

## **Seeing Without a Camera**

*'Using Secrets of Professional Photographers to Increase Creativity, Balance & Happiness'*

By Mark Sincevich

What is it that photographer's do that allow them to be more creative and more balanced? I can tell you from my recent experience that a part of the secret lies in realizing that things are not always what they seem. I believe that everyone would benefit from having an open mind and dropping preconceived notions when coming upon new situations or occurrences. Part of this has to do with allowing ourselves to be more creative. Creativity isn't something that can necessarily be ordered. What if your boss or your close friend said, 'I would like for you to be creative for the next 60 minutes.' You might be able to write a poem or come up with a new idea. Chances are that you will just sit there and only get your inspiration towards the end of the time, if at all. Creativity must be nurtured and practiced.

Photographers are more creative by the nature of their business, because it is something that is demanded by the job. In order to see the world with new eyes they must uncover unique ways to approach a subject. However, creativity like keeping physically fit requires constant attention and practice. It is something that non-photographers can nurture too. Consultant and former Grateful Dead Rocker John Perry Barlow explains, "I have been involved in many different strains of collective undertaking that lie outside of the traditional office. This has made it easier for me to avoid standard habits of mind." He helped Kodak realize that they aren't in the silver halide on paper business, but in the business of making emotions portable. He feels that this newfound creativity at Kodak eased their transition into digital photography.

Are photographers more balanced? I believe it depends upon the individual. I know of a few photographers who work too many hours only to have their personal lives suffer as a result. By being more creative, you allow people to have more options in any given set of circumstances. I believe that having more options allows people the opportunity to become more balanced. Without being creative with regards to keeping physically fit, you may have only gone walking or swimming to keep in shape. By being more creative, you have the option to join a speed walking group, run in a marathon, participate in water aerobics or join a gymnasium that has a pool. If you pay attention to your surroundings and give time and attention not just to your work, but also to your life, you will become more of a balanced individual.

It is for this reason that I feel that those individuals who are creative and balanced are a lot happier. This has to do with having many different choices in your personal life as well as in your business. It is my intention to share with you some of the secrets that professional photographers practice in order for you to gain more creativity, balance and happiness. I believe that in order to see without a camera, you need to throw out labels that you might have put on someone or something. Seeing without a camera is paying attention to the world around you and anticipating a scene or an event. Seeing involves constant practice on being more creative and more balanced. Seeing is having a long-term vision, and seeing without a camera is being able to tell your unique story by expressing yourself and your art. This is not just true for photographers, but for those of us who engage in each of our respective professions.

### ***Seeing is Throwing Out Labels***

The first part of truly seeing is to throw out labels and to remove barriers. It involves challenging accepted ways of doing things so that we don't become creatures of habit. Freeman Patterson feels that, "We avoid introducing new factors, technical or emotional, into our photographs for fear that we won't be able to control them." Being able to see something truly special is not trying to control it. If we aren't busy worrying about controlling something, then we might just enjoy the process a little more. Practicing Yoga is a great way to remind us of this. "Suddenly, energy itself will begin to direct the flow of postures. In these moments we may have a sense of effortlessness, of complete

surrender to a force greater than ourselves. ... And it appears to be completely out of our control. We cannot make it happen. We can only let it happen,” says author and yoga adherent Stephen Cope.

Surrendering control is one aspect of removing barriers. The other part is not always having a label for everything that you see. I remember having had my last art class in the eighth grade, and I didn't take art again until I was in my sophomore year of college some five years later. It seems that only the three R's are encouraged in education, reading, writing and arithmetic. The three R's develop our left side of the brain or our analytical thinking. They do not help in building the right side of the brain or our creativity. As the famous French impressionist Monet said, "In order to see we must forget the name of the thing we are looking at." If we are taught to constantly pay attention to the labels that we learn with the three R's, then we will have a difficult time in coming up with new names and new ideas. A white coffee mug just might become a bone white helmet with a half a donut attached.

Removing ourselves from art on a continual basis shrinks each person's ability to relate to each other and to the world. I feel that art allows us to be more open to others, because it is something that is all around us if we just stop and pay attention. While in La Jolla, California on vacation with my wife, we became lost. We were wandering through a residential neighborhood and couldn't find the area where the seals bathed on the rocks. As we walked by a fastidiously kept house, the owner was outside and asked us if we needed any help.

We were both open to his assistance, and we learned that he had retired from the Navy and then from the Board of Education as a teacher. He said that we absolutely needed to go to the cliffs of La Jolla on our way back to our hotel. The site wasn't on our map, so he actually led us to the spot where the trail started. Walking down the wooden stairs, we were greeted by breathtaking views. I was so moved by the vistas that I came back the next day and shot over 100 photographs! It never would have happened if we weren't open to the possibilities.

