the spirit of play. I can tell you, from my personal experience, after photographing for a decade, following a very rigid, traditional, and automatic approach to photography, that what I am doing right now, for the past two years, is the most liberating feeling I've ever had in my life. Just think, if I were to photograph the same way for the rest of my life, that would

certainly be a boring and limiting way to approach making art. By removing these limiting beliefs I've had in the past about what I believe a "good" photograph should be, I am now free.

The call to adventure

I've had a call to adventure since I was a little boy, playing in the Wiccan forest, crafting spears with sticks, attempting to hunt deer, climbing trees, building teepees, making bridges with stones, exploring the unknown. I remember when I first found the bike trail here in Philadelphia, and how much time I would spend simply riding onward, without stopping. I wanted to see how far I could go, and would push myself each day, from a very young age. Something about movement, and watching the trees pass you by from the left and the right of you, through biking onward. I feel the same sensation while walking on the street, walking in the trails, or in nature. I feel like this call to adventure has been bubbling up inside of me since I was a little boy, and now with the power of photography, I've unlocked this new form of creativity, that flows through me, and gives me an abundant and endless way to approach the multifaceted complexities of life. For the road is endless, there is so much to see, so much to do, you just have to go outside and recognize that every day is new.

Every day is a blank slate

When I wake up every morning, I treat it like a mini birth. Before I go to bed, and rest my eyes, I treat it like a mini death. I simply assume that I will not wake up in the morning.

Why do I do this?

Firstly, I believe it is important and critical for us to recognize the shortness of life. I believe that the shortness of life sets everything else into perspective, and helps me focus on the moment, the following day. Also, through waking up in the morning, and having another shot, this blank slate, this new day, I become very

grateful for the simple things in life, such as walking, sunlight, and water. I find joy in the simple pleasures of life, and recognize these to be the ultimate luxury. I'm simply grateful to be alive, to have another shot on this glorious day, to bask in the sunlight again.

How to thrive on your own?

As an artist and a street photographer, I thrive on my own. A few simple ways that I've approached my life throughout the years have been by making photographs, obviously. However, I also believe that through filming my experiences using a GoPro, such as the past POV videos that I've made, throughout all of my travels, since I first started photographing, I find new ways to thrive. For the past two years, I've been using my GoPro Mini as a way for me to live stream my life. I enjoy sharing, openly and honestly. I also prefer the GoPro Mini because there is no LCD screen, where you cannot perceive yourself. This removes all the distractions, and simply allows you to share openly. It's fun to just treat life like a video game, and using the super view on a GoPro, you can share your perspective, or your POV, similar to the FOV in a game. *Also, maybe the goal of art is to simply share your perspective, or your POV?*

I've enjoyed sharing my spiritual journey, philosophy, and creative ways of photographing. I'm finding that by live streaming, through making videos, authentically speaking my mind, without jump cuts, I'm thriving. I'm allowing my freak flag to fly, not really caring about what other people think. I'm enjoying this because it gives my life more meaning, and helps me thrive on my own. There's something special about the joy of creation, whether I'm making a photograph, filming a video, recording my audio, writing a poem, or making a collage, etc., that helps me thrive. If you're anything like me, you prefer solitude, and if so, my suggestion to you is to simply share, make a website, make videos, photos, etc. And just keep on pushing with your creative spirit. Honestly, I am very extroverted, love the bustling crowds, experiencing places, people, etc. However, I prefer to spend my days on my own, creating.

Focus on yourself

By focusing on myself, I've accepted who I am, and have found inner peace. I'm unbothered by others' perceptions of me. I simply do not care. I absolutely love myself. I believe this is the path to freedom and authenticity.

Delete your Instagram

Using Instagram first thing in the morning is like waking up, taking a shit, wiping with your hands, and smearing it all over yourself, your face, and your eyes. So do you want poop all over yourself? No. Delete your Instagram.

Let us assume that internet users are bots. All the arguments and comments are AI bots. Now what? Are you going to actively give attention to people's perception of you via likes, comments, etc.? No... so just disable them!

Just pick up a camera and go!

This is your call to action: just pick up the camera and go! Move your physical body more, and spend the maximum time in your day outside. First, isn't this the goal of a photographer? To be out there in the world, exploring endlessly? Of course it is, so let's do this more. Let's move more, create more, photograph more and, think about ways that we can integrate photography into our daily lives. A simple suggestion is to purchase a compact digital camera such as the Ricoh GRIII or GRIIIx. It's never been simpler to make photographs, just start now!

