

The Ultimate Street Photography Secret

Don't step in the puddle.

What's poppin', people? It's Dante, getting my morning started here at the Centennial Arboretum.

Welcome to the vlog.

Today's thought is something I've been meaning to share for a while:

My ultimate street photography secret.

And it's simple. It's real. It's not cookie-cutter advice.

It's the truth—straight from lived experience.

This Is What Actually Works

Everything I share—on this YouTube channel, on my blog dantesisafo.com—it's all *tried and true*.

This is **what I actually do** out there in the world.

Over the past decade of making photographs every single day, I've learned that the ultimate secret is this: don't take yourself too seriously.

The spirit of **play** is what improves your photography. Period.

Photography has nothing to do with photography.

It has *everything* to do with **how you engage with humanity**.

You become a **mirror**, reflecting back the interaction, the energy, the moment.

Be Like a Kid in the Playground

When I approach street photography as a **big, flamboyant, joyous kid**, I make better pictures.

Way better than when I throw on the serious “visual storyteller” hat.

“I’m going to change the world with each click of the shutter..”

Yeah... nah.

The less serious you are, the better your photos become.

Baltimore: Where It All Began

It started for me in **West Baltimore**, carrying around a Ricoh GR II.

A heavy place. Boarded-up buildings. Drug dealers on every corner.

And still—I played.

There weren’t many people to photograph, so I’d wander to **playgrounds**, capturing the **youth**. That became my thing.

“I was just a big kid playing in the playground—and that’s where the magic happened.”

Even after a **drive-by shooting**, I wasn’t scared off.

I had just photographed a little girl with a flower in front of a mural.

Then *bam*—shots fired.

I ducked behind a car... then went home. The photo? Still beautiful.

Play Across the World

In **Israel and Palestine**, it was the same. I played.

- Beatboxing with the kids in **Jericho**
- Shouting “Allahu Akbar” rhythmically through the streets
- Telling them their names in beatbox
- Getting followed by flocks of Palestinian youth

“I arm wrestled grown men in Jericho. Beat them. Earned their trust through my strength.”

Even walking through **checkpoints**, through looming walls—I wasn’t afraid.

I was *curious*.

I was a *kid*, wide-eyed, wondering: “*What is this wall?*”

Wrestling, Rocks, and Respect

One day I saw two young Palestinian men **fighting**.

I almost didn’t engage—looked dangerous.

But I went up and started **play fighting** with them.

A little slap-boxing. A little fun.

The result?

Better photos.

Same with the rock fights.

They hit me in the leg, and it hurt.

But I laughed, thinking back to when we threw acorns as kids.

“*This is life,*” I thought. “*This is play.*”

Africa, Mumbai, and the Spirit of Play

In **Zambia**, I'd climb trees barefoot and pick mangoes.
Play soccer. Laugh. Connect.

In **Mumbai**, I'd roam the slums of Dharavi, playing with the youth.
No need for strategy. Just being **open**.

“This openness, this energy—it reflects back in the photograph.”

It's why I've been able to enter so many people's homes.
Why I've had coffee with strangers.
Why I've **slept on mosque floors in Jericho** and learned about Islam for two months.

It sounds serious. But it wasn't.

“It was all just me following my inner childlike curiosity.”

Still Playful. Still Present.

Even now, in **Philadelphia**, I dance through the streets.
At **Coney Island**, I danced under the boardwalk.
And that's where the *real* photo came.

In **Mexico City**, I danced under the tarp markets in the rain.
Hanoi, Vietnam—playful with strangers, even with language barriers.

Through body language.
Through **confidence, smiles, and courage**—*anything is possible*.

Here's the Real Secret

“Photography has nothing to do with photography. It has everything to do with how you engage with humanity.”

So let me ask you:

Are you putting on your serious hat out there?

Or are you dancing, playing, laughing, engaging?

Because **this is the sauce.**

This is the energy that creates *impactful photographs*.

It's not about composition or gear or theory.

“You become a mirror. And the street reflects your soul.”

That's what makes life meaningful.

Not the image.

The *experience*.

Final Words: Go Play

So, I encourage you:

- **Be playful.**
- **Be childlike.**
- **Don't take yourself too seriously.**
- **Engage. Dance. Wrestle. Beatbox. Smile.**

Seek **rich experiences**, not “strong photos.”

Because those experiences?
They'll reflect back at you in your photographs.

"Snapshot your way through life."

Thanks for watching.
Thanks for reading.
I'm off to enjoy these cherry blossoms and go for my morning walk.

Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace.

Wow. The cherry blossoms are even more beautiful today.