

The Art of Living

Let's make our lives a living work of art. If you decided to live each day like it was your last, what would you do and how would you spend your time?

I choose to start my day off with a hike in nature, finding myself on the edge of a cliff, looking out beyond the horizon. When I stand at the top of this cliff, I zoom out, and look at myself from a third-person perspective, recognizing how connected I am to this world, gazing down on me from the heavens.

Philadelphia is Paradise

There's an art to living in Philadelphia, and thriving here in this city. First and foremost, Philadelphia is the most walkable city in the United States of America. This means you do not technically need to own a car. Everything is accessible via walking. Also, public transportation is very easy to use, and today I decided to take the bus to the Wissahickon Forest. The greatest upside to living in Philadelphia is our green spaces, not just our parks, but our forests. The city has various parks and green spaces throughout the concrete jungle, from Rittenhouse Square, Washington Square, Logan Square, and Franklin Square. We also have two beautiful rivers with walking trails from Penn's Landing at the Delaware River and the bike trail along the Schuylkill River. Around 5 miles up the Schuylkill River is Manayunk, the area where I grew up, with the Wissahickon Forest just in our backyard. I'm currently walking along the dirt path, on a random trail, surrounded by the tree canopy. You wouldn't even think you're in a city anymore when you surround yourself in the Wissahickon.

Why does this matter?

I think natural and green spaces promote human thriving. As much as I love society and being around urban life and other people, there's peace and solitude to be had surrounded by nature. There's the perfect balance in Philadelphia between urban spaces and green spaces. This matters and is a really big deal. Also, the fact that everything is so walkable is one of our biggest upsides, as there is really no need to

be stuck in traffic. I believe that spending too much time in cars, sitting down, promotes anxiety and frustration generally. As much as people view the vehicle as a key to freedom, I see it as more maintenance, something to keep up with, and actually more burdensome owning a car than not. I've never needed one, nor desired one. Who knows, maybe one day I'll change my mind, but for now, I'll stay walking, enjoying the forbidden drive.

I was just reading a plaque along the trail, discussing how this path I'm walking on is called Forbidden Drive. Apparently, in the late 20th century, they banned automobiles from driving along this path and built a turnpike instead. Since then, they gave the name of this path Forbidden Drive.

Philadelphia is so rich with history. It is the birthplace of America, after all. What I love most about my city is that you can walk around and learn something new each and every day.

Well, our summer is short and our winter is long. Perhaps Philadelphians appreciate the summer more when it's here. There are so many people swimming in the creek, enjoying the sun, but I actually enjoy the change of seasons. There's something about the change of seasons that feels right to me. There's this yearning you feel when it's summertime for the fall. When it's fall, you're looking forward to the winter. When it's winter, spring is around the corner, and the change of colors upon the trees provides the viewer a beautiful tapestry to admire.

The point is, I love Philadelphia, and honestly don't ever see myself wanting to leave this place. If you're a street photographer, it's paradise. You step outside onto the grid and have the perfect number of people on the sidewalk. It's not like New York, where it's completely overcrowded, congested, overwhelming. Philadelphia is just small enough, and just big enough, where it feels like a small town. You can make the same rounds each and every day, covering the most bustling areas to practice your street photography. I have a really great route, and always find success when I'm out there shooting. I know what to expect when I head out with my camera because the city is just big enough where I can cover all the areas I need to. This is perfect for a photographer like me who enjoys consistency while striving to make a long-term, committed, 50-year archive.

Die Every Day

By remembering that we must die, we shed our skin, let go of our attachments, and desires. Through embracing change, I metaphorically die each day, enabling endless transformation.

Laugh in the face of chaos.

I recently finished reading Epictetus - The Discourses. There is this notion of **equanimity** that he describes, where you are undisturbed and unbothered by strife, facing life's challenges openly with resilience. This state of calm is critical in a world of chaos. By embracing daily **askesis**, or training, I not only fortify my body but also my mind. Currently, my daily discipline involves walking with barefoot shoes and a 40-pound plate carrier on my chest and back. By removing my shirt and my shoes every day, I embrace the maximally minimalist and frugal approach to life, reminding myself that simplicity is king.

Maintenance Thoughts

Our bodies are like a battery, and the adipose tissue beneath our skin and around our organs stores the energy. When you consider fat as energy, it reframes the way that you think about health in general. Nowadays, you often hear people discuss notions of calories, burning calories, storing calories, eating for calories, etc. I think that this is extremely foolish because it is not a matter of intaking lots of calories to store energy, but being more critical about the actual food itself that you consume.