Life is too short to spend your time indoors

When people from the office come outside, after work, they always talk about he said, she said, office drama, gossip, group chats, comments, leaving notes, man versus woman talk. This is so strange to me. I think these people that spend the maximum time inside during the day are becoming sick in both the mind and the body. Air conditioning in the summer is so cold and bad for you. I always find it amusing when the office workers come outside, how hot it is, and complain. I just laugh to myself, and think about fire, the sun, and how without it, we would not even be here right now.

Honestly, I'm just so grateful to be walking right now, as I write this essay. I'm so grateful to be outside, moving, and embracing the sunlight. This truly is the ultimate privilege in this modern world. I prefer to start my day in nature at an elevated view in an open space. I enjoy watching the waterfall and the river flow. I watch the tapestry of leaves as they wiggle, and find this to be the ultimate source of entertainment in my life. Just observe life and light. There's no TV show, movie, or social media that will provide you with the same joy as the great outdoors.

Walking becomes meditation. When you focus on the moment, examine life deeply.

The joy of creation

I saw a comedian on the street recently and asked him what he thought about society. He told me that this is the greatest time to be alive. He said, back in the 80s barely anyone had a car. He said that this is the only time where you can see people coming out of Planet Fitness, wearing beautiful yoga clothes, nice butts, and even if you're overweight, the clothes will force it into your body and make you look skinnier or nicer.

As much as I critique modernity, I can't help but laugh at this comedian, and see how right he is. For we truly do live in this abundant time, and we should be grateful for it. I think the problem becomes the instantaneous gratification of consumption, and people generally become consumers more than producers. I say because of this, let's create more, and find joy in creation. I enjoy listening to the people of the streets, chatting with strangers, and simply making street photographs through a playful approach, remaining open, and see what experiences will come my way.

The goal is to increase your curiosity by one percent each day

My goal in life is to increase my curiosity by one percent each day because a curious person will forever remain evolving. Evolution is the goal of the human being, and creativity and curiosity will guide us there. Looking at the world with a camera and making a photograph of things, I'm saying yes to life, affirming this moment, and finding new ways to see the same mundane things. By reveling in the mundane, the smallest details become the biggest fascinations for me. Simply increase your curiosity by one percent each day and recognize this as the goal. If you're continuously making photographs, going out there on the front lines of life, consider yourself a successful human being and photographer.

Obsession vs. discipline

I've been obsessed with street photography since the day I picked up a camera when I was around 16 or 17 years old. I remember taking a photography course in high school and needing to purchase my first camera. I remember going to a small mom-and-pop shop in Chestnut Hill, purchasing my first Nikon FM with a 50mm lens. From there, the rest is history. I learned that my uncle Bill had an M3, and he passed it down to me and taught me how to see. I think it's funny, as much as people realize that I'm a digital photographer, what they truly don't understand is that I've dabbled with many different cameras and formats, from 35mm film to 120, and spent my early years honing my craft on the streets with a Leica M3. I am very grateful, however, that towards the end of 2015, I learned about the Ricoh GRII and moved on from film photography. Ever since that day of transitioning to digital, my work has grown exponentially. I believe that was the moment when I truly became obsessed because I would go out, photograph, come home, import the photos, and continuously get my feedback right away. This made me more motivated to keep going out there, and I was no longer bogged down by the limitations of film. I truly became obsessed. Every waking moment for a decade, I spent on the streets, photographing. There truly hasn't been a moment since I first picked up the camera where I didn't have it in my pocket or on me. I believe obsession is very different from discipline.

I'm walking down the Philadelphia Museum of Art, carrying a 40-pound plate; this is discipline, as I wake up early, around 4:30, slam some espresso, throw the vest on, and go for a march wearing barefoot shoes. Could I walk without a vest? Probably. However, I'm disciplined in increasing my fitness, strength, and growth. The difference between obsession and discipline is that when you are disciplined, you're doing something, overcoming the tension and friction between you and the thing itself. Being disciplined is about going out there and doing the thing, even when you don't feel like it. Obsession is doing the thing when there's nothing else in the world that you would rather be doing, when it completely takes over your life, and it becomes like breathing, second nature.

