

High Thumos

Become what the world isn't. Society has conditioned us to consume, to buy into distractions and a slave mentality. But we are the ultimate producers, driven by the life force, vitality, and thumos within us. Personally, I don't need motivation—I'm always moving. My body is the vehicle, and courage drives me. Thumos fuels my every action in life.

I Was Always a Creative Person

As a kid, I built teepees in the woods, forts in trees, and carved my own nature paths. I arranged warrior figures and crusaders in intricate battle scenes, gave them dialogue, and created stories. In the first and second grade, I made books, illustrating scenes from *Star Wars* and crafting my own storylines. I vividly remember one story I created called "The Return of Yoda," with a colorful picture of Yoda on the cover that I drew with crayons. I loved making comic strips and short stories and always had a knack for creation since a very young age. By sixth grade, I was mastering graphic design in Photoshop CS3, which I learned how to pirate and get for free on the internet. At that time, I was also modifying Nerf guns and jailbreaking iPods, all while making music in GarageBand. I remember my neighbor would come over, and we would put down some beats, plug in an electric guitar or keyboard, and he would even sing over the songs we made, joking around and having fun with it.

Around this time, I loved alternative music, especially bands like Arcade Fire, and the song "Ready to Start" was my anthem. My gamertag on Xbox Live was "TuNe Music" because I always had the best music taste and found tracks before they got popular. I used to make *Call of Duty* montages and edit videos with After Effects and iMovie. I was even the first person to trick shot on *Call of Duty: World at War* and made a whole new subgenre within a niche community of sniping in the game.

In high school, I was very passionate about graphic design, web design, and especially typography. Eventually, that led me to photography. My first camera was the Nikon FM with a 50mm lens that I purchased from a small mom-and-pop

camera shop in Chestnut Hill. As I became more interested in photography, I learned that my great uncle Bill owned a Leica M3, and he allowed me to borrow it on the weekends, where I started practicing street photography as a teenager around the time I was 17 years old.

Full of Energy

I've always been full of energy and vitality. This, to me, is the core of what having high thumos is about. It's the passionate part of my soul that drives me to do what I do with courage at the forefront. I remind myself of how I started, as a young boy creating in my backyard, up until now, as a grown adult at 28 years old, still pursuing my passion for creation. I've never needed something to motivate me to do what I do. I simply find myself endlessly in a production state, a flow state, of making something. I find that photography is the ultimate tool or medium for any creator because it is so accessible and easy to get into. You can carry a small camera with you wherever you may be, and have the endless opportunity to use your vitality and energy for the act of creating.

For me, thumos drives my creation; it has me making more rather than less. Stagnation is not an option for those that have high vitality. With your vitality at the forefront, everything else falls into place. I believe that a photographer must be strong, full of life and energy, as this will reflect in the photographs that we make.

Producer Versus Consumer

Have you ever wondered why they give you free bread at restaurants?

When you sit down at a restaurant, they always offer you a drink menu first. They expect that you'll order alcohol. Secondly, free bread arrives, and I've always wondered why... Essentially, as you eat, the carbohydrates from the bread break down into sugars, which then spike your insulin, making you hungrier 10 minutes later. This is why restaurants give you free bread, because the waiter will then come around the middle of the meal, asking if you're OK, if you want to order anything

more, and then especially come back with the dessert menu. If you eat the bread at the beginning of the meal, you're going to have the hunger and appetite for dessert at the end.

The free basket of bread may seem like a courtesy, but it's actually manipulative and makes you want to eat dessert later. You can think this way about the entire food pyramid as well. The top of the food pyramid tells you to eat red meat sparingly, while grains are the base. Follow the food pyramid, and you will inevitably be a consumer slave. Why? Because you will then be dependent upon all of these other foods that are low in satiation and protein, which actually fuel your body with the energy that it needs.

What Is Your Modus Operandi?

I find it interesting to learn how other people operate, especially photographers or creative people. Personally, I wake up early, around 4:30 AM, slam four espressos, and head out the door with my 40-pound plate carrier, marching for one hour. I grab my camera and go immediately, either writing down my thoughts or making photographs. This is a new operation for me, as I've only been doing this for about two years now, since adopting my new process of photographing in black-and-white. I think I've ultimately returned to this amateur mindset, where I'm a big kid again with a camera, starting from day one every single day, and this is what fuels my curiosity to get out there so early in the morning.

Anyways, I enjoy going to the top of the cliff behind the Philadelphia Museum of Art, looking out towards the beautiful horizon, river, and architecture of the Fairmount Water Works. This location brings me immense joy as I can look out towards the skyline. On my journey back home, viewing the city in a panopticon view, looking out towards the surroundings and the sky above, always reminds me of how open this world is and how endless the possibilities are.

