

My Story

Early Childhood

I was born and raised in **Roxborough and Andorra**, neighborhoods in Philadelphia surrounded by the Wissahickon forest. My childhood was filled with endless exploration—**building tipis with sticks, making bridges with stones, fishing in the stream**, and biking through trails that snaked through the woods. These early adventures instilled a deep love for the outdoors and a desire to explore the world around me.

From a young age, I developed a strong sense of adventure. I remember discovering the **Schuylkill River Trail** around age twelve, my love for biking sparking this new exploration. Each day, I wandered through the neighborhood, often losing myself in the process, getting wonderfully “lost” on my bike. *Looking out towards the vast landscape of trees and a nearby farm from an elevated view*, I was struck by a sense of wonder—awe at the natural world and the endless horizon.

"It was here that I learned to take a new turn, to follow my intuition, and explore the world openly."

Nearby the farm, I stumbled upon a very steep hill. Without a second thought, I rode down at full speed, weaving and turning, caught up in the thrill of it all. I didn't even consider the challenge of getting back up or making my way home.

Reaching the bottom of the hill, I discovered the Schuylkill River itself. I noticed a trail alongside it and instinctively began riding, drawn forward by the path itself. Looking ahead, I could see nothing but trees and an endless trail. I rode until I reached a trailhead and realized I was miles from home, unsure of where to go next. Deciding to turn back, I began the climb uphill, only to discover the difficulty of pushing my small, tired body up the steep incline. But when I finally made it to the top, I felt a huge sense of accomplishment, brimming with curiosity about what I had just discovered on this small adventure.

I returned to that hill many times, pushing myself further and further along the trail each time. Eventually, I reached **Valley Forge National Park**, a beautiful, historic location here in Pennsylvania with plenty of terrain to explore. Riding along the dirt path, immersed in the surroundings, I eventually popped a tire, far from home. I had no choice but to call my mom, who, shocked at the distance I had traveled, immediately came to pick me up. I tossed my bike into the trunk, excitedly explaining my journey and newfound discovery of this incredible trail.

To my surprise, my mother didn't scold me or discourage me from going back; instead, she encouraged me. She simply wanted me to be more prepared next time, to be safe and independent. Her support allowed me to continue taking these long rides, often covering 20 to 30 miles throughout my early childhood.

Becoming an Artist

When I entered high school, I signed up for a **web design course** and was introduced to **Photoshop**. This sparked my love for art, design, and the creative process. I dove into the basics of digital design, exploring typography and layout, finding that I had a knack for it. But when the course moved into coding, my enthusiasm waned—I was far more captivated by the visuals than the technical side. Recognizing my passion, I enrolled in a graphic design course the following semester, focusing on the parts that truly interested me and **honing my skills in Photoshop**.

At sixteen, a pivotal moment occurred. My graphic design class introduced **photography** as part of the curriculum, and I was instantly hooked. I picked up a **Nikon FM film camera** and returned to the woods that had defined my childhood, this time with new purpose. The familiar trails and trees became my subjects, as I biked miles with my camera, capturing snapshots of nature in a way that felt meaningful and fresh. I began recording videos too, using a Canon Rebel T3i, and discovered that blending photography with video offered even more ways to express myself.

"My passion for exploration and photography was the perfect combination—each ride with my camera brought new excitement, a way to capture the world I saw and share the joy it brought me."

Photography soon became my main outlet, a way to translate my inner world onto film. **Exploration and photography** became inseparable, and I found myself eager to see more, to capture more, to experiment with angles, light, and composition. As I grew more confident, I ventured further afield, feeling that each click of the shutter allowed me to **shape my own world and understand life** from a new perspective.

Discovering Street Photography

As I continued honing my skills, I gravitated toward **black-and-white film**, focusing on the fundamentals—exposure, lighting, composition. I was deeply invested in understanding these technical elements, spending countless hours experimenting. Then, my **great-uncle**, noticing my growing passion for photography, invited me to see his camera collection. He had a range of classic cameras, including a **Leica M3** with various lenses. This collection became a new world of inspiration for me.

One day, he took me to a local mall to teach me more about **shutter speed** and motion. We started near a carousel, where he explained that depending on the shutter speed, I could either freeze the motion or create a beautiful blur. He showed me that setting the shutter to **1/500 of a second** would capture the carousel's riders perfectly still, while **1/30 of a second** would turn the moving scene into a dreamy, abstract blur. This hands-on lesson was a turning point; I began to see the world through the lens of possibilities.

"As he explained shutter speed, framing, and the interplay of light and motion, I realized how photography could alter reality, capturing moments in unique and unexpected ways."

Our lesson continued as we walked through the **Build-A-Bear Workshop** area, where he introduced me to the concept of the "**decisive moment**." He pointed out the children moving in and out of the shop with their bears, their interactions reflecting the advertisement on the wall—a teddy bear just like theirs. My uncle emphasized the importance of framing and waiting for just the right moment to create a photograph that told a story. That lesson opened my eyes to the potential of photography as more than just capturing a scene but weaving together elements in a single frame.

At this point, I had never considered photographing people or creating stories through the lens. **Juxtaposing people with their surroundings** became a kind of visual game that I would play, and from that day on, it became the foundation of my approach to street photography.

Soon after, my family moved to **Center City Philadelphia**, where I found myself surrounded by the perfect environment to practice. I began photographing the bustling streets without even realizing what “street photography” was. My uncle occasionally let me borrow his Leica, and I especially loved using the **35mm Summaron lens**. I would photograph people candidly, learning to anticipate moments and create natural compositions. The energy along Market Street, the unique characters at Penn’s Landing, and the liveliness of summertime in the city became my training ground. These early experiences on the street taught me **how to see**, and it was in these moments that I fully committed to street photography as my calling.

Art School

After high school, I decided to enroll at the **Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA)** in Baltimore, drawn to its renowned graphic design program. My first year was a broad introduction to the fine arts. I learned to draw from live models, sculpt with plaster and wood, experiment with multimedia, and paint. Each medium offered new insights, pushing me to explore beyond photography. This immersive experience laid a solid foundation, teaching me that art could take on many forms and that each had something unique to offer.

In my second year, I officially declared **graphic design as my major**. I enjoyed the structure of design, the balance of text and visuals, and the process of creating something meaningful on a page. Yet, even as I immersed myself in design, photography kept calling me back. That year, I took a course that blended photography with design, giving me a chance to reconnect with the camera and see how both disciplines could complement each other.

Exploring downtown Baltimore and its **Inner Harbor** reignited my interest in street photography. I started making portraits of strangers, engaging with people on the street, and capturing their stories. This approach was different from the candid

work I had done in Philadelphia. Now, I would ask for permission, building connections with people through the lens and learning to engage with subjects on a more personal level. I would return to campus, import the photos, and merge them with typography and design, blending the two worlds in a way that felt true to my vision.

"My teacher once offered an extra credit project, a chance to work on a project outside of class—creating portraits for a local church community."

This project involved engaging with people from the community, especially those in need. The final outcome was a gallery show where locals could view the portraits, accompanied by written stories. It was an opportunity to uplift these individuals, giving them a voice and a platform. My role was to make the portraits, and through this project, I found myself connecting with people on a deeper level, drawn to the way photography could bring us closer to communities and stories we might otherwise overlook.

This experience solidified my love for both people and photography. **Documenting lives and sharing moments** with those who are often unseen became my motivation. It brought me closer to the people of Baltimore, revealing layers of the city and its residents that I hadn't known before. I knew then that I wanted my photography to not only capture but to connect, to bridge gaps between individuals and their stories.

