

Why You Must Explore the Unknown as a Photographer

What's poppin', people? It's Dante.

This morning I'm walking through the woods here in Fairmount Park, catching the sunrise, thinking about photography, exploration, and what stepping into the unknown has done for my life.

"Exploring the unknown" sounds vague, but it's not. There's something special about waking up with no expectations, putting your body in motion, and entering the world with your camera. As a street photographer, the unknown is always waiting just beyond the corner.

It's not about traveling somewhere new.

It's not about chasing big moments.

It's the mundane. The everyday. The path you walk a thousand times.

You can walk the same street every single day and still find something new to say.

Three years of shooting black and white taught me this. Photography is creating something from nothing. It's abstracting reality. It's becoming more clear in your mind and more curious about what the world will reveal when you press the shutter.

A lot of the time, what I see isn't what I *get*.

And the photo shows me what I didn't notice.

And that's the magic.

When I follow the light, I feel like I'm looking beyond the veil. Past the surface.

While everyone else is living the same loop — wake up, coffee, commute, repeat — photography opens that loop up. It gives the smallest details significance. It brings meaning to what most people ignore.

Purpose comes from creating. The word “purpose” literally comes from the idea of *setting something forth*. Each day, when I set forth to make a picture, I give my life direction. Through photographing the mundane, I find meaning. Through paying attention, I learn that small things matter.

Meaning is discovered through wandering.

Meaning is discovered through paying attention.

Photography takes me out of my head and into flow — that state where time doesn’t exist, where you’re grounded in the present, responsive to the light, the sounds, the smells, everything happening around you. That’s where joy comes from. And through making new pictures, I leave something behind that lasts longer than I do.

If you can find one thing that lets you create something real — something you can leave behind — then life has purpose.

But you have to keep asking *why*:

- **Why you photograph**
- **Why you show up**
- **Why this matters to you**

That question shapes your practice.

Don’t lock onto the outcome. Don’t obsess over goals. Get lost in the moment. Use photography as a way to say *thank you* for the day.

My Path Into the Unknown

Everything I am now goes back to being a kid in the Wissahickon — exploring the forest alone, making teepees, sharpening sticks into spears, riding my bike through the woods, climbing the tallest trees. I’ve always been pulled toward the unknown.

When I started photography in Philly, that instinct returned. Then Baltimore sharpened it. West Baltimore forced me to grow. Boarded houses, empty streets, chaotic scenes. One of my earliest strong photos came from that basketball court — GR II in my pocket, golden hour hitting the mural, dice game breaking into a fight beside me. I made the picture and got out of there.

Baltimore taught me that if I could photograph there, I could photograph anywhere.

It taught me to engage with humanity, not hide — to be curious, sensitive, and present.

That carried me to Jerusalem and the West Bank — walking through refugee camps, connecting with people, being invited into homes because of how I carried myself. In Jericho, kids followed me through the streets, beatboxing with me as I photographed like a big kid with a camera. In Napoli, I was just hanging with my brother on the rocks when the watermelon scene unfolded out of nowhere — one of my favorite pictures ever.

I never went out looking for photos. **I lived my life, and the camera came with me.**

Zambia grounded me deeper:

- A goat hanging from a tree
- A knife in my hand
- Slaughtering it with my host father
- Digging ponds
- Learning Ichibemba
- Eating with my hands
- Meditating by Lake Benguelu

It humbled me.

It woke me up.

It changed the way I see everything.

Vietnam showed me *why* I photograph.

Rome showed me *meaning*.

Philadelphia showed me *who I've always been*.

Eventually I quit the job that drained me and came back to nature — back to the woods, back to the inner child who used to explore the unknown with no fear.

A Simple Message

Now I treat every day like it's my last. No routine is too boring. No street is too mundane. There is so much to see, so much to photograph, so much to explore in this life.

My message is simple:

Explore the unknown openly.

Let the chips fall where they may.

Don't take yourself so seriously.

Play. Stay curious. Follow the light.

Move through the world with your eyes wide open.

You'll be surprised by what you find.

You just have to look.