Fortune favors the bold

I remember photographing at Logan Square for eight hours straight, attempting to make a photograph on a hot summer day, as the children were playing in the fountain. I spent the entire day photographing around the edge of the fountain, taking off my shoes, diving in myself, getting soaking wet, falling, getting back up, continuously pressing the shutter again. I even told myself out loud, "I will photograph this rainbow!" I had the conviction and the willpower that I would make the photograph that would manifest in the world. I believe you must be bold, daring, courageous to make a strong photograph. It is inevitable that fortune will favor the bold through your obsession and dedication to the craft.

Belief vs. knowing

I've been thinking about the difference between a belief and a knowing. Two years ago, I woke up, looked outside my window on Easter Sunday, and felt like the world was new. On this particular day, I felt like a kid again. There was something in me that started to treat the world like a playground. I remember I started to jump up on benches, leap off the trees, and just embrace this playful spirit generally. I don't know what it was, but I think it was a byproduct of two years of COVID lockdown, being forced inside for so long. Contemplating my belief in God, I quit my job as a photographer because it was really unfulfilling, and decided to travel to Rome, where I spent two months, praying in the churches all day. I was looking at the

images of Caravaggio within the churches, and found these to uplift my spirit. I think visuals and seeing things solidify your belief. Seeing a piece of the cross, the inscription, the nails, and the thorns from his crown in a church in Rome uplifted my spirit. I visited Old City Jerusalem and saw the tomb of Jesus. I traveled the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and saw the sycamore tree. I visited the Valley of Elah in Israel and saw where the battle between David and Goliath was. I no longer have a “belief” in God but a knowing.

Travel vs. books

The other day I helped a man named Isaac across the street. I noticed him reaching for a pole and photographed his hands. The way his fingers were touching the pole just looked so beautiful. He then asked me if I could help him cross the street when the light turned green. He walked extremely slowly. We actually wound up not being able to cross the street in time. I stood there and stopped the traffic with my hand in his. I waited for him to get on the bus. We waited, and I asked what he would eat for dinner.

“I don’t like food, I like to read books. I like to absorb all of the knowledge. This is my problem. I just read read read read.”

He said he likes to read history. He probably likes to read so much because he can’t really walk anymore? I think as much as we can dive our noses into books and absorb knowledge through reading, I believe real wisdom comes from embodied experiences in reality, in the physical flesh, and especially from traveling the world. If you want to read books, just read for pleasure. I don’t think reading is something that we should force upon ourselves, but something that we willingly engage in. I personally carve out at least half an hour each day to read in nature, just because I want to. If I don’t feel like it, I just won’t read that day. I’d rather go explore and embrace the spirit of play. That’s how I was since I was a little kid in high school anyway; I would always skip class and just go out and touch the grass.

Every day is a battle for your mind

Are we living in a spiritual war, and what does this mean? Perhaps our attention and what we spend our time doing will provide the battleground for this spiritual war or battle for our mind. If you're spending too much time inside, on your phone, consuming, maybe you will find yourself inevitably in an emotional state, with hormones imbalanced. This is inevitable simply due to the way in which these algorithms work. Perhaps this war is for your mind, and you must free yourself from this enslavement of the mind. Just leave, stop distracting yourself with what's going on, and embrace this moment right here, right now.

Always evolving

Digging and searching for the meaning of life is like carving through an endless pit to nowhere, like digging on a beach and never striking water. Stop searching, and just let it flow toward you.

I feel like I've downloaded an extra DLC expansion pack

Think of a video game, and how it comes to an end. You defeat the boss, and then what? Maybe a few months later, they release a new DLC, downloadable content, for you to upgrade your character and increase the longevity of the gameplay. The reason why I used to be so obsessed with Minecraft is because the game is essentially endless. The world is endless, and there are infinite ways that you can play. There is no endgame in Minecraft. Even if you defeat the boss, the dragon, you can go back and fight it over and over again. We should approach our life and photography this way.

Your next photograph is your best photograph.

When you think this way, that the next time you press the shutter is the best time to press your shutter, you will unlock this new downloadable content. You will recognize how truly infinite photography is, for you cannot make the same photograph twice.

Just start now. Break all of the rules. Let's flip photography on its head and conquer this medium.

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