SCOTT BOURNE'S

NINE MOTIVATIONAL ESSAYS ON PHOTOGRAPHY

All text and photographs by Scott Bourne

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INTRODUCTION

Motivation is the driving force by which humans achieve their goals. In today's world, it's hard to come by. We seem to be surrounded by mean, unhappy, unhelpful people who are angry all the time. This can be depressing. It's easy sometimes to get wrapped up in all this negativity. It's easy to sit on the couch and hope things will get better. But that plan rarely works in my experience.

So I wrote a series of short essays that I hope will have the opposite effect. I want to give you hope. I want to give you something positive to think about. I want to motivate you to go out and be the best photographer you can be, period.

These essays were compiled from writings I've published over the last three years. I've updated a few of them and tried to make them relevant to today. I hope you find them helpful and if you do, please feel free to pass this free Ebook on to others.

Without further ado - here are nine motivational essays on photography.

Thanks

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ESSAY #1

TIPS FOR THE UNMOTIVATED

Every once in a while I get contacted by a photographer who lets me know they are burned out. It happens. It happens more often to pros than amateurs, but at some point, there's a "been there done that" mentality that creeps in and people get discouraged. My aim here is to help you overcome this problem if you're unmotivated.

1. Relax. Take a deep breath. This is not life or death. The problem can be exacerbated if you put a lot of pressure on yourself to overcome the lack of motivation. It happens to just about everyone at some point in time. While this may or may not be helpful, know that you aren't alone in this problem.

2. Rethink what you are photographing. Stop shooting ANYTHING that doesn't excite you. Shoot only things that interest you. Photographing people, places or things that you love may be all you need to get you over this hump.

3. Schedule shooting time no matter what. The very worst thing you can do when you hit a slump is to stop shooting. Seriously – this is a big deal. Do not stop picking up the camera. Pick a time at least two or three days a week to go out and shoot. Take the advice I gave you in the previous paragraph.

4. Get a sponsor...yeah like an "AA" sponsor. This person is someone you should confide in. Let them know you're having trouble. Have someone you trust hold you accountable. Make sure you share your goals and your trials with them.

5. Mix It Up. Just go shoot something you've never done before. Try a new technique, a new camera, a new lens. If you've never shot macro, go shoot macro. Never tried landscapes? Go shoot landscapes. It's important to keep shooting SOMETHING. This way you can identify if your burn out is the result of too much photography or too much of the wrong kind of photography.

Hang in there. I've been through it two or three times in my long career. These tricks and tips kept me going and I hope they will help you too.

ESSAY #2

WHAT'S LACKING IN YOUR PHOTOS?

It's time for me to play the part of Tony Robbins. Sometimes, we all need a pep talk. Here's one from me to you. Hoping that SOMEONE out there reading this today needs to hear this and can benefit.

When I talk about what's lacking in your photos, I bet many of you will start finding ways to talk about gear. That's easy. Everyone wants more gear – new gear – better gear – etc. But really, when it comes right down to it, what's missing is often deeper than just a new lens or a new camera.

Is it heart? Do you need more education? How about devotion or direction? For many it's lack of time to practice. Is it inspiration or patience? Do you need better subjects? Are you bored? Do you face physical challenges?

Whatever it is you're missing, the mere act of thinking about it, paying attention to it and trying to do SOMETHING about it will, nine times out of 10, help you get down the road faster. Don't run from it. Embrace it. Face it. Change it.

Once you know what you are missing, set a new course. Do goal setting exercises. (You can find help with those on Google.) Ask your friends and family to help. Seek out mentors who can give you advice in the area where you're weakest. Do research. Read books. Take concrete steps toward doing that one thing (or things) better. This is harder than just buying a new lens. It won't feel as satisfying in the short term. But it will be more satisfying in the long term.

Seriously – pay attention to this. Be honest with yourself. What are you missing? Go find it and fix it. Stop making excuses. Go out and make a great picture.

ESSAY #3

GETTING OUT OF A PHOTOGRAPHIC RUT

It's happened to any serious photographer who's been at the shutterbug thing for a while. Eventually you run out of fresh ideas. Eventually you find yourself searching for inspiration. Some people even get bored. I've written about this before, but here's a new take on it.

Believe it or not, as counterintuitive as it seems, you can get inspiration from your OLD work. Here's how.

1. Look at some of your older photos – the older the better. Start by asking yourself how you could improve them today. What new tools or techniques do your have access to today that would change the result?