Baltimore Street Photography

Toward the end of 2015, I purchased a **Ricoh GRII** and began exploring Baltimore in earnest. No longer content to photograph the familiar scenes around the downtown Inner Harbor, I ventured into **West Baltimore**, specifically the **Sandtown-Winchester** neighborhood near my school. Known for its reputation as a rough area, Sandtown was viewed by many as dangerous, especially for someone with a camera. But the skills I had gained from previous projects—learning to engage with people—helped me navigate the community with respect and openness.

In Sandtown, I discovered that **street photography required a different approach**. Unlike Philadelphia, where I could often capture candid shots anonymously, Baltimore demanded a level of interaction and trust. I started by introducing myself to people at bus stops, explaining my work as a photographer and a student nearby. This openness allowed me to connect with people in ways that went beyond just taking a picture. People began to recognize me as I returned day after day, and I found myself welcomed, gaining access to a part of the community few outsiders experience.

Each day after class, I would wander West Baltimore with my Ricoh GR11. Its small, compact design made it the perfect tool—it could easily slip into my pocket, letting me move naturally without drawing too much attention. The camera's unobtrusive presence helped me to **blend into the neighborhood**, capturing life as it unfolded, and gave me a unique vantage point as an observer within this vibrant community.

"One day, I came across a basketball game behind a high school during the golden hour. The mural on the wall and the players in motion created an energy I had never captured before."

As the boys played, I asked if I could make some photos. I set my camera to **P mode** and used the LCD screen on the back to frame the action. I shot continuously, each frame building on the last, capturing the fluidity and intensity of the game. This scene was a pivotal moment for me as a photographer. **When I reviewed the photos, I realized I had captured something special**, a dynamic image that spoke to the spirit of the place and the people in it.

Later that year, I submitted this photo to the **Miami Street Photography Contest**, judged by Martin Parr, and was awarded **first place**. Parr mentioned the visual effect of the gestures I captured in motion, which resembled wind blowing along a windmill. This recognition pushed me further in my pursuit of street photography, giving me the confidence to continue exploring, documenting, and searching for that next decisive moment.

Photojournalism and the DNC

In 2016, I was hired as a **photojournalist for the Democratic National Convention (DNC)**, a major turning point in my career. I was tasked with capturing a wide range of events, from political rallies and speeches to community festivals throughout Philadelphia. This experience allowed me to blend my passion for photography with the fast-paced demands of journalism, sharpening my skills in capturing moments with precision and purpose.

One festival that stands out was the **African Festival** in Center City, Philadelphia. I remember a powerful scene: a man was distributing newspapers commemorating the life of Muhammad Ali shortly after his passing. I made a photograph of him juxtaposed against a worker in the background, capturing a fleeting moment that felt both historical and deeply personal. My **Ricoh GR11** became my constant companion, allowing me to snap candid street photography shots in between my official assignments. My **Canon 6D** served as my primary workhorse for the event coverage, handling the bulk of my journalistic work while my Ricoh allowed me the freedom to capture the city's pulse in a more spontaneous, documentary style.

When the DNC convention took place in South Philadelphia, I expanded my focus to document not only the event itself but also the energy outside. Protesters gathered, fences were jumped, and as the sun set, the sense of tension and anticipation grew. I used my Ricoh's **pop flash** feature to capture the action as people moved dynamically through the scene.

Inside the convention, I navigated the crowded floors, photographing political figures, delegates, and supporters. The environment was fast-paced and chaotic, but the experience taught me invaluable lessons in adaptability. **Balancing official assignments with street photography** kept me constantly engaged, always ready to capture both the formal and the unexpected. Armed with my laptop, I would quickly cull through photos on the spot, uploading them for publications or social media—a process that kept me sharp and always prepared for the next shot.

The Road from Jerusalem to Jericho

In 2017, I decided to study abroad in **Jerusalem, Israel** at Hebrew University, a journey that deeply transformed my perspective. Before leaving, I visited B&H in New York City and purchased a **Fujifilm X-Pro2** with a 23mm F2 lens—a camera

setup I trusted to withstand the demands of my travels. For six months, I explored Jerusalem and its surroundings, channeling my childlike curiosity and capturing scenes steeped in history.

Each weekend, after class, I would take a bus to various cities throughout the **West Bank**—from Ramallah and Qalandia to Hebron, Jenin, Nablus, Bethlehem, and my favorite, **Jericho**. Jericho, often called the “City of the Moon,” is the lowest elevated city in the world and holds a timeless quality that captivated me. I spent hours wandering its streets, observing the way life unfolds in this desert town under the scorching sun. With each return, I grew more familiar with the community, establishing relationships that allowed me to delve deeper into its unique atmosphere.

"The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is a magical experience—desert mountains, the Dead Sea, and a biblical landscape that invites you to explore without expectations."

On my trips, I would stay in a modest hostel, often waking at dawn to capture the light over Jericho’s rustic buildings and vibrant streets. I spent a significant amount of time in the refugee camp nearby, walking through its densely packed streets and meeting residents who welcomed me with warmth and curiosity. Each day, I carried my camera and an open mind, allowing me to document the rhythm of life within this historic city.

One day, after visiting a mosque in Jericho, I was approached by members of the **Jahalin family**. They invited me into their home for tea, and I quickly felt part of their circle. That evening, they invited me on an adventure to the **Wadi Qelt mountain range**. We climbed into the back of their car and wound our way up a treacherous mountain road. At one point, their car broke down, and they jumped out to push it uphill. As chaos unfolded around us, I seized the moment to capture the scene—a blend of camaraderie, challenge, and joy. We eventually made it to the peak, where we made coffee over a fire, sang songs, and watched the sun sink over the Dead Sea.

This journey from Jerusalem to Jericho brought out a side of me that was deeply inspired by **adventure and storytelling**, blending my love for exploration with photography in a way I had never experienced before.

War Photography

Because I spent so much time photographing along the **border of Israel and Palestine**, I inevitably found myself caught in the midst of conflict on several occasions. It was a surreal experience to witness and document the tensions firsthand, confronting a world very different from the one I knew. These clashes between the **Israeli Defense Force (IDF)** and Palestinians were intense and often dangerous, challenging my resolve as both a photographer and an outsider.

One afternoon, while traveling along the border near **Qalandia**, our bus driver suddenly told everyone to disembark. I quickly found myself in the middle of a protest, with tear gas and live ammunition in the air. Trying to find a safe vantage point, I instinctively moved toward the IDF side of the conflict, but it became apparent that my camera made me a visible target. In a moment, the soldiers noticed me and fired tear gas in my direction. **Blinded and disoriented**, I sprinted into a nearby alleyway, hoping to escape the fumes.

"I stumbled into a small shop where the owner handed me a high-visibility vest. His kindness was a moment of humanity in the chaos, a simple gesture to keep me safe in a volatile space."

Wearing the vest, I found the courage to inch closer to the action, pushing past my fear as I documented the intensity around me. Tear gas filled the air, rubber bullets ricocheted off walls, and the sounds of shouting and explosions blurred together. I captured images of the protesters' defiance and the IDF's overwhelming presence, framing each shot with a sense of urgency and responsibility. This day was a visceral reminder of the dangers faced by those living in these conflict zones daily.

