

## **Ocean City**

I'm currently walking along the boardwalk in Ocean City, New Jersey. This is a very nostalgic place for me as I spent my childhood on this boardwalk. I remember playing mini-golf, riding amusement rides, going to the arcade, and swimming at the beach. When I woke up, I was very foggy as it rained the night before, which provided me with the surreal experience of photographing early in the morning. Because of the foggy conditions, as I photographed, and simply looked at life itself, as the sun was peering beyond the clouds, the fog, and the misty air, it felt like I was photographing past memory, or the feeling of nostalgia itself.

## **Create Your Own World**

While I photograph, I'm not simply looking at life, depicting it for what it is, as the truth. I'm abstracting reality, creating my own world, through the medium of photography. Consider our medium and how we utilize it to make photographs. Light is our information, our source of power, and through wielding it, we possess the ability to create a new world in a fraction of a second.

While I'm walking, I quite literally exist in my own world, where the external world around me is almost dreamlike. When you look at life through the lens of a camera, the mundane is not what it seems. The ordinary becomes extraordinary, and every fleeting moment becomes something worth reveling in. I believe this recognition of the infinite beauty of light and life is a superpower.

## **Images Are Ideas**

This morning I was curious about the word "idea," so I used ChatGPT to study its etymology.

*The word "idea" has its origins in ancient Greek philosophy and language. The term "idea" (ἰδέα) in Greek comes from the root "idein" (ἰδεῖν), which means "to see."*

What I find most interesting about this word, "idea," is the root of it meaning to see, and in the context of Greek philosophy, Plato referred to ideas as a form or concept, an abstract model of something that exists in the mind rather than in the physical world.

*Photographs don't tell the truth.*

When I photograph, I seek to depict what life should/could be. There is a surreal quality to life that I believe is only achieved through abstracting it with photography. There is no other medium that provides the individual with an experience like this.

While I am photographing "what I see," the result is ultimately what the camera saw. If we consider the connection between our mind, our eyes, and real life in front of us, it merely exists within our minds. Perhaps we can consider that the camera itself has a mind of its own? What the camera sees is ultimately what we get.

## **Feel, Don't See**

For almost 2 years now, I've been approaching my photography very loosely, embracing the snapshot approach, using a small, compact digital camera, and not taking it so seriously. What I'm realizing is that the photographs I create become much more authentic representations of myself, or my soul. I think this is due to the fact that I am not looking at life as a series of images or compositions to make. I think I'm tapping more into my intuition, my gut, and how I feel more than how I see.

*Shoot from the heart.*

I like the idea that a photograph is not merely a two-dimensional thing, light on a surface, a print, or even the contents of what you put within the four corners of a frame.

*A photograph is a reflection of your courage, or your heart.*

While in solitude, alone with a camera, I feel more connected to life. When I'm photographing, I exist outside the passage of time, in the eternal now. I believe you enter a blissful state while producing anything, especially while walking and photographing. The physical nature of photography, and the fact that it requires the individual to go out there onto the front lines of life, becoming closer to life itself, is what I appreciate most about this medium. When I'm on the street, I embrace the multifaceted sensory experiences of life: the visual, auditory, tactile, and gustatory. With my new process, I believe my photographs are becoming more raw, which I hope evokes the essence or the soul of the street itself. Ultimately, maybe we should consider photographing what the street feels like, more than what it looks like. What does the street smell like?

## **Ocean Power**

As I stand at the edge of the ocean, looking out at the waves crashing into the shoreline, I feel an abundance of power. Maybe the water is one of the most powerful forces that exist within nature besides fire or gravity? It's actually quite overwhelming when you consider the vastness of the ocean, and how deep it really is. When I was a young boy, I remember fearing swimming in the ocean because of all the critters inside, whether jellyfish, crabs, or even sharks. When I first learned to surf, I gave up immediately. As I was being pulled out deeper and deeper into the ocean, the undertow was taking me in. A lifeguard actually had to come and save me and bring me to the shore.

This morning, the waves were extremely rough, and many surfers gathered to head out there into the unknown, the chaos, on the edge of danger. The way in which surfers gracefully dance upon the waves, defying gravity, reminds me of my passion for photography. As the surfers carve the waves, they're putting order to the chaos, through their physical bodies. Perhaps this is the ultimate goal of a photographer, or any artist, for that matter, to articulate the unknown, to put order to the chaos. I believe that surfing and skateboarding can be seen just as much as art as it is a sport.

Anyways, back to the ocean. Could you imagine if the waves engulfed us at the shore, came crashing down, and destroyed the boardwalk, the houses, and all of the people inside? While the ocean makes me as an individual feel empowered, it

also makes me feel a bit small or powerless. There is this dichotomy of feeling empowered and weak at the same time when gazing out into the abyss. Just think, this probably happens each year, with tsunamis in various islands across the world. Maybe we should just leave mother nature alone.

Nature and the ocean are unstoppable forces. Don't go against them. Just ride the waves. Grab your surfboard!

## **Align with Nature**

What does it mean to align with nature, how can we do this, and why does this matter?

To align with nature means to recognize the connection between your mind, your body, your soul, and the natural world around you. We can achieve harmony between these different things by subtracting many of the distracting, artificial things from our lives, whether TV, news, media, or even fake foods, such as processed junk. You can basically find them anywhere these days. Is it just me, or do you recognize how most of the food we serve in restaurants and stores is just toxic sludge and poison? We should also remove any drugs or alcohol, as these things will clearly throw you out of balance with nature. Just start saying no more to the things that make you less pure. Let go of more things, or even people, that may be toxic in your life. By stripping away and shedding your skin, you become your authentic self. Ultimately, I believe, becoming authentic is the supreme joy of life itself. Create your own path.