2. Another quick trick to getting out of your rut is take your old ideas and turn them inside out. Try shooting the same subjects you did in the past but use a new angle. If you shot it high, try getting down on your belly and seeing if you can "see" in a new way. In other words, try exploring the opposite point of view, even if the original was your own.

3. Try mind-mapping. Make a plan. Start mapping out locations, gear changes, new angles, new approaches, new inspiration. Build a plan and work the plan. Sometimes photographic ruts happen when people are relying too much on emotion for inspiration. Professionals especially are prone to this. When it happens, start working by method and not by feel. When you start going through the motions of the technique you've learned, combine that with a plan, you start to break out of the rut and get inspired.

ESSAY #4

PHOTOGRAPHERS CREATIVE OATH

You've heard of the Boy Scout's Oath? Well here's a prospective photographer's creative oath I've created. If it doesn't resonate with you, create your own. In any event, it's something to think about when you realize that it's your ability as a creative that will set you apart from other photographers.

1. Creative photographers are committed. We're committed to our craft, our relationships, our clients, our patrons, our mentors and our development.

2. Creative photographers create daily. We do SOMETHING each day to further our goal of becoming more creative photographers.

3. Creative photographers never stop learning. We read books, listen to podcasts, read blogs, take and teach workshops, ask and answer questions and generally do anything and everything we can to learn more about photography, it's impact and its practice.

4. Creative photographers are generous. We will freely share any tip, trick, idea or inspiration that has worked for us. We won't wait to be asked. We'll share this information freely and often.

5. Creative photographers respect themselves. We won't undercut or underprice our work because it demeans us and our profession. We won't do work we don't believe in or enjoy just for money. We refuse to cheat clients or to mislead them. We honor our commitments and work hard.

ESSAY #5

JOY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Recently, several people and events in my life have caused me to really think hard about my photographic career. This is a tough post for me to write because it requires me to expose a side of myself I rarely show to anyone. Let's start at the beginning.

I'm an old war horse. I've seen it all and done it all and sometimes it's easy to get cynical. But then, sometimes a little magic happens and I keep going forward.

Usually the magic comes in the form of a big trip like my grizzly bear shoot last August off the Katmai Coast in Alaska. Sometimes the magic comes in the form of a great shot like my Cranes in the Fire Mist shot. Or sometimes it's just a big sale, or two or three.

But these last few months, the inspiration and spark I need are coming from some different quarters.

First, I read and then re-read Dane Sanders' great book Fast Track Photographer. Even though the book says it's for wedding photographers, it's really for anyone who is, wants to be, or might be a professional photographer.

I have to confess that I saw myself in that book sometimes as the guy you don't want to be. It wasn't all bad. I've been doing many of the positive things Dane talks about for decades. But still, there were a few places where I said "ouch." It caused me to do some self-examination.

Then, I started paying more attention to my friend Skip Cohen. His attitude is ALWAYS upbeat. He's ALWAYS positive. He's the sweetest guy in the world. He's always trying to have fun and to make sure our audience does too. He doesn't even seem to notice the trolls. He just keeps writing and teaching and helping. He doesn't miss a beat. He just doesn't have a mean bone in his body. Obviously, if you know me, you know I do have a mean bone or two, or three. Time for more self-examination.

Lastly, I had the high honor of leading a photo walk in Portland's Washington Park as part of Scott Kelby's Worldwide Photo Walk. Quite simply it was a very moving experience. The people who came to that walk came with joy in their hearts. They

were excited, happy and upbeat. They were looking forward to that day like none other. Here, I get to do these things all the time. I get to go to exotic locations and shoot or teach or speak and I even get paid for it. These folks took their Saturday morning and devoted it to supporting the photo walk and having a good time. While I was there to help them, it turned out they helped me.

I realized the joy they had was at least partly missing from my approach to photography. Part of that is easy to explain. For me it's a job. I make my living with a camera and have for a very long time. So it's not fresh or new. But still, now that I do so much on the Web, the side of me that has to deal with the Internet trolls, the haters, the wannabes, etc., gets too bogged down in the negative. Photography is supposed to be fun. These folks helped remind of this fact.

So I guess the point of this post is to say thanks. Thanks to Dane for writing about me in his book and pointing out my flaws without even knowing it. Thanks to Skip for always having a smile in his heart and for reminding me that being a little kid about photography is the right attitude. And thanks to Scott Kelby, Kelby Media and the folks who came with me to Portland for the photo walk. You were all and are all an inspiration.