In **Jericho**, I found myself in another confrontation near the border, only this time the landscape offered almost no cover. The open terrain forced me to rely on small ditches and concrete barriers, inching my way forward to capture the unfolding scene. As the protesters attempted to break down a barricade and lit tires on fire to create a smokescreen, I saw a man in a tattered mask, his eyes piercing through the haze. I framed the shot, with the smoke and flames rising behind him, and felt a moment of intense connection to the scene. His gaze held a mixture of resilience and defiance, embodying the gravity of the situation in a single image.

"War photography taught me the weight of a single moment, of how an image can capture not only what is seen but also what is felt. These were some of the most challenging and profound experiences of my life as a photographer."

The photographs I captured in Qalandia and Jericho are a testament to both the resilience of the people and the raw intensity of their struggle. I carry these experiences with me, reminders of the power and responsibility that come with documenting human conflict.

The Wall

In **East Jerusalem**, I explored a Palestinian refugee camp called **Shuafat**, known as one of the largest camps in the region. The camp was surrounded by a towering concrete wall, roughly **30 feet high**, doubling the height of the Berlin Wall. To enter Shuafat, one had to pass through a heavily guarded military checkpoint. My **American passport** granted me entry, allowing me to access and document this unique area.

I was primarily drawn to Shuafat because of the imposing wall. Its sheer size and presence dominated the landscape, casting long shadows over the narrow alleyways and winding streets within the camp. I spent days walking alongside the wall, navigating Shuafat's maze-like structure, absorbing the layers of graffiti and art that turned the concrete into a silent protest.

"The wall in Shuafat felt like a character of its own, a constant reminder of division and resilience."

I often visited after my classes, timing my trips to capture the changing light as it hit the wall and the surrounding neighborhood. On one memorable day, a group of children played nearby, using the wall as the boundary of their improvised playground. They threw rocks over it, their laughter and shouts ringing out amidst the gray concrete. While photographing, I suddenly felt a sharp pain in the back of my leg—a rock had hit me from a nearby hillside. It hurt, but the kids' resilience and energy made me push through, determined to document this defiant playfulness.

After several visits, I captured one of my strongest photographs of the trip: a young boy throwing a baby stroller against the wall. The image encapsulated the frustration and raw energy of Shuafat's younger generation, their actions a blend of innocence and rebellion. Over time, I returned to this spot repeatedly, experimenting with angles and perspectives, hoping to capture the essence of life within the camp.

In one of my final visits, I climbed on top of the wall itself, looking out over **East Jerusalem** with a sense of accomplishment. This journey into Shuafat left a lasting impact on me, shifting my perspective on resilience and the strength of communities that persevere under challenging conditions.

The City of the Moon

Jericho—known as the “City of the Moon”—had an otherworldly charm that captivated me from the start. The desert mountains loomed majestically over the city, casting dramatic shadows that shifted throughout the day. **The Dead Sea** sparkled in the distance, and the vibrant colors of Jericho's buildings stood out against the arid landscape. Photographing in this ancient city provided a unique opportunity to hone my craft in a place rich with history, spirituality, and striking scenery.

"Jericho was a magical place to practice street photography. Its raw beauty and rich culture created an ideal backdrop for storytelling through images."

I carried an **Instax camera** with me as I explored, a tool that allowed me to connect with locals. I'd make instant prints of my shots and give them to the people I photographed, using these small gifts as a way to ask for permission and build trust. This act of sharing the joy of photography often led to conversations, invitations, and, ultimately, stories that I could capture and share.

Over my six months in Jericho, I returned to photograph again and again, each visit offering new insights and perspectives. I would wake early to capture the light at dawn, roam the city's streets during the heat of the day, and explore the bustling

markets as the sun set. Jericho's combination of natural beauty and human resilience brought out the best in my work, and I left feeling that I had gained a deeper connection to both the city and the people within it.

"By the end of my time there, I had fallen in love with the city, its people, and its rhythm, knowing that my images would forever carry a piece of Jericho's spirit with them."

After these profound months of exploration and growth, I reunited with my brother, and together, we embarked on a trip to **Italy**. Though my time in Jericho had come to an end, the experiences and stories I collected there would stay with me, shaping my photography and my outlook on life.

A Summer in Napoli

In the summer of 2017, I joined my brother for a two-week trip to **Napoli, Italy**. Our family roots trace back to **Caserta**, a small town about 30 minutes from Napoli, where we still have relatives. Napoli's gritty streets and vibrant energy created an ideal environment for street photography, filled with opportunities to capture raw, authentic scenes.

While the bustling streets of Napoli offered endless moments to photograph, I was drawn to the **Mediterranean Sea**. Locals would gather along the rocky shore to sunbathe, swim, and socialize. My brother and I decided to join them, enjoying fresh seafood from nearby vendors and mingling with locals by the water. During one of these afternoons, we met a group of men who shared their watermelon with us. They showed us a unique trick: keeping the watermelon cool by submerging it in the water—a natural refrigeration method. When they lifted it from the sea, they sliced it and passed around pieces, inviting my brother and me to join in this simple yet memorable feast.

"It was a beautiful moment by the sea, filled with laughter, generosity, and the warmth of shared culture."

I took advantage of this moment to capture a photograph that reflected the essence of Napoli. The rich red of the watermelon, the blue of the sea, and the sun-soaked skin of the locals created a scene that was vibrant and full of life. I worked to align the elements in a way that conveyed the atmosphere—the laid-back joy of summer and the community spirit that thrives along Napoli’s shores.

The decisive moment came as one of the men took a bite of watermelon against the backdrop of the sea. I pressed the shutter, capturing an image that, for me, embodied the spirit of **Italian summer** and the connection between people and place. Although our trip was brief, this photograph became a cherished memory, a snapshot of an unforgettable experience along the Mediterranean.

Attending a Workshop

During my final year at university in 2018, I received a **scholarship to attend a workshop** with the esteemed photographers **Alex and Rebecca Webb** in Santa Fe, New Mexico. This opportunity came through Chris Boot from Aperture, who had been scouting students in my class. Recognizing my work, he encouraged me to apply for the scholarship, and I soon found myself embarking on a journey that would significantly impact my understanding of photography.

The workshop was centered around **bookmaking, sequencing, and editing**, pushing us to think beyond single images and explore how a collection of photographs could tell a cohesive story. We had the chance to create a mock book, arranging and rearranging our photos to craft narratives that flowed visually. Using **Blurb** as a platform, I made my first photography book—a tangible result of the workshop and a way to see my work come to life on the page. Observing how Alex Webb selected and sequenced images, and seeing Rebecca’s insights on framing, was an invaluable learning experience.

"Watching masters of photography like Alex and Rebecca Webb select and sequence images changed the way I viewed storytelling through photographs."

At the end of the workshop, I spoke with Alex and Rebecca about my passion for travel and my desire to continue exploring the world through photography. Rebecca mentioned the possibility of volunteering abroad as a way to immerse myself in

new cultures and make meaningful connections. This conversation sparked the idea of returning to Israel to volunteer on a **kibbutz** and continue my photography project in the region.

The workshop was more than a learning experience; it was a turning point. It gave me a new perspective on storytelling, inspiration for future travels, and the motivation to approach my work with a fresh outlook.

Volunteering on a Kibbutz

After graduating from university, I returned to Israel with a plan to continue my photography journey by volunteering on a **kibbutz**. I joined **Kibbutz Ein Hashofet** near Haifa, a place that offered me both a unique experience in communal living and a chance to explore a new side of Israel. The kibbutz environment was vastly different from anything I had known, with each person contributing to the community's daily operations.