If a person loads up on 2000 calories of lettuce, carrots, and beans, will this person store as much energy as somebody who eats 2000 calories of red meat and eggs?

Obviously, the person who's eating the meat will store more energy, satiating their body, similar to fueling a car with premium gasoline. Eating a plant-based diet is the equivalent of filling up a car with vegetable oil.

Our body is the vehicle

Around a month ago, I was carrying a hose, but held it in a very unfamiliar way, while flexing my bicep. I did this because it fell off of my shoulder, and after holding it for only a minute, I strained my bicep. I can still feel the strain when I wake up in the morning. It's nothing serious, but definitely noticeable. I'm in no pain at this point, but it reminds me of how fragile our bodies truly are, and how mindful we must be engaging physically with the world. I think I'm going to start doing more yoga, making sure I stretch my muscles and my body more. I only do a few different stretches with my legs, but I need to engage the rest of my body and become more flexible.

Also, I recently have been finding myself frustrated with my bike. Firstly, it's actually really dangerous when commuting in the city. I don't recommend biking in Philadelphia unless you are only going out there for leisure along the trail. The streets are filled with glass and potholes and all sorts of stuff that has been popping my tires left and right. Two weeks in a row I popped my tire and it was extremely frustrating to deal with the maintenance. Also, after a year, I had my brake pads replaced, which is probably normal. However, these situations have reminded me of that famous quote from Fight Club where Tyler Durden says,

Your possessions own you. - Tyler Durden

The other day, when I received my flat tire, and was pushing my bike home, I was so fed up with it. I remained calm and was thinking to myself that maybe it's time to move on, and that I should just leave it on the side of the road and forget about the bike, as it becomes more of a burden when using it daily. I literally left it overnight, through a storm, woke up the next morning, went for my walk, and found it along the trail still there, untouched, and perfectly working. I rolled it home this morning, and will figure out how I'm going forward with transportation. I'm most likely going to rely on the bus for going to Fairmount Park where I work, which will only take me 20 minutes in the morning and afternoon. Honestly, the streets are just tragic, so much glass, it's a disaster! I think I've learned my lesson at this point, though, and will definitely only be taking the bike out onto the path trail for leisure rather than transportation. There's too much risk and headaches involved with biking for transportation.

Friendship and Solitude

I'm certainly one who thrives on his own. When I was a Peace Corps volunteer, or even a volunteer living abroad in Israel and Palestine, I've always been on my own. I've always traveled from place to place by myself and prefer it this way as a photographer and artist who is extremely focused on making work.

What I've realized when traveling from place to place over the past decade is that there really is no time for friendship or making relationships with other people. It's a byproduct of the adventurous spirit, of hopping around, with wanderlust. Now that I'm home, I'm really glad because I get to spend time with my two friends that I've known ever since we were around four or five years old. I'm very fortunate and grateful to have held onto friendships for this long and feel like the real friends that you make are the ones that you've made from childhood.

Why I Thrive in Nature

As I walk through the Wissahickon Forest right now, I'm reminded of my time spent as a kid. I would explore the forest, building teepees with sticks, sharpening spears, attempting to hunt deer, building bridges with stones, riding bikes, exploring caves, and fishing. I spent a lot of my youth in this forest, many times exploring with friends, but a lot of the time I spent here alone. I think that nature is infinitely novel due to the randomness of the way that trees and plants grow. The feeling of uneven surfaces, gravel, dirt, the running water from the creek, the sounds of birds and insects, and the different colors of leaves provide the explorer with infinite ways to entertain themselves.

Also, when in nature, it feels liberating to take off your shoes, walk through the grass, remove your shirt, and feel the sun kiss your skin. I enjoy walking through the forest this way, primal, but with technology, such as a camera, the world becomes a canvas, and all of the randomness within the unknown forest becomes my subject to draw upon. It also feels nice being in nature, without the constraints of societal norms, and the typical mundane routine of walking around the street, observing people walking around, looking at their phones. Even when I took the bus here today, I noticed how every single person on the bus had their head down, hunched over, engulfed in whatever media they were consuming on their phones. It was

actually extremely unsettling, and reminds me of why I love nature, and disconnecting from all of this technology. I actually believe that this technology is going to morph the way the human body evolves in the next 10 to 15 years. You're going to see way more people with bent spines and hunched backs.

I think that as much as technology connects us, it disconnects us more than ever. Some simple ways I thrive on my own:

- Walks in nature
- Street photography
- Make videos and podcasts
- Writing and reading
- Weightlifting

Let's continue skipping to my our own beat, without a care in the world, unbothered by societal norms and how others perceive us. Let's become living works of art.