

INTRODUCTION

It would be cliché to name the feeling freedom, but that's what a camera meant to me as a teenager. My camera was an excuse to spend hours roaming the streets of Denver, chasing fires (literal ones) or standing on a corner waiting for the right shot. An excuse to talk to strangers and to get lost. When I couldn't escape to the city, I ventured to the mountains and called upon my friends to be the subjects. I shot film for a time, I won a few awards, and the hours that should have been filled with class were replaced by time spent with my camera out in the world. I was obsessed with the frame and the freedom. But I lost the gumption to chase a career in photography as most ambitions are lost in one's youth — when someone older and *wiser* tells you it's just not possible.

I was accepted into university and I was cautioned to choose a major carefully, something financially sound. I abandoned photography and settled on secondary education. I followed the course, completed my student teaching, and graduated in 2014. I'd followed the prescribed path towards security, but I was left wondering if there was room for anything else before the dominoes knocked each aspect of the American dream into place. I was appreciative, but I was unsettled with two choices: find a teaching job or go back to school.

I chose neither.

I pulled the plug and veered for what I had wanted all along. I didn't know how I was going to make something of a point-and-shoot lifestyle, but the rush of being behind a camera and seeing the world was a feeling I didn't want to lose again. Retracing my steps back to photography, I noticed the only time I had picked up my camera in university was while traveling. By graduation, I'd tallied and photographed quite a few countries across Europe, having spent every summer back-

packing abroad. I'd even co-launched a travel blog as a hobby — a place for some of the tens of thousands of photographs to see the light of day. Traveling was the greatest joy I'd ever experienced. Traveling was how I began seeing life outside of my bubble. Traveling became the passion and drive of my life — the kind of thing that bends everything else to its whim. I had a distinct understanding that even if I was broke, as long as I could travel I would be alright.

A big leap came in 2015 when I asked my girlfriend to marry me in a rather unconventional proposal. I asked her to travel the world with me for a year and if we were still in love with the idea of a life together then we would tie the knot. She was just as crazed about travel as I was, and luckily just as in love with me as I was with her. She said yes. We sold our things, our cars, closed out bank accounts, and fit our lives into backpacks with no guarantee things would work. I again felt the rush of freedom as I had when I was behind the camera. The delirious dream began in Colombia and had a timestamp of 365 days—a year that has since stretched into five with a wedding in the middle.

As travel became my life, photography again came to the surface. Each new place stirred my inspiration and the camera was on hand. I took shots of everything: the landscapes, the food, the buildings, the doors, and the people. I was trigger happy as each turn was new, though I was a bit blinded at first seeing what fit an article. As I settled into a home base in Da Nang, Vietnam in 2017, I discovered a theme had been marching through my photography all along even in the streets of Denver — people.

I love to photograph people.

I have thousands of unnamed faces cataloged on my

hard drives from all over the world. Women leaning from windows watching life move below. Moments of men sleeping in shops from Cusco to Tokyo. Children playing. People working, people in motion, in thought, in happiness, and some in despair. These moments emerged, and as instinct, I clicked, some from the hip, some framed. I was always in the right place when it came to street photography. For me, there is wonder in people. Billions of us each living a separate existence, trying to make the pieces fit.

My eye, if you will, for capturing faces has been with me since the beginning. I know nothing about the subjects of my photos — their identities are kept their own — but the absence of knowing their backstory is part of what I find fascinating. I see only what is unsaid. I'm left with abstract details to tell a story. There's a particular photograph I took in India and when it pops up as my screensaver it stops me every time. The three people framed each display entirely opposing expressions of one another. I have a narrative in my mind, I know what inspires and speaks to me as the photographer, but it has always left me wondering: Who are they? Do they know one another? What's their story?

Then the idea came.

I would make a book of stories told through photography and writing. I would seek willing writers inspired by the photographs to create fictional narratives. I loved the thought of my story as a photographer being entirely different from the story someone else sees. My art begins and ends with the frame, but I enjoyed the thought of other artists who would view my photographs from another angle. I dwelled on some themes for the book, but I was hooked on, "A Picture Is Worth 1000 Words." I wanted to play with the trope that a photograph

comes without words and instead see if a photograph could inspire 1,000 words — no more, no less. As I set up the project online, I was less concerned with anyone's status as a writer and more focused on whether someone could tell a good story. I was looking for any and all storytellers who wanted to give dimension to these characters.

The project went live and people from all over the world submitted stories. I am told by my wife, who is a writer, that 1,000 words to tell a story is a challenge — but there were many who met the challenge and wrote for the project. Our editorial team spent days reading through tales of love and triumph, disaster, hope, and laughter. The final book is a collection of 31 of my photographs paired with 31 stories. The book features 27 writers across 11 different countries. Writers who crafted narratives that brought the photographs off the page.

When I set my mind to creating this book I didn't know if anyone would be willing to write. My name as a photographer is quite fresh and I knew only a handful of writers. It was a gamble and one I could have avoided by creating a standard coffee table book. I thought of the "older and wiser" who had convinced me at a young age to be skeptical of dreams. However, ever since, I have been working to find joy in the art I make. How the sure path would have been to fit the genre of photography and create something with a higher chance of sales. But that wouldn't have been right. That wouldn't have made this book unique and wonderful. Without having taken the risk, there would be 31 stories untold. I'm humbled by the efforts of those who submitted, and I hope you too will be inspired to dream, to take risks, and to stretch your imagination as we have done in this collaborative book: *A Picture Is Worth 1000 Words*.