ESSAY #6

WAYS TO FIND PHOTOGRAPHIC INSPIRATION

As I made my way from Gig Harbor to Las Vegas for the WPPI convention, I was reminded of how important photography is in our world. The highway is lined with billboards containing photos. People drive by with pictures on their car or in their windows. When I stopped for food and gas breaks the restaurants and gas stations were full of images.

All of these photographs, good and bad, can serve up inspiration for photographers. The most routines places and experiences in our lives can motivate our photography. Where else can we find inspiration?

1 - Movies

I don't have much time to go to the movies these days, but when I do go, I go for two reasons. The first is to hope for entertainment. The second is to look for imagery. If you study the work cinematographers like John Alton or Charles Bryant Lang, Jr., you can't help but be inspired. Cinematographers have to struggle with the same issues we do as photographers. Look at how they tell stories with motion picture cameras and learn from their expertise.

2 - Old Family Photos

I love looking at old family photos. I don't even care if they're from my family. ANYONE'S old family photos can be a source of inspiration. What backgrounds caught my eye? How did the pose from the old days compare with one I might find now? What patterns moved me? Old family photos can be a gold mine of information and inspiration for modern-day photographers.

3 - Museums

Whether or not your local museum displays photography, there's plenty of visual stimulation at the average exhibit. Movement, shape, color, form, lighting, etc. are important to many art forms. Look at how other artists use these tools to create their art and apply it to your photography.

4. Music

Now this might sound weird, but I often find myself visually inspired by auditory input. When I listen to certain types of music, I start to create visual imagery in my head that goes with the music. That seems to get cataloged somewhere in my tiny brain and just when I least expect it, instead of being able to remember my Safeway Customer Loyalty Card Number, I hear the melody and see a corresponding image that causes me to want to make a photograph.

5. Go For A Walk

When I was in Florida last month, I regularly went for a walk along the beach. I often came upon patterns, reflections, and other things that would cause me to think about photography. Maybe the information I took away from walking down the beach didn't directly and immediately translate to a photo opportunity, but it often stimulated me to take action on a photographic idea later.

6. Read the Sunday Paper

If you have access to a major Sunday Newspaper - spend 15 minutes looking at the images. Don't read any stories, just look at pictures. Most Sunday newspapers have a Sunday magazine or a features section that will be full of the best work from talented photojournalists who are master storytellers. I find this sort of imagery very instructive and inspiring. It helps me to see in new ways.

7. Get a New Lens

Okay, I had to throw in something for the gear junkies. (I can see it now, hundreds of photographers furiously printing this post out on their inkjet printers to show to their spouse or significant other to use as an excuse to make a trip to the local camera store!) Sometimes literally looking through a new lens can cause you to be visually inspired. I'll never forget the first time I looked through a fisheye or a tilt-shift lens. It had a big impact on me and caused me to want to spend more time trying new things with my camera.

8. Buy a Child a Disposable Camera

This is one of my favorites. Kids aren't afraid to try new things. Heck, to them, everything IS new. They haven't learned to be self-conscious or doubting yet so they just go for it. Kids don't care if the picture "comes out" as much as they care about the experience. If you hand a kid a disposable camera and say, "Let's go shooting together," be prepared for your inspiration meter to peg hard to the right. Kids see things differently (and sometimes more clearly) than we do as adults. Follow their lead and you will be inspired.

9. Photograph for Charity

If you are bored with your photography, one of the quickest ways to get a pick-me-up is to stop thinking about yourself, and start thinking about helping somebody else. Years ago I started a project taking inner-city youth out on a monthly photo walk. I don't think the term "photo walk" had even been invented yet. We'd go photograph around town and a local lab would develop contact prints for each child. We'd have a little contest and give EVERY kid a $50 grocery gift certificate so they could be assured of food on the weekend. Talk about inspiration. Watching and working with these kids gave me so many ideas that years later, I still thrive by them.

10. Ignore the Critics

One thing that will kill your creativity faster than anything else is the critic. Ignore negative people. They exist for one reason - to steal your inspiration. Look at them and treat them like thieves. Stay away from them. Exclude them from your life. The trolls can't do what you can do so they have no choice but to try to make themselves feel better by cutting you down. Don't fall for it. The most inspirational thing you can do is surround yourself with people who support your photographic efforts. Find people who are rooting for you to win - not people who are hoping (and helping) you find find failure.

