

**HOW TO GAIN FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS IN
PHOTOGRAPHY**

7 SECRETS FOR FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Dear friend,

I think I have discovered the secret to happiness and photography -- and I want to share this secret with you.

Of course, this only works for me. It probably won't work for you. But it might -- that is why I am sharing this information with you.

Secret 1: Own your own platform

The first secret -- own your own platform. Own your own blog, your own website, or whatever you use to publish/share your work.

For example, the quick rule to know whether you 'own' your platform or not:

Do you pay a monthly fee to use it?

For example, 'free' photo-sharing services/apps like Facebook, Instagram (FB owns Instagram), Snapchat, etc -- make money by making *YOU* into the product. Which means, these services make money by advertising stuff to you.

It is pretty bad-- I already see it now. On Facebook/Instagram, every 5th post is an advertisement. The more addicted we get to these 'free' services, the more dependent we become on them. By building your entire following on these free services, **you are building your kingdom in quicksand.**

The solution: make your own website/photography blog. I recommend using wordpress.org (my site is hosted on 1and1.com, and I use the paid 'Genesis' theme).

Or an easier option -- use wordpress.com, and pay for their 'premium' option, and purchase your own domain name.

The joy of owning your own photography website or blog is:

1. You can control how to display your photos. You can create a slideshow, or have it all shown at once as small thumbnails, or in a stream-blog-post format. **You have control over how your viewer consumes your images.** With services like Facebook or Instagram, you are a slave to their platform, and you can only display your photos according to their framework. And you cannot control whether your viewer will look at your photo (with a distracting advertisement in the bottom-right of the screen).
2. You can control to disable comments, likes, statistics. I personally think that having comments, likes, and statistics like view count is harmful for us as creators and artists. Why? Because you become a slave to the 'likes' -- you make art to appease and impress your audience/followers, rather than making art for yourself. For example, in the past, when I used to upload my photos directly to these free services, I would always get discouraged when I didn't get 'as many' likes/favorites/comments as I thought I 'should'. Whereas nowadays I only share my work on my photography blog/website, which means I don't get distracted whether my photos get lots of likes or not. **I use my website as a platform to share my photos, rather than seeking the approval of others.**
3. You find more innovative ways to share/publish your work. For example, with Facebook/Instagram, you want to only publish single images, and maximize your 'like' count. And you might only publish certain times during the day which are 'optimal' to gaining the maximum amount of likes (usually around 12:00pm noon, pacific time). And you don't want to 'post too much', or else Facebook/Instagram's algorithm will punish you by not showing your stuff to as many people in their newsfeeds. Now the problem with this is that **you get trapped into only thinking of the 'single image' mindset-- rather than thinking of your photography as stories, sets, or photo-essays.** In the past

with Flickr/Facebook/Instagram, I used to focus too much on the single image, and feel trapped. Now, I feel liberated-- because I can post *MANY* photos in one blog post, and tell more of a story through my 'Photo Diaries' -- which I feel are more personal and authentic.

Secret 2: No genre photography

Don't become the prisoner of a genre of photography. Rather, give yourself the creative freedom to shoot whatever style of photography your heart desires.

Secret 3: Shoot like a child/beginner

Shoot without any restrictions. If you see something and it interests or excites you,

JUST SHOOT IT.

Be like a kid. Don't take your photography seriously. Shoot without limits, without restrictions. **Shoot without resistance.**

Shoot without an inner-censor telling you what to shoot or what not to shoot.

My practical suggestion:

Shoot whatever interests you, and then be more discerning when you go home and decide which photos to publish/share.

That means,

1. Shoot like a child
 2. Edit (choose your photos) like a pro
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Secret 4: Photography is art and self-expression

My theory:

The purpose of human life is to make art which empowers us and others.

We must first make photos and visual art which brings us happiness, delight, and joy to our soul.

Then, **we have a duty to share our art with others. But it isn't within our control whether others like our work or not.**

Therefore, share photos that you like, even though others may not like it.

I feel each human has in his/her DNA to make art, and express themselves. If we cannot make art, or express ourselves, we become depressed, we become anxious, and we become emotionally/creatively constipated. And I don't know about you, but constipation is one of the worst physical pains (mental constipation is even worse).

We must make art, express ourselves, publish it, let it out, and then move onto new things.

For myself, I am only happy when I am in the process of making art -- whether writing, making photos, teaching, or sharing my passion with others.

Thus, to me -- happiness is active. **Happiness is an action, not a feeling or emotion.**

Therefore **to be happier in life, shoot more.** You don't need every photo to be a masterpiece. Give yourself permission to make 'bad' or 'noob' photos. **As long as the photos bring a smile to your face and bring you joy -- you are on the right**

path.

Secret 5: Use the smallest, simplest camera

The secret to making more photos:

The smaller and simpler your camera, the more photos you will shoot.

Smaller cameras: always with us.

Simpler cameras: easier to shoot; less thinking of technical settings.

For myself, I shoot with RICOH GR II, and shoot in P (program) mode, center point autofocus, ISO 800-1600, and JPEG high contrast color film positive preset. Uber-easy, simple, and I just 'point and click'.

The biggest mistake we make in photography is we get too nerdy about the gear, the equipment, and the settings. Care less about that stuff, and just focus on making nice compositions, and making photos of things which bring you joy.

Secret 6: Composition

The secret to making great photos I think is great composition.

Your subject-matter (what you photograph) can be very ordinary. But **it is your job as a photographer (through composition/framing) to make your subject-matter look interesting.**

Good composition to me is both dynamic and simple.

Dynamic: diagonal lines, curves (arabesque), dynamic contrast, hand gestures, movement, eye contact.

Simple: simple colors, simple background, not too many subjects in the frame.

To study great composition, study the work of the masters of photography. My favorite compositions in photographers include:

- Henri Cartier-Bresson
- Sergio Larrain
- Andre Kertesz
- Josef Koudelka
- Richard Avedon
- Edward Weston

And also study great painting. My favorite compositions in painting:

- Matisse
- Vermeer
- Leonardo da Vinci
- Raphael

Also study sculpture for inspiration on composition -- how to compose the body movement of your subjects.

Secret 7: Find joy in the process of your photographic journey, but never be satisfied

To me, true joy in life consists of:

1. Progress
2. Appreciation
3. Continual growth/evolution

We must appreciate the progress we have made in the past, but we cannot be satisfied -- we must keep pushing ourselves to grow and evolve.

Thus, be grateful for your progress in your photography and life, but see how you can continue to push yourself to evolve and grow.

Never be satisfied, but be grateful in your photographic journey/process.

Conclusion

To me, these are the 7 principles I've discovered for freedom/happiness in my photography, which has helped me be passionate/productive for over a decade in photography.

Once again -- focus on growth, your personal evolution, owning your platform in how you share your photos, and seek to push your limits.

Find inspiration anywhere and everywhere. Keep your child-like naivete and beginner-enthusiasm to your photography and life.

Never stop growing. And of course, always have faith in yourself.

BE BOLD, ERIC
