



# Introduction

Dear friend,

If you want to use photography as a tool of empowerment for yourself, I have written this book for you.

This book will teach you:

- How to find more joy in your everyday life
- How to re-inspire yourself in photography
- The secrets of seeing the world from a child's perspective
- How to overcome self-doubt and self-criticism in photography
- Why street photography is one of the most effective ways to empower yourself in life

Of course, the advice I give you in this book may or may not work for you. I am only giving you advice that has helped empower myself. So my suggestion is this:

*Scan this book, and take the advice that resonates and empowers you. If there is anything in this book you disagree with, simply ignore it, and move on.*

Photography and life is all about the journey, and we are always in a state of flux.

I have also written this book for myself, to distill my learnings about photography, philosophy, and life. I hope you will find at least 1 idea which helps empower you in your photography and life.

Let's begin, and remember our motto:

*BE BOLD.*

ERIC

# Chapter 1. Why photography?

The first question we can ask ourselves in photography is:

*"Why do I make photos?"*

Try to remember how it was like when you first picked up a camera. What were your initial motivations?

For myself, I was 18 years old, and about to graduate high school. I wanted a digital camera to document my memories (I always had a terrible memory). To start, I didn't actually have artistic aspirations in my photography. I knew I was going to college, and wanted to document and record all of the exciting adventures I would have.

What is it for you? Did you first start taking photos as a way for you to artistically self-express yourself? Or were you like me-- you just wanted to document personally-meaningful moments and memories of your life?

## **Assignment 1: Why do I make photos?**

Your assignment is this: Write down *why* you started to make photos, and *why* you make photos right now.

For example,

- I started to make photos initially because I wanted to document my life experiences, and to not forget personally-meaningful memories.

- I now make photos because I see photography as a tool of artistic self-expression.

# Chapter 2: Who do I make photos for?

The next question we must ask ourselves,

*Who do I make photos for?*

I think intuitively, all of us make photos for ourselves, and we also make them for others.

For example, let's say you make photos to document personally-meaningful memories of your own life. You might also want to share these photos with your friends and family, because you know they would also appreciate the images.

Also, you might make photos for artistic purposes. And the reason why you share your photos is because you think that others will find inspiration, joy, and delight from looking at your photos.

Thus, if we are truly honest with ourselves-- we must make photos for ourselves and for others.

Now, **the problem which happens is when we start to make photos more for others, than ourselves.**

My suggestion:

*Always first make photos for yourself, which bring you joy. Then share those photos with others.*

Also, **detach yourself by not having any expectations that others will like/appreciate your photos.**

The reason why I want you to first make photos for yourself is that it will allow you to make more authentic photos. And to me, the only stamp of what makes art good or bad is how authentic your art is.

By making photos that are authentic to yourself, and bring joy to yourself, you make yourself more robust. This means, **you can find joy and delight from your own photos, without depending on whether others like your work or not.** Photographers who make photos to please their audience, or desire praise from others, will be massively disappointed, discouraged, and sad when they don't get the positive feedback they expect from others.

To simplify:

- You might make photos that you really like, but nobody else likes. That is OK, because at least you get joy from your own photos.
- You might either consciously or subconsciously make photos to maximize your likes/followers on social media. But if you make photos, and share photos that you hope others will like -- you might end up losing your passion and enthusiasm for photography, because you don't find the inner-joy of making photos for yourself.

## **Assignment 2: "If I only made photos for myself, would I be happy?"**

Ask yourself the question:

*"If I only made photos for myself, would I be happy?"*

And as an assignment, **don't upload your photos or share your photos for a month.** This will truly test yourself -- and see how much joy you gain from your own photography.



# Chapter 3: Finding more joy in your photography

Photography has made me a happier person because I can now find more joy and happiness in the beauty and joy in the small things in my everyday life.

For example, I've been allowing myself to shoot anything and everything in my everyday life that brings me joy.

For example, I now photograph my food, snapshots of my friends, family and loved ones, landscapes, colorful textures in walls, and other "silly" and "non-serious" photos.

I think the biggest pitfall we often encounter in our photography is when we try to take our photography "too seriously" and try to impress others.