ESSAY #7

GREAT PHOTOGRAPHERS

Do you really want to be a great photographer? Well do you? I believe that very few people actually want to be a great photographer. I should rephrase. I believe that very few people are willing to do the work to become a great photographer. Furthermore, I believe that few people have enough self-esteem to be great.

Those of you who know me know that lack of self-esteem isn't my problem :) Perhaps that's why I ended up becoming a successful photographer. I had high self-esteem (the cool kids call that arrogance because they don't know the difference between thinking you're better than everyone else and believing in yourself) and I was willing to work hard.

I get lots of inspiration from Seth Godin. He recently reminded me that if you want to raise your game, you need to be willing to shake things up. You need to be someone who hasn't yet been brainwashed into thinking you can't do great work.

The great photographers are not happy with status quo. The great photographers believe in themselves enough to put it all out there. As I've said before, being great isn't about doing something just because it's new. Being great is about being YOU. Believe in yourself enough to think that maybe - just maybe, you're capable of great work!

ESSAY #8

TRYING TO FIND SOMETHING TO PHOTOGRAPH

You're stuck. You're not feeling creative. You are looking for good photographic subjects but you just aren't finding them.

Here's a short post that is designed to get you off the couch and back in the field with your camera in hand.

1. What do you believe in? I mean really believe in? Do you believe in God? Do you believe in love? Do you believe in family?

Whatever it is you really believe in can motivate you to photograph something that matters. Think about it.

2. Is there a defining moment (as Henri Cartier-Bresson called it) in your life? Is there a turning point where everything changed for you? What photographic subjects can you attach to that moment? Might be worth thinking about if you're looking for something to shoot.

3. What makes you uncomfortable? While it's counterintuitive, things that make us uncomfortable might just make for excellent photo subjects. When something is worrisome, it brings out a different set of emotions than those you might usually explore. This (while not always fun) can lead to amazing images.

4. What are you an expert at? Are you a birdwatcher, accomplished guitar player, champion baseball player or just really good at playing Spades? Whatever it is you know best is often a place where you can explore deeper and deeper than others who know that subject less. Don't discount your own expertise as a source of inspiration.

5. What can you find that is useful or helpful to someone else? Often taking our own angst and setting it aside in favor of helping someone else can free us from the bondage of doing nothing. Think about how you can photograph something that will help someone else and if you have any human empathy at all you will find subjects as fast as you can think.

It's not hard to find something to photograph, if you're really looking that is.

ESSAY #9

LIFE, PHOTOGRAPHY & AMAZING MOMENTS

You've heard it before – "Life is short." Too short for some. Tomorrow is promised to no person. We all owe a death. But it's not the death we live for, it's the life in between. When you're in your 20s, you think you're untouchable – you'll live forever. When you're in your 30s, you live as if you still have most of your life ahead of you. When you're in your 40s, you start to realize that you have less time than you thought to accomplish your dreams. When you're in your 50s, your friends start to pass with alarming frequency. You no longer suspect – you know your time is limited. I can't tell you what happens to folks in their 60s, and beyond. You see I haven't made it that far yet – and have no idea whether or not I will.

What I do have is today – right now – this moment. And I've learned that living IN THE MOMENT or FOR THE AMAZING MOMENT can be very rewarding. But getting to this place was a process. It didn't happen overnight. And the WAY I got here is the reason I'm writing this post. You see, it was in large part my photography that taught me to live for amazing moments.

Henri-Cartier Bresson is closely aligned with the phrase "The Decisive Moment." And this tracks with my life philosophy of living for AMAZING moments. Another Bresson quote really drove this home for me. He said, "There is a creative fraction of a second when you are taking a picture. Your eye must see a composition or an expression that life itself offers you, and you must know with intuition when to click the camera. That is the moment the photographer is creative," he said. "Oop! The Moment! Once you miss it, it is gone forever." Isn't this much like life itself?

We're offered thousands of moments each day. What we do with them...How we react to them...Our opinion of them. These things all influence the quality of our life, wether or not we acknowledge them.

When I look at my favorite photographs (both mine and yours) I see lots of special and amazing moments. In my own work, I am rewarded not only with the visual reminder, but an emotional reminder since every photo I make is also part of my life's experience. I've been very, very fortunate to go places and see things most never see. