Get Closer: The Power of Proximity in Street Photography

What's poppin', people? It's Dante.
Today we're going to be discussing how *getting close* can make your street photography more impactful.

> ***"If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough."***
> *—Robert Capa*

This quote comes from one of the founding members of Magnum Photos. It stuck with me. And it's something I've embodied since one of my first-ever street photos here in Philly.

The Early Days: Philly, 2015

One of the earliest photographs in my archive was made just after I picked up the Ricoh GR II in 2015. I hit the streets with fresh eyes, no expectations.

There was this moment—
A man with glasses and a cigarette, standing still while, in the background, someone clearly unwell was being prepared for an ambulance.

To make that frame, I had to *muster up the courage* to physically position myself close to him. I wasn't trying to exploit the moment. I emphasized the man in the foreground and allowed the background to tell the rest of the story.

It was spontaneous.
I was simply there—with my camera. And because I was physically close, I was able to *let the moment uplift itself.*

The Front Lines of Life

"One must get close on the front lines of life to make a photograph with more impact."

That moment with the cigarette and the ambulance—there's this interplay between tragedy and the mundane. And that's what elevates it.

Proximity removes distractions.
It fills the frame.
It creates immediacy.

Zambia: Finding Order in Chaos

In the markets of Zambia, I was overwhelmed by chaos. But by focusing on *small gestures*, on *light and shadow*, and by getting close, I was able to make something simple and distraction-free.

It's all about the eyes.
The skin.
The *details*.

"The real emotion lives in the details—in the skin, in the eyes, in the gestures."

A Funeral in the Community

There was a moment where a man was mourning during a funeral. I dropped to my knees, got to his level. I was *physically* close, yes—but more than that, I had spent over a year with that community.

These moments came from *emotional connection*, not from hunting.

My Grandmother Sunbathing

A personal moment:
My grandmother sunbathing.

I was inches away—28mm lens on the Ricoh GR II. Her skin, her red lipstick and nails, the blue sky, the gestures.

> ***"Positioning my physical body close to the gesture made the impact."***

Whether it's mourning or sunbathing, *gesture* is everything.

Overcoming Fear

> ***"If you want to get close, one must muster up the courage to go out there and photograph."***

A great place to start? Photograph someone you know.

Start at a boxing gym.
Go every week.
Build connection.
Then photograph.

That's what I did in Jericho—months of living there, engaging, then making photos.

Engagement Leads to Impact

Engagement creates better photographs.

Not always about being a fly on the wall.
Have a conversation.
Be playful.

In Jerusalem, I passed through a checkpoint and into Shafat refugee camp. The first thing I saw was men loading watermelons. I joked with them. That connection allowed me to photograph the scene naturally.

>   *"I go out there in the spirit of play, like a big kid."*

That's the key. Don't take yourself so seriously. Let your charisma shine.

The Puff of a Cigarette

After hiking all day with Ahmed and Muhammad, one of the young men began smoking a cigarette. I got close, framed him up, and as he puffed, I pressed the shutter.

He noticed me.
He made eye contact.
But I had already built that trust.

>   *"These moments don't happen in a day. They happen over weeks."*

I was sleeping on mosque floors, fully immersed in the community. That emotional proximity made the photo.

The Joy of Risk

Street photography is a risk.
The world is our arena.

In Dharavi, Mumbai, the largest slum in the world, I turned a corner and a man offered me to photograph him snorting Indian drugs.

Yes, it was dangerous.
But I was invited.
And I made the photo.

> *"Through that risk-taking, I come home with a photograph with more impact."*

Practical Tips for Getting Close

Here's what helps:

- Use a **28mm or 35mm lens**
- Use **zone focus**, **snap focus**, or **fast autofocus**
- Be **decisive**, not nervous
- Set up your camera so it doesn't get in the way

When a man did a wheelie down my Philly street, I dropped low, snapped quickly, and let the gesture separate cleanly from the background.

Physical vs. Emotional Closeness

Photographing during Holi in Worli, India—I was invited into someone's home. We drank tea. They showed me around the village.

After that emotional prep, I was ready for the moment.

> *"Proximity will create more power in your photograph."*

Go deep to get close.
Spend time in a place.
Walk the same route every day.

The One Trick

So what's the trick?

> *"What's the worst that can happen?"*

Detach from outcome.
Let go of fear.
Pretend you're photographing the background.
Don't make eye contact.
Act like a tourist.

Get uncomfortably close.

Because when I look at someone's work, I can often tell:

> *"The photography lacks intimacy… because of the physical distance."*

Final Thoughts

If you want to make impactful photographs, you've gotta get close.
Overcome that fear.
Push with courage.

"Ultimately, these kinds of images... they're just better."

Might just be my subjective taste—but I suggest you try it.

See what happens when you step *one foot closer*.

Peace.
Until the next video.