Before I start the day, I make sure to do yoga for at least 10 minutes, stretching my legs and body, preparing for a day of physical activity. I've started working in horticulture, spending the majority of my morning and afternoon in nature, typically in solitude, to be honest, for eight hours on my own from 7-3. This is a very important part of my day for me. As a street photographer, working amidst the

hustle and bustle of people, I also need the balance of being alone in nature, away from urban life. I've designed my life this way so that I can have time to reflect, think, read, and write before going out there and creating on the streets.

After work, I strap my 40-pound plate carrier back on and hit my home gym, where I do some pull-ups, push-ups, dips, farmer's walk, lateral raises, bicep curls, squats, and a simple routine for about 15 minutes. From 3 to 6 PM, I photograph on Market Street, which is one of the oldest streets in Philadelphia. I think this is the best street to practice photography in Philadelphia because the streets are so wide, with many people coming and going from the bus stops, walking through the Convention Center, Reading Terminal Market, and the mall. There are some office buildings where workers come from, and it's close to City Hall and Broad Street, where you can see beautiful architecture and get more action when the offices let out.

At 5:30 PM, I enjoy listening to the Wanamaker Organ inside the Macy's on Market Street. This has become a daily ritual for me, where I cull through my photos of the day, making my selections and listening to some beautiful music. At first, listening to the organ was merely a curiosity after my grandmother passed away, because she worked in the building, and I knew that maybe she listened to it too. I then realized how this may be the most uplifting and beautiful artistic experience you could have in the city of Philadelphia. The combination of architecture, sculpture, and music are some of the highest forms of art. Not to mention, the Wanamaker Organ is the world's largest playing pipe organ, and it's truly a privilege to have the opportunity to listen to it for free each day.

I feel as though when I stand in front of this gigantic eagle sculpture, with thousands of feathers wrought by hand, I'm standing within a divine space, enjoying a transcendent artistic experience, soaring upwards and beyond the high ceiling of the Wanamaker building on the wings of the eagle!

Now, this ritual has become an active discipline for me to remain outside until the end of the day and to always finish looking at my photos and making selections before I even get home. I've always found the burden of culling through the work and making selections to be the most grueling part of photography. Since adopting

a new workflow using small JPEG, high contrast, black-and-white, with the Ricoh GR and iPad, I've found the fastest workflow for street photography possible, which not only makes my life easier but makes me a happier person and photographer.

After I cull through the photos, I shoot for another half hour, head home, and break my fast, eating one meal per day of entirely red meat. By satiating my body with red meat, I give my soul the vitality it needs to go onwards the next day. I also believe that through fasting, I remain disciplined and focused on my creative pursuits throughout the entirety of the day.

My mode of operation is one of high discipline, high thumos, physical training, and creativity. I've designed a life where I'm always outdoors, never stagnant, never sitting down, and essentially standing and walking throughout the entirety of my day. There hasn't been a single day that passes by where I don't reach my goal of 30,000 steps or 15 miles per day. Maybe I walk more than 99% of the city of Philadelphia every single day? This is what thumos looks like, where you have too much power within your body, your legs, and this inevitably leads you onwards, endlessly.

How to Increase Your Thumos

When I think of thumos, I think of Achilles dragging the body of Hector along the walls of Troy, taunting his enemies after avenging the death of his best friend Patroclus. This intense, emotional rage that fueled Achilles on the battlefield with vengeance and the goal of glory, I believe, is the core of thumos. There's an inner warrior within us that disregards the rational, embracing that spiritedness, that high energy, that brings us to do what we do with passion. Were Achilles' actions ultimately what led to his decline? Yes, but the spirit of his soul is something we can carry out within this modern world that suppresses our inner warrior.

Fear is normal and irrational, something we all feel. However, what if courage was the antidote to these feelings, and we moved onward, through the walls of Troy, with them set aside? What if we take all the arrows, all the shots, similar to how Achilles took an arrow to his ankle from Hector's brother, a coward from the sidelines, sniping him from a distance?

I think of the video game *League of Legends* and my favorite champion to play as, Blitzcrank. Blitzcrank was an ultra-tanky character, one that could take lots of shots. I would always increase his defense to the maximum, and I even remember a defense system that would allow him to regenerate his shield when his health was low. I would take all of the shots from the turrets, the minions, and support my team as we marched onward through the lanes. I find this to be a metaphor for embracing your raw power, vitality, and thumos, despite the heat of battle or the critique of others, whether it be from Zeus himself or a mortal in the flesh.

We do not let the words and actions of others affect us in any way. We have an inner energy, a fiery force, that is driving us onto the front lines of life, in pursuit of eternal glory through the medium of photography. May he who photographs the most win.

The world has been conquered, and there is nowhere left for man to dominate. I say, the world of photography is open, and a new domain for us to conquer.