

THE CHEERFUL PHOTOGRAPHER

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The happiest photographer is the photographer who is cheerful – who is optimistic, looking forward to the future, excited to make new photos, and still has that child-like sense of wonder and curiosity.

1. What's the point of photography?

I've been philosophizing a lot lately – and looking through all the photos of these great master photographers (alive and dead).

And to be frank – ultimately, no matter how famous you are as a photographer (even if you become the next Henri Cartier-Bresson)– “success” (in the modern sense) is very shallow, and won't give you happiness, pleasure, and a sense of purpose for the rest of your life.

For example, Henri Cartier-Bresson gave up photography after about 30 years of shooting and retired and picked up drawing and painting instead. Even though he was arguably the worlds most famous photographer of all time, he lost his passion and enthusiasm for photography.

And of course, when you're dead – you cannot appreciate your own fame and wealth that you have accrued during your lifetime.

Which makes me think: **we should strive to feel the maximum amount of joy while we are still alive – we should never delay living a fulfilling and joyful life.** Because we never know when we will die. And after you're dead of course you cannot enjoy life.

2. I'm searching for the answers as well

In my life so far, I have achieved a moderate amount of success and fame as a street photographer. I've had solo exhibitions, been all around the globe, gave talks to hundreds of people, made a bunch of money, and yet still – I'm not 100% satisfied. To be frank, after achieving a lot of my life goals in photography (making a living off my passion, having a solo exhibition, having my book published, etc)— I actually felt a little bit depressed and lost. Why? **Once you meet your life goals, and you have nothing to look forward to – you start to question, “Why live?”** or, “What is the purpose of it all?”

So of course, to find more direction, I delved deep into philosophy – asking myself “*Why?*” to discover some answers for myself.

3. My personal discoveries in photography

Some discoveries:

First of all, I think the secret to happiness and fulfillment in photography is to never stop shooting, never stop evolving, never stop following your curiosity, never losing that childlike sense of enthusiasm for photography and making art. **Personally, I find the most joy while I'm constantly learning and making art – rather than reaping the rewards of my art.**

Secondly, it is being “cheerful” (a concept I got from the philosopher Democritus). I love the word cheerful because it is much better than other words like “content” (something that Zen Buddhists use a lot). I don't like the word “contentment” so much, because it sounds like “complacency”— not striving anymore, and not working anymore. I love a lot about Zen Buddhism, but I think the spirit of becoming nothing and doing nothing is a bit besides the point of life. I think perhaps the idea is to subtract desires which won't truly lead us to having happiness and purpose in life – but **it is still having a desire to making new things, discovering new things, having new experiences, discovering wisdom and knowledge, and sharing it with others.**

4. What does a cheerful photographer look like?

To me, the concept of “cheerful” is a dynamic one. It is a state of constant learning, re-examination, and having a sense of joy, and having a smile on your face. It means to not take yourself too seriously, it means not to care too much about what others think of you, and to not care too much for fame or money.

To be cheerful as a photographer is to smile every time you click the shutter. To be cheerful is to always be optimistic, upbeat, positive, and excited for the future. It means to enjoy everyday to the fullest, and to see more possibilities and opportunities in photography – rather than that dreadful tone and idea, “What’s the point of shooting? It has all already been done before.”

No. There are still a billion trillion things you can photograph. **Even if the concept has been done before in photography, YOU HAVEN’T DONE IT YET.**

Metaphysically, it is impossible to make the same type of photography project or concept as someone else. You will always add your own unique voice and honey to your artwork.

5. Let’s have fun

So friend, always stay cheerful. Chin up. Stay inspired, motivated. Don’t take your photography too seriously. Have fun. Treat the world like your own visual playground.

Let’s treat our photography like play, be cheerful, and enjoy our never-ending quest in photography.

Life is fun, an adventure, and a chance for us to pave new roads!

Be bold and have fun, ERIC