I chose the physically demanding work of **landscaping**, spending my days in the gardens, tending to plants, and working closely with nature. I enjoyed the labor, despite the long hours and intense summer heat. My hands became calloused, and I gained a newfound respect for the dedication it took to maintain the kibbutz grounds. Occasionally, I also worked in the **dairy**, helping to milk cows—a task that connected me to the kibbutz's agricultural roots.

Living alongside people from all over the world, I learned the importance of teamwork and shared purpose. The kibbutz had volunteers from different backgrounds, each with their own story, and the diversity enriched the experience. We shared meals, told stories, and developed a camaraderie that made the hard work feel fulfilling and even enjoyable.

"The kibbutz taught me the value of community and the strength that comes from working toward a shared goal. It was a humbling experience, one that brought me closer to both the land and the people around me."

During my time off, I wandered the kibbutz with my camera, capturing moments that spoke to the simplicity and beauty of communal life. However, after about a month, I felt a creative lull. I wasn't making any significant progress on my photography, and a sense of restlessness grew within me. Spontaneously, I decided to leave the kibbutz and venture back to **Jericho**, hoping to find renewed inspiration in familiar surroundings.

Living with a Palestinian Family

After leaving the kibbutz, I traveled back to **Jericho** on a whim, hoping to reconnect with the city and find new inspiration. I arrived late at night and knocked on the door of a small hostel I had stayed at before. The family who managed the hostel welcomed me warmly, surprised yet pleased to see me return. Over tea the next morning, I explained my intention to stay longer in Jericho to work on my photography. They graciously offered me a place to stay, rent-free, in exchange for volunteering at the hostel.

For the next two months, I became a part of their world. My tasks included **sweeping floors, burning trash, cleaning rooms, and preparing beds** for new guests. Each morning, I joined the family for breakfast—usually a simple but hearty meal of eggs, pita, hummus, and fresh dates. After finishing my chores around mid-morning, I'd set off to explore Jericho, free to photograph the city and its people for the remainder of the day.

During this time, I made friends with a young man named **Mohammed**, who was around my age. Each morning, I'd knock on his door, and he would show me around the city, offering insights into life in Jericho that I wouldn't have found on my own. Mohammed was a **refugee living alone**, having built his own home from scratch. His daily visits to a mentor, a man named Hassan, gave me the opportunity to learn about the city's traditions, people, and culture on a deeper level.

"Every day with Mohammed was a new discovery. Through him, I saw Jericho not just as a city but as a community, full of resilience and strength."

One afternoon, Hassan drove us to the **Wadi Qelt Valley**—a breathtaking area with a river running through its steep, rocky landscape. We spent the day hiking, cooling off in the valley’s pools, and enjoying the simple beauty of nature. Moments like these with Mohammed and his friends brought me closer to the essence of Jericho, a city where the landscape and its people exist in a unique harmony.

My time living with this family and working at the hostel gave me a perspective that went beyond photography. I gained a deeper understanding of Palestinian life and culture, building relationships that profoundly influenced me and the images I captured.

My Friend Mohammed

During my time in Jericho, my friendship with **Mohammed** became one of the most impactful connections I made. Mohammed, a young man my age, had grown up as a **refugee in Jericho**, living alone in a modest home he built himself. Each morning, I’d knock on his door, and he would graciously take me around the city, sharing his life and experiences with a depth that went beyond words. Mohammed’s openness gave me a rare and genuine insight into the daily life and struggles of Palestinian youth, as well as the warmth and resilience that characterized Jericho.

Every day, I would accompany Mohammed to meet **Hassan**, an older man who served as a mentor to him. Hassan’s home was surrounded by a lush garden that he tended with care, and Mohammed helped him water the plants and maintain the grounds. I often joined them, gaining a sense of the traditions and values passed down through generations in Jericho.

"Through Mohammed, I didn't just observe Jericho; I experienced it from the inside, witnessing the kindness, strength, and generosity that ran deep in the community."

One memorable day, Hassan drove us to the **Wadi Qelt Valley** with a small group of friends. We hiked through the rugged terrain, cooling off in the river, and taking in the stunning natural beauty. Moments like these showed me the joy and

camaraderie that existed within the community, even amidst the challenges of daily life. **Wadi Qelt** became a place of solace for us, a reminder of nature's beauty and the spirit of adventure that connected us.

My time with Mohammed was filled with laughter, stories, and a deep sense of friendship. His life and his outlook left a profound mark on me, giving me a perspective I could never have gained otherwise. **Through Mohammed and his friends, I understood the power of connection and community**, lessons that went far beyond my camera lens.

Sleeping in Mosques

During my time in Jericho, I expressed to the family I was staying with that I wanted to learn more about **Islam** and Palestinian culture. They were pleased with my curiosity and introduced me to a local **Imam named Hirsham**, who welcomed me into a group of young men who were also studying and practicing Islam. Through this group, I had the opportunity to experience a transformative period, spending two weeks living and learning in various mosques throughout Jericho.

We would travel together, sleeping on the floors of different mosques, fasting, praying five times a day, and sharing meals that consisted mostly of **pigeon, rice, and potatoes**. The days were filled with structured learning, as I read the Quran, learned how to pray, and followed the customs of Islamic living. The simple routines—cleaning, praying, and gathering together—created a sense of peace and purpose that I found deeply moving.

"Sleeping on the mosque floors, surrounded by brothers in faith, I was embraced by a community that taught me not only about Islam but about humility, patience, and the beauty of simplicity."

We spent some days hiking around the neighborhoods surrounding the mosques, knocking on doors to invite people to join us for evening prayers. My presence as an American drew curiosity, and people were interested in why I had chosen to join them. The warmth and openness I encountered were profound, and over time, I felt a part of the community in a way I hadn't expected.

By the end of my time studying Islam, I had not only gained a deeper understanding of the religion but also a profound respect for **Palestinian culture**. These two weeks were some of the most impactful of my life, revealing to me the strength, resilience, and faith of the people I lived alongside. This experience became a defining chapter in my journey, leaving a mark on my heart and on my photographs.

Joining the Peace Corps

After my experiences in Israel and Palestine, I felt a growing desire to continue traveling and engaging in meaningful work. In 2019, I joined the **Peace Corps** and was assigned to **Zambia** as part of the **rural aquaculture program**, working closely with the Department of Fisheries to help local communities develop sustainable fish farming practices. It was a leap into the unknown, but one that felt like a natural next step on my journey.

For the first three months, I underwent **intensive training** to learn the local language, **Bemba**, and to adapt to the cultural nuances of life in Zambia. I lived with a host family, learning to wash clothes by hand, cook over a fire, and fetch water from a well. I quickly adjusted to the rhythms of rural life, sleeping under a mosquito net, slaughtering and preparing chickens, and becoming more attuned to the simplicity and self-sufficiency that defined village living.

"The Peace Corps gave me the gift of immersion, teaching me the customs, language, and values of a culture vastly different from my own."

After training, I was stationed in **Mpanta Village** in the **Luapula Province**, a breathtaking area near **Lake Bangweulu**. Upon my arrival, my host father, Bwalya, welcomed me with an extraordinary gesture—he presented me with a goat to slaughter as part of a traditional ceremony. He handed me a knife, and I made the cut, connecting me immediately to the customs and life of the village. Over the next few days, we shared meals together, getting to know one another as I began settling into my new home.

Village life offered a sense of freedom and exploration that reminded me of my childhood adventures. I spent my days riding my bike along dirt paths, visiting nearby villages, and engaging with local farmers on their **fish farming projects**. In

the mornings, I even started a **fitness club** with a group of young men, using gymnastic rings and outdoor exercises to build strength and camaraderie.

"My goal was to share a bit of my culture while embracing theirs, creating an exchange of traditions and experiences that felt truly reciprocal."

The **hierarchy in the village** was simple yet profound, with God, tribe, and land at its core. Every member of the community played a role: women collected firewood and carried babies on their backs, men built homes and churches, boys made bricks, and girls prepared meals. Life was straightforward but rich with purpose, a daily routine built on tradition, unity, and hard work.

Sharing meals with my host family, usually a staple of **Nshima** (a dish made from maize) served with vegetables and fish, taught me that food is more than sustenance; it is a bond that brings people together. In Zambia, it is customary for the head of the house to receive the most respected part of the meal, such as the head of a fish or the gizzard of a chicken. Experiencing these customs firsthand deepened my understanding of respect, family, and cultural identity.

My time in Zambia, though challenging, offered me some of the most rewarding and eye-opening experiences of my life. The village, with its simple rhythms and strong community bonds, became a place of learning, connection, and growth.

Village Life

Life in **Mpanta Village** was beautifully simple and profoundly grounding. Every day, I'd take my bike along the dirt paths, enjoying the freedom of exploration that village life allowed. Biking became my way to connect with the surroundings, as I'd ride through the nearby villages, greet locals, and take in the scenes of daily life. The **center of the village** was always bustling, with people gathering near the lake to buy goods, chat, and go about their day. There was a vibrant energy here, with a sense of community that ran deep.

I spent much of my time in the company of **Amaz**, a local I befriended who worked in **transportation and delivery** across Lake Bangweulu. He often took me on boat tours, guiding me across the lake to visit other villages. During **mango season**, we

would climb trees to pick fresh fruit, and I'd watch the village boys play football on the dirt in bare feet. I tried joining them once without shoes, but the rough ground left my feet blistered and sore. Their resilience was humbling, and it reminded me of the strength that comes from living close to the land, free from the protective layers that city life often imposes.

"Village life taught me that strength and resilience come from simplicity and connection to the land. The people of Mpanta had calloused hands and feet, reminders of the hard work they did each day."

Every morning, I woke to the sounds of **roosters crowing and the rhythmic pounding of a mortar and pestle** before sunrise. The staple food here was **Nshima**, made from maize and prepared by pounding the grain into a fine powder, which was then mixed with water to form a dough-like consistency. Nshima was rolled into balls and eaten by hand, paired with fresh vegetables or fish. Meals were communal and served on homemade bamboo mats, a tradition that brought families together on the floor. The simplicity and intimacy of sharing food on the ground, without utensils, emphasized the importance of family and community.

The village's daily routines were anchored in a natural hierarchy, rooted in **God, tribe, and land**. Each person had a role to play, and it was common to see mothers carrying firewood and babies, men building homes, boys making bricks, and girls preparing meals. The unity and harmony in their work created a rhythm that, while demanding, felt purposeful.

"In Mpanta Village, I learned that life's greatest joys and deepest connections often come from the simplest routines—sharing meals, working together, and honoring traditions."

My days in the village were filled with these small yet profound experiences. The people of Mpanta welcomed me as one of their own, teaching me that wealth isn't measured by material possessions but by community, tradition, and respect. The lessons I learned from them have stayed with me, shaping my perspective on life and leaving me with memories I'll cherish forever.

One Tribe Under God

One of the most unforgettable experiences of my time in Zambia was attending a **two-week Seventh-day Adventist church camp** with my host family. Every **Saturday**, I would join them for prayer at their local church, where they welcomed me with open arms and a spirit of genuine hospitality. The camp was a large gathering of Zambians from surrounding villages, and I was amazed to see an entire community come together to celebrate their faith.

When I arrived, the camp was like a small, bustling town, with **homes constructed from sticks and tarps** just for the event. At the center stood a massive makeshift church, also made from sticks and tarps, where people gathered to sing, pray, and share meals. Each morning and evening, the sound of song and dance filled the air, creating an atmosphere that was both joyous and spiritual. I often found myself wandering through the camp with my camera, capturing the vibrant scenes of community life, always accompanied by a group of young men who had become my host brothers.

"The camp was more than a gathering—it was a testament to the strength of faith and the sense of unity that transcends the boundaries of daily life."

Every day, hundreds of people would go to the lake to wash their clothes, bathe, or simply enjoy the water. Watching the interactions between families and friends, seeing the laughter and joy, I felt immersed in a world where faith and community were inseparable. Small shops and markets popped up around the camp, where people could buy and sell goods, sharing what they had and celebrating their time together.

One of the most powerful moments was the **baptism ceremony** at the lake. Those who were ready to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church lined up along the shore, awaiting their turn to be baptized by the main preacher. The lake became a sacred place as each individual was dunked underwater, welcomed into the church with the support of their community. I walked into the water, chest-deep, to get as close as possible to capture the ceremony. The experience was worth every soaked inch of my clothing, as I documented a profound moment of transformation and devotion.

"The sight of people being baptized in the lake, surrounded by friends, family, and song, was a powerful reminder of the strength of faith and the beauty of community."

These two weeks at the camp were some of the most joyous and fulfilling of my entire year in Zambia. The energy, love, and unity I witnessed among the people left a lasting impact on me, reminding me that true community is built on shared beliefs, mutual support, and unwavering kindness. It was an experience that transcended the boundaries of language and culture, one that showed me the beauty of life lived in harmony with faith.

Documenting Funerals

In **Zambian culture**, attending a funeral is a mark of respect, even if you don't personally know the deceased. This tradition highlights the deep-rooted sense of community and shared responsibility that defines life in rural villages. During my time in Mpanta, I attended several funeral processions, each one a profound and humbling experience that taught me more about the cultural values surrounding death and mourning.

When a funeral procession passed through the village, it was customary for everyone to stop what they were doing to join in the mourning. The family and close friends would gather around the casket, offering prayers and honoring the memory of the departed. The scene was often somber but deeply moving, as villagers surrounded the grave site, singing hymns and offering final respects. After lowering the casket, the men of the family would take turns filling the grave with soil, a symbolic gesture of closure and unity.

"Standing among villagers, witnessing their shared grief and resilience, I realized the strength that comes from a community bound by mutual support."

As a photographer, I felt a responsibility to document these moments with sensitivity and respect. I often knelt to capture the scene, allowing myself to blend in with the mourners and avoid intruding on such a sacred event. In one instance, I

photographed a man grieving at the graveside, his face a powerful reflection of loss and love. Behind him, other family members poured dirt into the grave, each shovelful a testament to the shared strength and enduring bonds within the village.

The funerals I attended in Zambia revealed a unique perspective on **life, death, and community**. In Mpanta, loss wasn't something to face alone. The entire village came together, supporting one another through sorrow and remembering the individual as part of a collective memory. It was a lesson in the power of human connection, one that resonated deeply with me and has stayed with me ever since.

Covid-19 Pandemic

My Peace Corps assignment in Zambia was originally set to last **27 months**, but in 2020, the **Covid-19 pandemic** swept through the world, abruptly changing everything. News of the virus reached us gradually, but when it became clear how serious the situation was, the Peace Corps made the difficult decision to evacuate all volunteers from Zambia. Within a matter of days, I was told to pack up my things and prepare to leave the village and the people who had become my family.

The evacuation was swift and efficient, yet it left me with a deep sense of sadness and unfinished purpose. I had formed close bonds with my host family and friends in the village, and leaving them so suddenly was heartbreaking. My host brothers and I shared a tearful farewell, struggling to process that our time together was ending prematurely. Over the past year, we had built a connection through shared experiences: working out together, biking along dirt paths, climbing trees, swimming in the lake, and exchanging stories about our cultures. To have this journey cut short felt like an abrupt loss of something precious.

"Saying goodbye to my host family was one of the hardest moments of my life. Our bond had grown so strong that leaving felt like leaving a part of myself behind."

The days leading up to my departure were filled with a whirlwind of emotions. As I packed, memories of my time in Zambia flooded back—moments of laughter, challenges, discoveries, and the everyday rhythms of village life that had become

so familiar to me. I knew I would miss the sounds of roosters crowing at dawn, the communal meals shared on bamboo mats, and the stars that filled the night sky, brighter and more numerous than anywhere else I had been.

Returning to Philadelphia after this experience was a difficult adjustment. I had grown so accustomed to the simplicity and community of village life that the isolation of the pandemic lockdown felt especially jarring. I carried with me the lessons and memories from Mpanta, grateful for every moment I spent there, even though it was cut short. My time in Zambia remains one of the most cherished chapters of my life, a reminder of resilience, connection, and the beauty of embracing each day fully.

Gazing at Heaven

One of the memories that lingers most vividly from my time in Zambia is the quiet, reflective evenings spent with my **host father, Bwalya**. Each night, we would sit outside under the vast Zambian sky, talking about life, sharing stories, and comparing our vastly different worlds. As we gazed up, the night sky became a canvas of countless stars, clear and endless in the remote village. It was a sight unlike anything I had seen back home in Philadelphia, where city lights obscure the heavens.

"Under that open sky, filled with stars and silence, dreams and imagination seemed to flourish effortlessly."

Looking up at the stars together, we spoke of our lives, our families, and the paths that had brought us to this moment. We watched for **shooting stars and satellites**, marveling at the universe above us. In those conversations, the distance between our cultures faded. Bwalya would share stories of his own life, his dreams for his children, and the values that he held dear, all while I shared bits of my world back in America. These moments taught me that despite our differences, the same aspirations connect us all—family, community, and a sense of purpose.

Each night, as I lay under my mosquito net, the sounds of the village filling the silence—birds, insects, and distant laughter—I felt a peace I hadn't known before. The simplicity of life in Mpanta, combined with the natural beauty of Zambia, gave

me a profound sense of gratitude. Those nights spent with Bwalya, reflecting on life under the stars, were a reminder of how vast and interconnected the world truly is.

"I still carry those star-filled nights with me, as they became a source of inspiration and a reminder of the beauty in simplicity, the quiet strength of human connection, and the dreams that unite us across borders and cultures."

A Month in Mumbai

In **March of 2022**, I traveled to **Mumbai, India**, with the aim of immersing myself in street photography for an entire month. I stayed near **Juhu Beach**, which offered a beautiful view of the ocean and became my starting point each morning. The beach was alive with activity, a chaotic blend of people, colors, and energy that felt both overwhelming and inspiring. It was here that I began my exploration of Mumbai's bustling life, finding moments of raw beauty amid the chaos.

Each day, I would make my way from the beach to the heart of the city, where Mumbai's vibrant markets awaited. I wandered through **Sassoon Docks** at 4 a.m. on certain mornings, photographing the fishermen unloading their catches and vendors selling fish larger than I had ever seen. The sights, sounds, and even the smells of the docks were intense, but they offered endless photographic opportunities. Sassoon Docks was easily one of the most chaotic environments I had ever photographed, with every inch packed with movement and life.

"The sheer energy of Mumbai's streets, from the markets to the docks, was unlike anything I had experienced. Each moment felt like a story waiting to be told."

One of my most memorable experiences was exploring **Dharavi**, the world's largest slum. Despite the challenges it presented, Dharavi was filled with warmth and resilience. Families invited me into their homes, allowing me a glimpse of the lives they had built within the community. I witnessed how people crafted goods from clay and other materials, creating livelihoods in what appeared to be one of the most unlikely places. Each alley, each doorway, and each conversation added depth to my understanding of the strength and hospitality within Dharavi.

Nearby, I also visited **Dhobi Ghat**, the world's largest open-air laundry. Here, families worked together, washing and hanging out clothes to dry, each piece representing the dedication and hard work that sustains the community. This was another opportunity to capture the essence of daily life in Mumbai, where even the most ordinary tasks took on a certain beauty.

In the midst of the city's rhythm, I visited **Haji Ali Dargah**, a stunning mosque set on an islet in the Arabian Sea, accessible only by a narrow causeway. This place felt like a sanctuary amid the bustling city. At low tide, rocks would emerge around the islet, where families and pilgrims would walk, play, and pray. One of my favorite memories was cooling off with a fresh cucumber from a street vendor as I watched the sun set over the mosque—a moment of peace in a city that rarely slowed down.

"Mumbai was a city of extremes—where spirituality met chaos, and where every street, market, and beach held a story waiting to unfold."

Throughout my time in Mumbai, the city's intense colors, lively people, and intricate cultural layers constantly inspired me. This month in Mumbai taught me to see beauty in the smallest details and reminded me that every place has its own rhythm, its own heartbeat, and its own way of telling stories.

Celebrating Holi

One of the most unforgettable experiences during my time in Mumbai was celebrating **Holi** in **Worli**, an ancient fishing village within the city. Holi, known as the **Festival of Colors**, brings people together to celebrate the arrival of spring, unity, and joy. The festival's vibrancy and energy were palpable, with people dancing, singing, and throwing colored powders in a display of pure celebration.

Late in the evening, I joined the locals as they gathered in the narrow streets of Worli. There was music in the air, and the village's close-knit community filled every corner with laughter and excitement. The next morning, the true spirit of Holi came to life as children and adults alike armed themselves with colorful powders and water balloons, transforming the streets into a rainbow of colors.

"Holi in Worli was an experience of boundless joy and unity, where barriers faded away in a sea of colors and laughter."

I spent the morning photographing children as they played, their faces and clothes covered in vibrant reds, blues, and yellows. The colors added a dreamlike quality to each image, capturing the spirit of Holi and the warmth of the people who welcomed me into their celebration. As I moved through the village, I felt a profound sense of connection with the community, as if I were a part of their celebration rather than just an observer.

The authenticity of celebrating Holi in such an intimate setting made it all the more special. Unlike the larger citywide celebrations, this village gathering allowed me to experience Holi in its rawest, most heartfelt form. It was a celebration of life, unity, and the beauty of human connection, a memory I carry with me as one of the highlights of my time in India.

"The colors of Holi faded from my clothes but left a lasting mark on my heart, reminding me of the joy, resilience, and openness of the people of Mumbai."

Climbing Mountains in Mexico City

In **June of 2022**, I traveled to **Mexico City** for a two-week adventure with my friend Matt Wong, whom I had met years earlier at Hebrew University. Mexico City's vibrant culture, rich history, and bustling streets were a perfect setting for street photography, but it was our time in the mountains on the city's outskirts that left the deepest impression.

One day, Matt and I decided to take a cable car from **Indios Verdes** up into the mountains, where neighborhoods dotted the slopes. Locals had warned us about the potential dangers in these areas, but our experience turned out to be one of the most rewarding of the trip. At the summit, we found a world of elevated views, clean backgrounds, and light that seemed to illuminate everything with a unique clarity.

"Being at an elevated space in the mountains was both humbling and exhilarating, offering perspectives that grounded me in the beauty of Mexico."

We wandered through the mountain neighborhoods, meeting people, photographing the local markets, and taking in the breathtaking scenery. At one point, we encountered a group of construction workers who were building a home near a large cross statue overlooking the entire city. They allowed us to photograph them as they worked, sharing stories with us as we captured their world. Just as I snapped a photo of one of the men against the striking mountain backdrop, the clouds shifted, and rain began to fall—a moment that felt both intimate and monumental.

The next day, we returned to the same spot and found children playing around the **cross statue**, climbing its large frame with laughter and carefree joy. I photographed them as they reached for the sky, their silhouettes framed against the vast landscape below. The mountain's sense of freedom and expansiveness made it one of the most memorable parts of our journey.

"The mountain gave me a new perspective—not only on photography but on the strength and resilience of the people who lived there, working and playing amidst the beauty and challenges of their environment."

Our time in the mountains of Mexico City revealed a side of the city that felt hidden and untouched by the usual urban chaos. It was a place where community, nature, and daily life coexisted in a way that reminded me of the simplicity and strength I had encountered in other parts of the world. This adventure left a lasting impact, reminding me of the beauty that exists beyond the city streets.

Markets, Plazas, and a Gondola Ride

Exploring **Mexico City** was an adventure of discovery and contrasts, from its lively open-air markets to its historic plazas. One of my favorite areas was **Tepito**, a neighborhood known for its sprawling markets, grit, and vibrancy. Tepito offered endless inspiration for street photography, with vendors selling goods, families shopping, and an undercurrent of energy that was both intense and captivating.

Each day, I immersed myself in the rhythms of Tepito, capturing scenes of daily life in the bustling market. The area's raw atmosphere contrasted sharply with the elegance of other parts of the city, yet it was precisely this authenticity that drew

me in. There was an unfiltered humanity in Tepito that felt real and grounded, a reminder of the diversity that defines Mexico City.

Another memorable location was **Plaza Garibaldi**, known for its mariachis and nightlife. One rainy night, I joined the crowds under a covered area as live music played and people danced. The rain added a beautiful dimension to the scene, as people moved through the downpour with laughter and joy. I even captured a photograph of a young couple sharing a kiss, drenched but oblivious to the world around them. It was one of those moments where everything aligned—the music, the rain, and the expressions of love and happiness.

"Plaza Garibaldi was a place of music and movement, where joy was palpable, even in the midst of a rain-soaked night."

We also experienced a more peaceful side of the city by taking a **gondola ride** through the canals. As we drifted along the water, we passed fields and small farms, a serene contrast to the urban sprawl of Mexico City. This journey offered a glimpse of rural life and the rich agricultural traditions that continue to thrive just beyond the city's borders.

Our time exploring the markets, plazas, and waterways of Mexico City revealed a mosaic of cultures and lifestyles. It was a reminder that the city, with all its complexity and history, held endless stories waiting to be discovered.

"From the bustling energy of Tepito to the romance of Plaza Garibaldi, Mexico City's contrasts were a photographer's dream, each moment a new layer of life and culture to uncover."

Meditation in Hanoi, Vietnam

After Mexico City, I traveled to **Hanoi, Vietnam**, where I spent a month exploring the city's unique blend of tranquility and chaos. I stayed near **Hoàn Kiếm Lake**, which quickly became my sanctuary in the heart of Hanoi. Each morning, I rose early—often before sunrise—to walk around the lake, observing locals as they

practiced yoga, tai chi, and various forms of exercise. There was a peaceful energy in the air, a sense of calm that contrasted with the lively, bustling streets surrounding it.

"Hoàn Kiếm Lake became a place of peace and reflection, a gentle reminder to slow down and simply be present."

I began joining the locals in their morning routines, using this time to focus on my own fitness and meditation. The lake was more than just a scenic spot; it was a space that encouraged me to contemplate life and photography on a deeper level. My mornings here became a ritual, a grounding practice that set the tone for each day. I found myself more attuned to my thoughts, reflecting on my journey and the purpose of my work.

In the afternoons, I would wander through **Hanoi's vibrant markets**, a stark contrast to the lake's serenity. The markets were alive with the colors, smells, and sounds of daily Vietnamese life. Vendors sold fresh produce, meats, and spices, while people bargained, laughed, and chatted, weaving through the crowded aisles. The chaos of the markets offered a different kind of energy—one that was invigorating and inspiring. My camera was constantly in hand, capturing the raw beauty and authenticity of each moment.

"Hanoi taught me to embrace both stillness and motion, to find harmony between the peaceful mornings by the lake and the vibrant pulse of the city's markets."

The people of Hanoi were incredibly kind and welcoming, adding to the warmth of my experience. I felt an instant connection to the culture, the food, and the community. This month in Hanoi became a time of meditation, creativity, and growth. Rising early to greet the day and wandering through the city's contrasts opened me to new perspectives on life and photography, blending moments of calm with the thrill of discovery.

"My time in Hanoi was a lesson in balance—finding beauty in both the quiet and the chaotic, the serene and the spirited."

Transitioning to Black and White

When I returned to the United States after my travels, I felt a need to reinvent my photography. My experiences in places like Mexico City and Hanoi had given me new insights, and I was ready to push my work in a different direction. I decided to make the shift from color to **black-and-white photography**—a choice that felt like both a return to basics and an evolution of my style.

I traveled to **New York City** and sold my Fujifilm equipment, opting instead for two compact cameras: the **Ricoh GR III** and **Ricoh GR IIIx**. These cameras allowed me to work quickly and discreetly, perfect for capturing candid moments in the high-contrast black-and-white style I wanted to explore. I began to see the world differently, focusing more on light, shadow, and form rather than color. Each photograph became a study in composition and emotion, stripped of any distractions.

"Transitioning to black and white was a way to get back to the essence of photography—to see the world in shapes, shadows, and the rawness of light."

This shift also marked a change in my approach to subject matter. I no longer felt the need to seek out grand scenes or exotic locations. Instead, I became interested in **documenting everyday life**, finding beauty in the mundane and creating images that reflected my own reality. I embraced the simplicity of capturing fleeting moments, whether it was a quiet street corner or a glimpse of a passerby in a bustling city.

Black and white photography gave me a renewed sense of purpose. It encouraged me to focus on the fundamentals and to be present in each moment without getting caught up in color or superficial details. It became a more meditative practice, aligning with my desire for **longevity and curiosity** in my work.

"Shooting in black and white allowed me to reimagine the world through my camera, to capture moments that felt timeless, and to stay true to the essence of my own vision."

This transition was a turning point in my journey as a photographer. I felt more fulfilled, more connected to my art, and more open to the possibilities that lay ahead. It reminded me that photography is a continuous journey of growth, exploration, and self-discovery, where each frame is an opportunity to see the world anew.

All Roads Lead to Rome

After embracing black-and-white photography, I felt drawn to **Italy**—specifically **Rome**—to deepen my understanding of both the medium and myself. Being a **dual citizen** of the United States and Italy, it seemed only fitting to return to my roots and explore the rich history and culture that had always been a part of me. I spent two months in Rome, studying Italian in the **Monti neighborhood** each morning and dedicating my afternoons to street photography.