*Detox your body, detox your mind, detox your life.*

Send your body and your mind through the fire, and become tempered by it.

Anyways, our mental health is ultimately our physical health. If you're not getting enough sleep, it's inevitable that you will be a bit delirious, leading to feelings of depression or anxiety. Imagine, if you do not possess the ability to stand and walk from sunrise to sunset, feel tired, sluggish, have to take breaks, sit down, or just feel weakness in any shape or form, you will ultimately feel worse than if you were filled with strength and vitality. This is why I believe, weightlifting, daily physical

training, and maximum time spent outside, under the sun, to be critical for health, both physical and mental. These things are connected, and often misunderstood in this modern world. I can only really speak for men, as I am a man, have testicles, and certain hormones, such as testosterone, that determine how I ultimately feel. When you consider nature and our hierarchy among it, perhaps we truly are the apex predator. We have the ingenuity, the wit, to create tools, to sharpen spears, to craft bullets, guns, and hunt prey.

*Cows eat grass, humans eat cows.*

If you're a man, or I'm even sure if you're a woman, eating more meat will certainly align you more with our natural, biological position within the animal kingdom. I think a lot of modern diets lead to these feelings of weakness, depression, or mental health problems. If you're nibbling on almonds, little granola snacks, bits, and pieces of tofu, lettuce, beans here and there, subscribing to a traditional, three-meal-a-day program, you are doing yourself a disservice in terms of becoming more aligned with nature. Just let the cows eat the grass for us. Think of a cow, it basically mills around, eating all day long. Why do they eat all day long? Because they're eating damn grass! It's not satiating whatsoever. This is why I'm highly skeptical about vegetarian or vegan diets because it ultimately makes you more of a consumer, feeling hungrier, eating more food throughout the day. If you're looking to increase your vitality, and becoming more in tune with nature, just start fasting, and eat a shitload of meat before you go to sleep.

Also, another random thought about becoming in tune with nature, maybe driving cars is completely unnatural? Something that we should avoid as much as possible?

## **Public Transportation Thoughts**

So I've been taking the bus to work for the past week, and it is so easy and way more efficient than riding my bike. While riding my bike is fun, it's ultimately dangerous. I have to deal with crazy drivers or even other bikers who don't obey the traffic laws. There's so much glass, you get popped tires, and it's just too dangerous at the end of the day. However, the bus comes right outside my house, drops me off

right at work in Fairmont Park, only takes around 20 to 30 minutes, and is really nice because I can even work on some photography, look out the window, or observe other people on the bus.

Also, I took the train from Philadelphia's 30th St. station to Atlantic City. It was only five dollars for the ticket, and got me right where I needed to be. You can literally walk from the train station to the beach or the boardwalk. I've always used the train to get to New York or even Baltimore when I was in college. It's so much more efficient than driving. Honestly, the more that I use public transportation, the more it confirms my belief that I do not need a car. Philadelphia is the most walkable city, and you can get anywhere just from our trains, buses, or subways. I think owning a car is similar to owning a bike; it's just more maintenance, more bullshit to deal with. I feel like having fewer items that you own, subtracting unnecessary things from your life, brings you more peace, and ultimately makes you happier. Most people view the car as a key to freedom, but I see it as slavery. The things that you own just own you. I don't need a car. The human being is the ultimate vehicle.

*If you're not moving, you're dying.*

## **Nostalgia Is Bad**

I was speaking with an old man that was working at the pier, who is about seventy years old, sweeping up the floors after I made a photograph of him in between the arches. He told me he's from South Philadelphia and Italian, giving us a connection to each other. He lives in Margate, right next door to where I grew up going to the beach at my grandma's house in Longport. I'm always curious about people that I meet who grew up in South Philadelphia and ask them how it was back in their day. There's always a discussion about how much different it is now, how much better it was in the past. What if we remove this notion that the past was better than the present, and simply embrace right now as the supreme state of being, despite the external circumstances?

The word "nostalgia" has its roots in the Greek language. It is derived from two Greek words:

*Nóstos (νόστος): meaning “return home” or “homecoming,” and Álgos (ἄλγος): meaning “pain” or “suffering.”*

Maybe nostalgia is a yearning for the past that truly does lead to pain or suffering. If you're yearning for the past, you're existing within an imaginary state, chasing a shadow that once was. I think nostalgia is bad, such as collecting old things like video games, antiques, or even hoarding old photographs. When you look back at an old photograph of someone you loved who is now lost, does it make you happy or sad? I argue that it will lead to suffering. While this isn't necessarily something we should avoid, it's something to be aware of. For instance, as I walk the boardwalk, I can yearn for my childhood, wishing I was a kid again, or I can change my perspective on life itself, embrace my inner child, and become born again, like I'm just some big kid. I could go and eat some funnel cake (which I will not), ride the log flume, or even swim in the ocean, fueling my inner child. If I treat the world as a playground, and I remain as playful as a child, then there is no point in yearning for the past. The way I feel right now, in this moment, is superior. One funny thing I realize is how small everything feels right now as I walk past the ice cream stands, the rides, and the arcades. When you're a kid, you look up at the world, as everything is taller than you, or you have to go on your tiptoes to look at the counter, or even have your height measured before being permitted to get on a ride. As we evolve, we become taller, stronger, and harder. While we become hardened by life over time, perhaps it's most wise to loosen up, and embrace your inner child.

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