

To Change is Happiness

I've been thinking about happiness lately and what it truly means to me. Happiness is movement, change, and evolution. I find the most joy when my photography and creative practices allow me to change, go deeper, and find even more greatness in my craft.

Hero's Journey

I feel like I've gone on my own Odyssey, with a call to adventure that took me around the world and back home again. I've gone from my comfortable surroundings, in my hometown, Philadelphia, to Baltimore, Israel, Palestine, Zambia, Mumbai, Mexico City, Hanoi, and Rome. These are the major locations where I focused on my photography and explored throughout the past decade. I faced lots of challenges along my journey, photographing in conflict situations, attending funerals and baptisms, climbing mountains, working on farms, sleeping on floors, and pitching tents under the stars. Now, I'm back in my comfortable, luxurious condo in Center City. Towards the end of my journey, while in Hanoi, I felt like I was crawling out of the abyss, out of my old self, ready to transform into something new. I will never forget my experience walking around the lake, feeling quite disconnected from my surroundings, questioning why I photograph, and what I will do next with my life. I started a job working as a photographer, which I really did not enjoy, so I quit. My intuition told me to visit Rome. While in Rome, I spent most of my time in churches, praying, and of course, photographing. When I came back to Philadelphia, I felt like a completely new person, like I had crawled back into my body again, shed my skin, and was reborn.

Harry Potter is one of my favorite movie series, and the only series that I've watched every single episode of in a movie theater since I was a young boy. There's a scene where Harry Potter descends into hell, to fight against the basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets, and because of his courage, the Phoenix delivers him a sword, helping him slay the beast. When he returned to Dumbledore, the Phoenix healed Harry's wound with its tears. The Phoenix is Dumbledore's close companion, a

representation of death and rebirth. Dumbledore founded the Order of the Phoenix, a symbol of light, as the organization fights against the darkness, the evil, and Voldemort.

Perhaps if you look into the abyss, the darkness, it is inevitable that you will find the light.

Let's Thrive, Not Survive

I believe that we send ourselves to hell, here on Earth, through the actions that we take, the people that we associate with, and the things that we consume. Perhaps we have all descended into hell at one point or another, but we must rise from the ashes like a Phoenix, through transformation and evolution.

"Tonight we dine in hell!"

Every day is war, every day is a battle for your mind. If we stay complacent, stagnant, and adopt the same old habits throughout our entire lives, of course, we will feel misery and sadness, with no progress. However, through moving on, by quite literally walking, moving our two legs, creating, and changing, we can find new ways to thrive. As an artist, I seek novelty through the chaos of everyday life. By looking at the world this way, in the spirit of play, everything around me becomes my canvas. This recognition of the infinite possibilities within the mundane provides me with a perception of reality that promotes thriving in my life. I don't want to simply walk through life, surviving, and not take notice of all of life's beauty. By taking in each moment, I thrive.

Why I'm So Happy

Ever since changing my photography process, I've been the happiest I've ever been in my entire life. Like I said earlier, I hit a wall in Vietnam, where I felt like I wasn't making any progress and felt very disconnected from the work I was making.

To change is to be happy.

When I returned home, I traded my cameras in and returned to my first love, the Ricoh GR111. I also decided to make a big shift in my process; I now photograph using small JPEG files and high contrast black-and-white. This takes a lot of commitment for me, as I was very comfortable with my old ways of working. The problem with my old ways was the speed at which I would photograph and go through the images. RAW files take way too long to import, upload, and work with, which inevitably led to my unhappiness. I would become really frustrated with the process itself and found that I wasn't seeing anything different in my photographs or any progress being made at the end of my journey. However, now I am seeing nothing but progress; every day I'm making something new, something different, that sparks my interest. I feel like I've tapped into this endless well of the unknown that keeps on delivering. I've never felt so creatively, physically, spiritually, and mentally full and fulfilled in my entire life. I truly believe that this is because of my transformation, evolution, and new process of making photographs.

Self Overcoming vs Self Sedation

By changing every day, I embark on a journey of self-overcoming. I enjoy pushing myself, both physically and creatively, by waking up early at 4 AM, writing, reading, and photographing first thing in the morning. I enjoy my Askesis training, walking barefoot with a 40lb plate carrier for one hour, on a hike in nature, where I climb a cliff behind the Philadelphia Museum of Art. When I stand on top of this cliff each and every morning, I zoom out from a third perspective point of view in my head, looking down at myself from the heavens, recognizing how connected I am to this world, and how I can forever change each day, similar to the river that I gaze out to in the distance, ever-flowing. When it comes to self-overcoming, we must be most critical about our physiology and vitality. I believe that when you become in tune with nature and peak physical health and condition, you've returned home, to your true essence, to who you are meant to be. But it is only when you embrace vitality, practice your craft, and follow your passions with vigor and purpose. I find that by overcoming myself I feel more alive, I feel more like myself.

It's very easy to self-sedate in this modern world, as we have a weapon of mass distraction in our front right pocket, the iPhone. Through endless media, drugs, alcohol, clubs, bars, festivals, etc., it's simple to seek pleasure. There's an endless

amount of options for us to sedate ourselves, remaining numb and comfortable. This is why I believe it to be more important than ever to remove these things from your life and focus on self-overcoming in the face of self-sedation.

Comfortable Life vs Beautiful Life

Happiness comes from progress. Stagnation leads to unhappiness.

When I think of a comfortable life, I imagine an office worker, sitting in an air-conditioned room for eight hours per day, eating yummy processed food, watching YouTube videos, and enjoying the cushion of a comfy chair. What's funny to me is that these chairs and sitting down are not comfortable at all, but I seek a beautiful and free life in the great outdoors.

To be inside is where souls go to die, to be outside is where humans thrive.

There's something so critical to consider here about having a beautiful life and the physical nature of being inside versus outside. We are becoming more comfortable indoors, with air-conditioning systems, enclosed systems, where we are fed pleasure on a silver spoon. However, what if we took the interesting path, the road less traveled, and treated our world and our life like a work of art? We should embark on our own odyssey, our own journey home, and lead a beautiful life, one that transcends the mundane routine of this comfortable modern existence. We will feel most alive and joyful when we overcome what has been before us and simply move onward into the unknown. If you were to treat your life like a work of art, how would you live each day?

Travel Thoughts

Coming home?

I believe that we can travel in both our mind and our body, outside in the world and inside our own world. I've traveled far and wide, but now I dive deeper inside my mind, examining how I look at things, feel about society, and find myself fitting into

this cosmic drama that is life. I'm home again, here in Philadelphia, where I was born and raised, but not only am I home physically, I feel at home mentally, spiritually, connected to my essence, who I am. I found who I am through coming home, stripping away distractions, and embracing vitality at the forefront of my life.

A strong body will lead to a strong mind, and inevitably, a strong soul.

One thing I'm very proud of about my traveling is that I have never read any books or information about the locations before traveling there. I've always simply followed my intuition and traveled to new places without any preconceived notions of what I would find. I believe that if you want to travel somewhere, you should do it intuitively, just trust your gut, and go. You don't want to be the person who researches the best places to photograph in the city and goes to the same old boring locations as everyone else. In terms of reading, I've only started reading these past two years, and I'm glad I'm only just starting, because I feel as though I have this blank slate to work upon. I've experienced a lot in this world, traveled far and wide, but now I can come home, to myself, to dive into my mind, read books, and reflect philosophically about how I see myself and the world. I no longer have that urge or that burning desire to travel from place to place anymore, and feel perfectly content, as I am now home, both physically and metaphorically.

You Define Success

As a photographer, consider yourself successful if you're making new pictures each day. The goal as a photographer is to simply increase your curiosity by one percent every time you step out there with your camera. Curiosity is a sign of success for an artist. Curiosity is what leads us out there into the world, creating anew, over and over again. If you lack curiosity, you will inevitably remain stagnant, not moving, changing, or evolving. However, by remaining curious, like a child, we can hone in on our ultimate potential through endless transformation. Consider a curious child and how they view the world. A child sees everything with fresh eyes and finds infinite novel ways to embrace the mundane, boredom, and create upon it. I believe that we should be like that child, who views the mundane as novel, remaining curious about every fleeting moment, every detail. While Philadelphia is certainly a more difficult city to practice my photography in, I thrive in the boredom, the mundane, and believe that the downside can ultimately be an upside in my life. I

don't need to travel, I don't need to go anywhere; I am home, I have transformed, I have moved on from who I was before, and I'm overcoming myself every day by embracing the infinite journey of change. Once you know yourself, you can overcome yourself, and through self-overcoming, you can find happiness and meaning in life.

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