Remember, **we first must impress ourselves in photography.**

Also, I think photography should also bring more joy to our everyday lives, rather than adding stress to our lives.

I know for myself, when I started photography, it was all fun and joy, and no self criticism or self judgement. But as time went on, I tried to seek more acclaim from others, which caused me a lot of stress and anxiety. If I didn't get as many likes on a photo I uploaded as I expected to, I would feel very disappointed, and afraid to upload my next photograph, not living up to my own expectations of myself.

Also to find more joy in your photography, let us take a "via negativa" approach – to be happier in your photography, it is easier to SUBTRACT our stress, dissatisfaction, and frustrations in photography, rather than add "happiness" to our photography.

## **Assignment 3: What stresses me out in photography?**

Therefore for this assignment, write down a list of what stresses you out in photography or makes you feel crappy.

For example, my list of things which stress me out in photography:

- Wanting to get a lot of likes and comments for my photos I share to social media
- Afraid of losing followers if I share photos or things that others might not like
- Going out for a whole day, and not making any photos that I like or not getting any "keepers".
- Feeling like I don't have a sense of progress or forward development in my photography; feeling like I am just repeating myself, and not innovating.

Of course this list is going to be different for you. Just be very honest with yourself and write it in a piece of paper, without the need to share it with others. Or just write down this list in the "Notes" app in your phone. And if you're feeling really courageous, feel free to share this list with your fellow photography friends on social media or your own blog.

# Chapter 4: Finding more personal meaning and fulfillment through photography

Often we get confused of thinking that “happiness” is simply a feeling of pleasure.

However to me, I think that true happiness in photography and art is deeper than that. It is about having a sense of direction, a sense of purpose, and a sense of fulfillment.

But what does that really mean? Let us break down these concepts.

## a. Purpose in photography

Purpose is living our life for the sake of empowering the collective of the human race.

The reason why I think having “purpose” in our photography and life is so empowering is because it gives us a reason to live.

I know for myself, I’ve gone through periods of purposelessness in my photography: I would just take photos, upload them to social media, collect the likes, and repeat. After a while, it felt so empty, and purposeless.

But now what drives me and my photography: to ultimately make photos that empower others to find more joy in their everyday lives and also to help empower photographers through my books, writings, products, videos, and information I share.

Therefore, consider for purpose in photography–

*"How do I benefit others and empower others in their photography and life?"*

## **b. Fulfillment in photography**

Fulfillment is striving and working hard at something, and feeling successful at your initial aim.

For example, I feel fulfilled in my photography when I sought to initially make good photos, and then I make photos which I identify as "good" to myself.

Therefore **fulfillment is a combination of effort and results.**

Now, we often get frustrated and depressed in our photography when either our effort or results are thwarted. Meaning,

- We try really hard (we put in a lot of effort) and don't get the results we expect.
- We don't have the opportunity to put in the effort we desire (because we are too busy with our jobs or life).

The solution:

*Gain more control over our effort, and detach ourselves from the results.*

Philosophically speaking, you can control how much effort you put in. But you cannot control the results 100%.

Generally the more effort you put in, the higher the likelihood you are to achieve the results you desire. But as we know, you can be the best fisherman in the world and put in the maximum effort, but still not get the result of catching fish you desire. An-

other ingredient in results include luck – luck manifested as opportunity, or being in the “right place at the right time”.

## **Assignment 4: What is my purpose in photography and what brings me fulfillment?**

What gives you a sense of purpose in your photography and life? Do you make photos to record memories for your family and friends? Do you make photos to bring more joy in the lives of your viewers? Do you make photos for yourself, to feel more joy in your life, in order for you to be more positive towards the people in your community?

What gives you a sense of fulfillment in your photography? When do you feel “fulfilled” in your photography? Is it related to the number of likes you get in your photos? Or is it when your effort pays off, and brings you satisfaction?

Don’t judge your answers. Just write these down as honestly as possible, to better understand your motivations in photography.

# Chapter 5: Staying inspired/ motivated in your photogra- phy

Something that I've struggled for a long time in photography is staying inspired and motivated.

But what exactly is inspiration and motivation?

## a. Inspiration

The word "inspire" means in ancient Latin to "breathe into". To me, I feel "inspired" from an external source – when I see an artwork that breathes inspiration into me, and motivates me to make more of my own art.

But inspiration is fleeting. It comes and goes. I think motivation is deeper.

## b. Motivation

Motivation is *why* you do something. Motivation to me, is connected with your purpose in photography and life.

I consider motivation more like slow burning coals... keeping you steadily warm. Inspiration is more like a huge flash of fire, that scorches you, but doesn't last.

Thus, my suggestion:

*Focus on your own motivation rather than inspiration.*

Many of us don't know what motivates us to make photos or why we make photos. To be frank, you don't always need to know the answer.

What I think is more important:

*Never betray your own motivation or will to photograph.*

## **Why do you lose your motivation?**

What causes our motivation to fade? Some thoughts:

I know for myself, I've lost motivation in my photography when my photography became too focused on pleasing others, or "making good photos". I generally feel more motivation in my photography when I am motivated by having fun.

I also lose motivation to shoot when I don't walk around enough. This happens often in the winter time, because it is colder, I walk around outside less. Whenever I walk around a lot, I find more energy and enthusiasm to shoot – because I see more things I desire to photograph. Also in general, the more I walk, the better mood I am in.

I know for some people, being too busy with work is a huge detriment to their photography. If this is the case, just be very honest with yourself:

*What is more important to you – your work, or your own artistic thriving as a photographer?*

I say opt for being an artist-photographer. Ain't nobody gonna care when they're on their death bed how many 1s and 0s they have in their bank account. We will probably care more about the art we've made in our lives, and the art we are going to leave behind, to empower future generations of artists.



# Chapter 6: Don't censor yourself

In other words, don't censor yourself in photography.

If you see something that you want to photograph, **JUST SHOOT IT.**

This means don't be a slave or a prisoner to genre.

Too often, we brand and label ourselves as a "street photographer", a "wedding photographer", a "landscape photographer", or "portrait photographer". My theory is that this hurts us more than helps us – because we become too focused on sticking to a rigid definition of what we can and can't shoot, instead of just shooting what brings a smile to our own face.

Thus, just shoot anything that brings you joy.

## Ignore your inner critic

I know for myself in the past, I would become the victim of my own inner critic. Rather than following my own voice, and simply photographing what I found interesting, my inner critic would say:

*"No Eric don't photograph that. It is boring. It has been done before. If you share that on social media, nobody is going to like it."*

Therefore I would self censor myself, and ended up feeling miserable. Why? The stronger my self critic, the less I shot. The less I shot, the less happy I was. Because the less I shot, the less likely I was to make a good photo.

## Beginner's Mind

One zen concept which has helped me much is "beginner's mind" (also known as child's mind). The basic concept is that when we are beginners, we don't have structure, rules, or concepts to hold us back, or define what we do. Rather, we just follow our instinct and gut, and just photograph whatever we find interesting.

The same thing goes for children – if you have ever handed a kid a camera or your phone, they will go nuts with taking photos. They smile, laugh, shoot a lot, and don't worry about composition or making "good photos". They simply have fun, and play with the camera.

The opposite of child's mind or beginner's mind is "expert's mind". To be an expert is a trap. Why? With the expert, we confine ourselves too much with rules, theory, and ideas. We forget to just shoot, and not theorize too much.

I know for example, when I learned too much photographic theory, I would think too much, which paralyzed me. I would think so much that I wouldn't even take any photos.

Thus, I think if you know too much, it can be a danger in photography. Thus, seek to "unlearn" the theory that you have built up, if you find that information disempowers you.

Philosophically speaking the ideal amount of knowledge we should have is enough to empower us. Too much knowledge, it debilitates us.

# Come up with theories afterwards

Some beginners start with theory, and then practice. I think this is dangerous.

For example, in photography, don't learn any theory when you're beginning. When you start off, just shoot randomly, have fun, and learn from your own mistakes. Then as you gain experience, start to build your own theoretical framework for yourself and your photography.

The worst is when you go to photography or art school, and you are taught too much rules and theory before you let your inner child play. I know a lot of young photography students who lose their initial passion for photography, because their teachers criticize and critique them too much – even a flower needs time before they bloom.

Only create theories for yourself, based on your own life experiences in photography. Don't listen to the theories of others before testing out your own personal theories. Because all advice and theories just come from our personal life experiences. And for all of us, photography is a different and unique experience.

So how can you use the experiences of others and superimpose that upon yourself? You're a unique person – create your own theory for yourself in photography, and for the most part, ignore photography teachers, critics, theories, and writers (including ERIC KIM).

## Photographing in a vacuum

Another thing to ask yourself:

*“If I took a photo of this, and never shared it with anyone else... would it still bring me joy?”*

Or in other words,

*If you were the last human being on earth, would you still make photos?*

For me, I would. Because it still gives me an opportunity to find joy and appreciation in my life. And a new practice I’m better at doing: spending more time reviewing the photos I’ve already shot, and “double dipping” my joy.

Photography gives me two rounds of joy:

1. The joy of making a photo
2. The joy of looking at the photo afterwards, and re-living the experience, and finding additional joy.

Sometimes we focus too much on making photos, not enough on the art of reviewing, selecting, and editing down our photos. Why waste your precious time looking at the art of others, or watching tv – when you have the best entertainment of having fun looking at your own photos?

## **Assignment 6: 1,000 photos on a Saturday**

To conquer your inner critic, allow yourself to make “shitty photos.”

The next Saturday, allow yourself to make 1,000 “bad” photos. Don’t censor yourself. Photograph anything you find interesting. Just shoot in JPEG mode, program mode, center point autofocus, iso 1600. Set your settings and forget them. **Your only focus is clicking a lot, and overcoming any hesitation.**

Then at the end of the day, look through your 1,000 photos and just choose your 1 favorite photo of the day, and share it online, with your friends, family, and followers.

Lesson: shoot a lot, you are bound to get a few good ones. And the more you shoot, the more fun you will have.

# 7. Eudaemonia: Creative Flourishing as a Photographer

This last chapter is an exposition on addressing the philosophical question:

*If you lived for 1,000 years, how would you live, thrive, and flourish as a photographer?*

We will also tackle what 'happiness' means in photography, and how to find more joy in our lives and photography.

## Happiness

The best definition I've got (so far) for "happiness" is the greek concept of 'eudaemonia'-- which can be roughly translated to 'human flourishing' or 'creative flourishing'.

To me, true happiness in photography comes when we are in the process of making photos, or whenever we are ACTIVE. For example, activities in photography include:

- Actively making photos
- Actively composing, framing our scenes
- Actively selecting and editing down our photos to choose our favorite ones
- Actively arranging our photos, and sequencing our photos
- Actively sharing our photos with others, and telling stories with our photos

- Actively learning about visual art, and actively trying to come up with ways we can integrate new ideas and concepts into our own work

I think the secret to having control, freedom, and happiness in photography is being more ACTIVE.

## The Passive Photographer

The opposite of being ACTIVE, and partaking in activity is being PASSIVE, or feeling passivity.

To be PASSIVE is to just mindlessly read gear reviews online, to passively lust after new gear, or passively daydreaming about being somewhere else to make photos-- rather than actively harnessing the opportunities you already have in life, to make the best photos possible.

To me, a life of activity is far more fun, engaging, and interesting. Being active makes us feel empowered, and in control. Being passive makes us feel disempowered, and we feel lack of control over our lives.

Thus the simple guideline we can ask ourselves in our photography:

*Is this going to make me more active as a photographer, or passive?*

## FLUX

According to the greek philosopher Heraclitus, "All is in a state of flux" -- meaning, all is always in a state of change.

This philosophical concept is empowering to me, because it means that I don't need to have one static and fixed style. Rather, I can be like water, ever-flowing, and ever-changing my state (ice, hail, snow, liquid)-- but I am still water.

**Allow yourself freedom to change as a photographer and visual artist.**

Don't be a slave to style, trends, or yourself. Do not impose "self-tyranny" on yourself (as I once did in the past), which prevents you from paving new grounds, and exploring new techniques, styles, and approaches in photography.

Henri Cartier-Bresson (once passionate about photography), lost his passion for photography at the end of his career, putting down his camera, and turning to drawing and painting instead. Why did he lose his passion for photography? My theory: he became too strict on himself with his style and approach (50mm Leica, black and white, decisive moment candid photography), that **he just got bored**. He no longer saw opportunities-- he exhausted all his opportunities, because **he didn't allow himself to change**.