If we had insisted on sticking to the supposedly 'perfect' map, we never would have been able to see the incredible views that next day. I feel that some of the most memorable experiences happen when our car breaks down or when we become lost. Japanese pottery masters must know this secret, because they always leave an imperfection in their work. According to the Japanese Pottery Masters, imperfection means completeness and wholeness. This imperfection is what makes each photographer and person unique. Each of us needs to celebrate our imperfections!

### ***Seeing is Paying Attention***

If we are able to understand our differences and appreciate each other and the place where we are, we might just look at things a little differently. The next time you take a photograph of a field of beautiful flowers, ask yourself what a small animal or insect might see. Get down on your hands and knees and look up. Perhaps you will see a forest of giant flowers while you get a little dirty. The next time you want to drive to a destination, try walking instead. You will open yourself up to the unexpected. As Susan Sontag says, "The painter constructs, the photographer discloses."

Also, you need to anticipate an event too in addition to paying attention to your surroundings; photographers learn to anticipate an event too. World-famous photographer, Joe Rosenthal of the Associated Press took the most recognized image of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the raising of the American flag on Mount Surabachi, Iwo Jima on February 23, 1945. He chose a different angle from the official U.S. Marine photographer. While he waited to frame the shot, the wind blew the flag, and he got the photograph. As "LIFE Magazine" photo editor, Barbara Baker Burrows said, "Yes, all photographers need luck. But other elements are timing, anticipation and a talent for composition."

While you may not be a photographer, you will certainly need luck in every potentially great situation. Louis Pasteur, who discovered pasteurization, put it another way, "luck is when opportunity and preparation meet." Not only must you need to be prepared, but you also need to put yourself into a

situation where you will have the best opportunity. Joe Rosenthal was a very well prepared photographer, but he had to insert himself in the middle of a battle to increase his opportunity for a great photograph. He became very lucky. However, you can't control luck, it can happen at any moment or it can take longer than expected.

### ***Seeing is Practicing Creativity***

Just as a preparation is a part of luck, we need to practice creativity in order to see what is out there. Dwight Jones said, "Creativity is the ability to look at what everyone else is doing and see something different." This reminds me of how I feel about tourist sites while traveling. If the crowd is being led in one direction, I want to explore those areas where the crowds are not. I believe it is in the unexplored areas where the truly magical things can happen.

While in downtown Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, next to the Petronius Twin-Towers, my wife and I were surrounded by skyscrapers and concrete. Faced with the choice of going on a group city tour arranged by our hotel, we decided instead to take our "Lonely Planet" guidebook and start walking in the direction of Chinatown. We saw shopping malls, a Starbucks, and restaurants with air conditioning blasting out their wide-open front doors trying to attract customers.

We walked down the bottom of a hill to a five-way intersection, the sweat was pouring from our bodies. I stopped to purchase two large bottles of water from a vendor in a wooden shack. At the bottom of the hill near a bus stop, we paused and drank greedily from our ice-cold water. I turned behind me and noticed a magazine stand with a Hindu Woman right in the middle of the racks. In less than two seconds, I had taken her photograph. She noticed me, straightened up slightly and composed herself; I zoomed in and took another photograph. The photograph of her shows this dignified woman surrounded by a swirling sea of magazines. She had a white scarf wrapped around her head and shoulders, so when you look at the photograph, you are immediately drawn to her face.

If I hadn't had my camera in my right hand, strap wrapped tightly around my wrist, finger always on the shutter, I never would have gotten the picture. You need to practice for the unexpected and actually develop ways in your life where there is a potential for more creativity to happen. I end up taking more photographs overall, but the percentage of ones that turn out to be exceptional are increased too. Each issue of "National Geographic" Magazine has only 50 photographs published from a selection of 14,000 images. Clearly the photographers at this esteemed magazine aren't worried about making a mistake as they continue to practice. Babe Ruth is another example of somebody who isn't afraid to make a mistake. He has the record for the most home runs in baseball, but you might not know that he struck out the most times too. In life, you need to keep practicing your creativity even though you might make a lot of mistakes.

### ***Seeing is Creating Balance with Impact***

While you are out practicing making mistakes and getting some things right, it is important to look for balance. Often times the strongest photographs are the ones that have the best composition because they observe the rule of thirds. The rule of thirds was first developed in Ancient Greece and covers the horizontal, vertical and diagonal in a photograph. While on the Greek Island of Patmos, I rented a scooter and drove up the hill toward the highest point on the island, a medieval castle. On the way up to the top, I took a detour to the left of the castle and came upon three ancient windmills. I composed the frame, spacing each windmill a third of the way, and took the photograph.

I not only created balance in this photograph, but I carefully thought about how to compose for more impact. Having three windmills in the frame creates balance, symmetry and may ask questions from the viewer such as how long have these structures been abandoned? The windmills also are a combination of the square and the circle. If you look throughout nature, you will constantly see these three basic forms, the triangle, circle and square. According to Freeman Patterson, "Nature observes the rules of simplicity, which means that nothing in nature is more complex than it has to be in order

to fulfill its particular function.” It is no surprise that a simple and well-composed photograph expresses ideas clearly and gets people to think.

