

## Engaging with People on the Street: A Key to Closeness in Street Photography

In street photography, interaction is as much a part of the process as the photography itself. Over the years, I've discovered that *closeness* in street photography isn't just about physical proximity; it's also about connecting emotionally with the subject. When you're on the street, don't shy away from interaction—it's a critical part of my approach, one I've learned to appreciate deeply.

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### Closeness: Beyond Physical Proximity

When most people think about closeness in street photography, they often imagine being physically close, like the in-your-face styles of photographers such as **Bruce Gilden** or **William Klein**. While physical proximity has its place, there's a different kind of closeness I aim for—an *emotional closeness*. This connection goes beyond merely capturing a person's image; it's about forging a bond, even if it's only for a moment.

In my early days of photography in Baltimore, I naturally gravitated toward a documentary approach, making my presence known, talking with people, and earning their trust. Through interaction, I was able to capture *genuine moments*, building a rapport that allowed for a more intimate exchange. For me, this closeness is about more than snapping an image; it's about understanding and respecting the space I share with my subjects.

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## Embrace Interaction as a Tool, Not an Obstacle

Street photographers often get caught up in the *fly-on-the-wall* mentality, aiming to go unnoticed. This approach has its benefits—you capture people in their natural state, undisturbed by your presence. However, I’ve come to see interaction as an essential tool in my kit. You don’t always have to be invisible to capture meaningful images. Sometimes, engaging with people, talking, making jokes, and showing genuine curiosity opens doors to moments you’d never capture by standing on the sidelines.

*“Interaction is a tool that you can add to your toolkit to increase the probability of you making a successful photograph.”*

I’ve experienced this firsthand. Recently, while traveling with a local photographer, I stumbled into a scene where families were celebrating a feast day. By simply joining in the festivities, dancing and sharing laughs, I was able to capture intimate, joyful moments that felt far more authentic. The photographs became *closer to life itself*, reflecting the spontaneous energy and warmth of the celebration.

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## Breaking Barriers with Authenticity

Connecting with people on the street requires more than a camera; it demands openness and honesty. *Don’t hide your camera.* Instead, let it be an extension of your curiosity. If you approach people with sincerity, they’ll be more inclined to let you in. Simple gestures, like learning a few words in the local language or showing a genuine interest in their lives, go a long way in bridging the emotional distance.

*“The way to get closer is through being playful, open, and honest with your intentions. Don’t hide your camera.”*

When I lived in a village in Zambia, I spent months with a host family, and by the time I left, we were like family. The photographs from that period reflect a unique warmth, not just because I was physically close, but because I had truly become

part of their lives. These experiences taught me that *spending time and building trust leads to photographs with a soul.*

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## **Time and Familiarity: Closeness in Familiar and New Places Alike**

Whether you're photographing in a familiar place or somewhere entirely new, *spending time* is invaluable. The longer you're in a location, the more comfortable people feel with you, and the richer your photos become. This doesn't mean you always need days or weeks; sometimes, a few moments of genuine interaction can create an opening. Engage with people, join in on their stories, and let the interaction guide you.

*"You know, it's not just about putting the camera closer—it's everything but that."*

The key is to immerse yourself fully, embracing the surroundings and the people. When I think of William Klein's work, he wasn't just *shooting* the streets; he was *living* them. His presence is felt in every shot because he engaged deeply with the people. I approach the street with a similar mindset: connecting, conversing, and making my presence a part of the photograph.

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## **Tips for Getting Closer to Life on the Streets**

To truly embrace closeness in street photography, here are a few guiding principles:

1. **Engage openly:** Don't shy away from conversation. Approach with curiosity, share a smile, or make a friendly comment.
2. **Show genuine interest:** People can sense authenticity. Let them know you care about their story, not just their photograph.
3. **Spend time:** Whether minutes or hours, time spent in the space naturally builds comfort and trust.

4. **Break down barriers:** Physical closeness isn't the only closeness; emotional connection creates richer images.
5. **Have fun:** Don't take it all too seriously. Enjoy the unpredictability of the streets and let interactions flow.

Ultimately, the street is a stage, and interaction is the rhythm that drives it. Embrace the spontaneity, the unpredictability, and the energy of the people you meet. Let go of pretense, step out from behind the lens, and allow closeness to guide you. By making your presence a part of the experience, you're not just a photographer; you're part of the story.