Rome is a city of timeless beauty, where ancient architecture and modern life coexist harmoniously. Each day, I roamed the streets with my camera, capturing the interplay of light and shadow against the historic facades. The textures of cobblestone streets, the grandiosity of piazzas, and the steady rhythm of Roman life all made for a perfect backdrop to practice my black-and-white photography.

"There's something inherently inspiring about Rome—its history, its art, and its character all converge in a way that invites introspection and creativity."

During my weekends, I ventured beyond Rome, taking trips to nearby towns like **Florence** and **Ostia**. In Florence, I visited **Dante Alighieri's house**, admiring the art and sculptures that defined the city, including masterpieces like the statues of Hercules, David, and Achilles. Each piece of art felt alive, resonating with the energy of those who had created and admired it across centuries.

In **Ostia**, a seaside town just outside of Rome, I found a different kind of inspiration. I spent the day sunbathing, photographing locals, and practicing my Italian. The beach was alive with the laughter and warmth of Roman families, giving me a glimpse of everyday Italian life outside the historical epicenter of Rome.

"Rome gave me a sense of belonging, a connection to my heritage, and a renewed passion for capturing life in its simplest, most authentic form."

My time in Italy reminded me of the importance of roots and identity. Wandering through Rome and its neighboring cities with my camera, I felt a deep connection to both the past and the present. This journey was more than just a photographic exploration; it was a personal pilgrimage, a chance to reconnect with a part of myself and to find inspiration in the places and stories that shaped my family and my culture.

After those two months, I left Rome with a heart full of memories and a camera filled with moments that captured the city's soul. I knew that I would return one day, but until then, I carried Rome's timeless beauty and spirit with me, woven into every photograph I took.

The Birthplace of Street Photography

During my stay in Rome, I took a spontaneous trip to **Paris**—a city often regarded as the birthplace of **street photography**. Paris is steeped in photographic history, home to iconic photographers like **Henri Cartier-Bresson**, whose work has long inspired me. Walking the same streets where the medium of street photography was pioneered felt both surreal and inspiring.

One day, while photographing near the **Eiffel Tower**, an older woman approached me, asking for a family photograph. After I composed the shot, she looked at my work and remarked that my style reminded her of Cartier-Bresson. Curious, I asked how she knew of him, and she revealed that they had been friends. This serendipitous encounter felt like a culmination of my journey, as if I were being reminded of the legacy of street photography and the giants who had shaped it.

"Standing in the presence of someone who knew Cartier-Bresson, I felt a powerful connection to the roots of my craft and a sense of gratitude for the photographers who paved the way."

Paris itself felt like a living museum of street photography. Every corner, every shadow, and every passerby seemed like part of an ongoing story. I wandered through neighborhoods like **Montmartre** and along the **Seine**, letting the city's energy guide my lens. There was a sense of romance and nostalgia in the air, a reminder of why Paris has been an enduring subject for artists and photographers alike.

Capturing moments in Paris was both a tribute to the art form and an opportunity to connect with its origins. The city taught me to observe, to wait, and to appreciate the subtle beauty in everyday life. I left Paris feeling more inspired than ever, with a renewed commitment to street photography and a deeper respect for its history.

"Paris reminded me that street photography is not just about capturing moments but about honoring the legacy of those who have shaped the way we see the world."

Into the Future

Looking ahead, I'm committed to keeping my photography practice as simple and authentic as possible. These experiences—from my childhood explorations in the woods to wandering the streets of Mumbai, Rome, and Paris—have taught me that photography is not just about capturing scenes but about connecting with life itself. Nowadays, I carry my camera in my pocket, always ready but without the pressure to create something extraordinary. Instead, I let the world guide me, open to whatever unfolds.

"Perhaps there's no such thing as a 'good' or 'bad' photograph—just new images, new perspectives, and a continuous journey of becoming."

I treat photography as a **stream of becoming**, where each shot is an expression of curiosity and an opportunity to see the world through fresh eyes. The camera allows me to embrace the mundane, to explore the complexities of life, and to create my own world through simple moments. I no longer feel the need for grand subjects or exotic locations; instead, I find fulfillment in capturing the everyday, the fleeting, and the overlooked.

As I move forward, my goal is to remain like a child with a camera—seeing the world with wonder, joy, and a spirit of playfulness. I want my photography to be a lifelong exploration, where I continue to evolve, learn, and find new ways to connect with the world around me.

"The world is my playground, my canvas, and each photograph is an instant sketch, a piece of a story that continues to unfold."

In the end, my photography is about embracing change and growth, not perfection. The moments I capture, the people I meet, and the places I explore are all part of a larger journey—one that I hope to continue for as long as I can. My story, like my photography, is always in flux, and that is where the true beauty lies.

Timeline of My Journey

1. **Early Childhood in Philadelphia**
2. Grew up exploring the Wissahickon forest in Roxborough and Andorra.
3. Discovered a love for adventure and the Schuylkill River Trail through biking.
4. **High School Years**
5. Enrolled in a web design course, discovering a passion for graphic design and later photography.
6. Picked up a Nikon FM film camera, exploring the natural world through a new lens.
7. **Discovering Street Photography**
8. Influenced by my great uncle, learned about framing and capturing stories with a Leica M3.
9. Started practicing street photography in Center City, Philadelphia.
10. **Art School and Baltimore Exploration**
11. Attended Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), where I refined my graphic design skills and deepened my love for photography.
12. Practiced street photography in Baltimore, engaging with local communities.
13. **Winning a Street Photography Contest**
14. Won first place in the Miami Street Photography Festival, judged by Martin Parr, for a photograph capturing a Baltimore street basketball game.
15. **Photojournalism at the DNC**

16. Worked as a photojournalist for the Democratic National Convention, documenting events and protests, while continuing personal street photography.
17. **Study Abroad in Jerusalem and the West Bank**
18. Spent six months at Hebrew University, exploring cities across the West Bank, including Jericho, where I made lasting friendships and learned about Palestinian culture.
19. **Volunteering on a Kibbutz**
20. Returned to Israel to volunteer at Kibbutz Ein Hashofet, working in horticulture and dairy while exploring the communal lifestyle.
21. **Living with a Palestinian Family in Jericho**
22. Lived rent-free with a Palestinian family in Jericho, immersing myself in their culture and forming close bonds with the community.
23. **Joining the Peace Corps in Zambia**
 - Assigned to Mpanta Village as part of the rural aquaculture program, building connections through shared work, language, and customs.
24. **Evacuation Due to Covid-19**
 - Returned to Philadelphia after a year in Zambia, leaving behind meaningful friendships and unfinished projects.
25. **A Month in Mumbai, India**
 - Spent a month photographing Mumbai's vibrant scenes, from Juhu Beach to the slums of Dharavi, and celebrated Holi in the village of Worli.
26. **Exploration in Mexico City**
 - Explored Mexico City's neighborhoods and climbed mountains with a friend, capturing the culture through street photography.
27. **Meditation in Hanoi, Vietnam**
 - Spent a month practicing meditation around Hoàn Kiếm Lake, balancing peaceful mornings with the lively markets of Hanoi.
28. **Transitioning to Black and White Photography**
 - Returned to the U.S. and embraced black-and-white photography, focusing on capturing the essence of everyday life.
29. **Rediscovering My Roots in Rome**
 - Spent two months in Rome, studying Italian and photographing the historic city and nearby areas, including Florence and Ostia.
30. **Pilgrimage to the Birthplace of Street Photography in Paris**
 - Explored Paris, capturing the city's scenes and connecting with its legacy as the birthplace of street photography.