If we are too busy working more hours, how can we express our ideas clearly and live with more balance? According to research from Joe Robinson, the founder of Work to Live, “MRI Images of fatigued brains look exactly like ones that are sound asleep.” After working a long day we try to squeeze in time at the grocery store, chores around the house, and then many of us plop down on the couch to watch television. Where is the time for practicing our creativity and simplicity? Photography reminds each of us to keep striving for the simplicity and balance that exists in nature.

Other ways to create more impact in a photograph is to accentuate movement and tension. Does the photograph draw your eye out of the scene? Does it make you think about what might be going on elsewhere? Photographers can increase the dynamics or point of view of their photographs by choosing different types of lenses. Photographers can even distort reality by using an ultra-wide angle lens to simulate the curvature of the earth. I believe many companies that have poor customer service aren’t using their own zoom lenses. Famous photographer Robert Capa put it best, “If it (the photograph) is not good enough, you’re not close enough.” If a company has poor customer service, they aren’t zooming in on their customers.

### ***Seeing is Having a Vision***

However, if I wanted to tell a more complete story about the island of Patmos, then the photograph of windmills would only be a part. At the Smithsonian Institution, there are many photographs which are part of a larger story in an exhibit called, “Heart & Hands: Musical Instrument Makers of America,” by Photographer Jake Jacobson. Jake has had a lifelong interest in music, photography, workmanship, travel and people. He was able to combine all of these interests by photographing musical instrument makers across America over a three-year period. He took over 20,000 photographs and put 90,000 miles on his car. His project generated so much interest that a German book publisher reimbursed him for much of his expenses.

I am sure that if Jake had gone to book publishers with his idea before his journey he probably wouldn’t have gotten any funding. He might have lost interested from the start. Instead he just started his journey. To make your point in photography or in life, you sometimes need to break all of the rules and just start your journey. If a photographer feels strongly about wanting to create a feeling of power in a picture, the photographer might put the subject in the center. If you feel strongly about where you see your own life, put yourself at its center. Otherwise, you might get caught up in events that take you to a place not of your original intention.

In one of poet David Whyte’s seminars, a woman wrote, “I turned my head if only for a moment and ten years later it became my life.” I believe that your task as a person is to make sure the profession you have chosen is expressed as clearly as possible in your work. You will attract others because of the passion that you have for what you do. This is a combination of having a vision of where you want you life to go and being aware of your journey along the way.

### ***Seeing is Being Able to Tell Your Story***

One of the most important aspects of seeing without a camera is being able to tell your own unique story about your journey along the way. This is accomplished through expressing yourself through your art. In the Native American tradition, everyone was an artist. Art wasn’t separated from life; it was a part of it. I believe that true art really is a form of self-expression. One of my stories is called “The Journey of a Life Time,” which combines my photography with my philosophy of seeing.

A large part of your awareness is your state of mind that you bring to each destination. It partially shapes your experience. I feel when preconceived notions are left behind; each location reveals itself to the traveler allowing one to more fully bring home stories of the people visited. I believe that this

can only happen when away from one's responsibilities for an extended period. It takes time for cares and worries to melt away.

While traveling, you will not only learn to appreciate other places and cultures, but you will get to know yourself for perhaps the first time. I have learned that the more you allow your destination to reveal itself to you, the more it will help you to discover who you really are. It is my hope that my photographs will inspire you to take your own journey on the road to self-discovery. In this way, your place in this world will open up to you while you are on the journey of a lifetime.

Just as each photograph and journey has a beginning, middle and end, I want you to think about how you can create a wonderful story for your own life. In 1990, a man named Subhankar Banerjee left Calcutta, India to come to New Mexico for graduate school in physics and computer science. After working for a few years, he couldn't shake his strong interest in the arts. After investing his life savings, he borrowed another \$100,000 and raised an additional \$60,000 to cover the rest of his expenses. He lived in a tent for 14 months in the Artic Wildlife Refuge in Alaska while he took incredible photographs. Doors started to open, because of his passion for his work.

The Mountaineers Club in Seattle, Washington decided to publish his book and senator Barbara Boxer from California displayed the book before a rally to drum up support against drilling in the Artic Wildlife Refuge. The subsequent controversy increased awareness and sales for his book, and now he is wondering what he will do on his second grand journey. What will be your journey of a lifetime? How do you show others that you care deeply about the work that you do?

It is through the art of seeing without a camera that we realize that rules, labels and dominant ideas can become barriers to our creativity. Just like I found out in Tucson, things aren't always what they seem. With practice, you will start to actively search for new and different ways to look at the world. Practicing seeing without a camera will get you out of your routines. You may just welcome the chance encounter that will open up endless possibilities. Everything we see all around us once started as an idea. How can you come up with new ideas if you aren't seeing? When you start to see, you will be more creative and you will have more balance and happiness in your life.

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