## Playful Experimentation

Think of yourself as a child, with a camera as your fun tool of experimentation.

Whenever you take a photo, it is just a little mini-experiment. You're not 100% sure how the photo is going to turn out. So just shoot it, to figure out what it will look like afterwards.

The photographer Garry Winogrand once said,

*"I photograph to see what the world looks like photographed."*

Which means--



*"You don't know what a photograph is going to look like, until you shoot it."*

Reality is different from photos.

I think our role as photographer isn't to make our photos look like reality. Rather, **our role as photographer is to create our own version of reality, and share that perspective and vision with others.**

Therefore, don't self-impose this feeling of 'finality' to your work.

Once again, **all photos are just playful experimentation.**

## **The Cheerful Photographer**

To become truly wise in our photography is to be cheerful, smile, and feel an overall feeling of elation.

We should all strive to have a 'cheerful soul' as a photographer.

I like the word 'cheerful' -- because it shows us as having a fun experimental attitude towards life, always smiling, and always being positive. It doesn't mean we have to be super super happy all the time-- but once again, to always have a grin on our face, and a feeling of optimism towards the future.

In today's world with media, there is too much 'doom and gloom' out there. I want to encourage more positivity, and optimism.

We need to be more cheerful, by making photos that bring a smile to our own face.

There is a bias in photography that in order to be 'serious' photographers, we must photograph pain, suffering, and inequality in the world. This type of photography is very important-- but we are over-saturated with these type of images.

What if we could make more photos that show the joy, optimism, and hope in the world-- while still being cognizant of the fact of the pain, inequality, and suffering in the world?

## **Memento Vivere**

I talk a lot about 'memento mori' -- remember that you (must and will) die.

The opposite of memento mori is 'memento vivere': "Remember to live!"

If you are reading this, you are alive. You might be going through some tough shit in your life, but in spite of all of that-- how can you live your life to the fullest, with the maximum amount of joy, purpose, and excitement in life?

Regardless of the pain and suffering you have once felt (or currently feel)--how can you find more hope, optimism, and fun in life?

## **Assignment 7: Blessings**

Write down a list of the blessings in your life, and what you are grateful for-- and how that manifests through your photography.

For example, this is my list:

- I am grateful for coffee (I photograph my espresso cups).
- I am grateful for my friends, loved ones, family, and mothers (I do simple group photos of my family and loved ones).
- I am grateful for having the health of my two legs, being able to walk, and wave to strangers (street photography).

- I am grateful for all the information and knowledge others have taught me in photography, and I feel my duty is to 'pay it forward' and continue to share this information with others (open source photography, teaching, workshops, videos, books, etc).
- I am grateful for being alive, and a part of society, where I can share my joy of life with other human beings (everyday life photography, using photography as visual sociology).

What is that list for you? What are you grateful for in life, and how can you photograph your blessings in life?

# Conclusion: Never Stop Searching For Truth(s)

If you are reading this book and have made it this far, I congratulate you friend. You are probably philosophically-minded and oriented.

As photographer-philosophers, we are on the search for truth(s) in life. Ultimately, the best truths to discover is what works for you. **The best knowledge is self-knowledge.**

First and foremost, your knowledge should benefit and profit yourself. Then, share what works with you with others-- and **accept the fact that what works for you won't necessarily work for others.** But it might. This is what makes it worth sharing your knowledge.

I also believe that there isn't just one final answer, or one ultimate truth in life. There are many truths in life, which makes the hunt fun.

So friend-- keep searching, keep exploring, and keep living an adventurous life in your photography and everyday life. Regardless of your position in life, you can always find opportunities to exploit to benefit yourself. Regardless of how 'boring' you think your life and surroundings are -- you can always find something to be grateful for, and something to photograph.

Remember, you're not just a photographer. You're an artist. As an artist-- don't just constrain yourself to photos. Make poetry, make films and videos, paint and draw, try sculpture, dance, laugh, and smile at all the opportunities that life presents you.

Smile,

ERIC

*January // Lisbon, 2018*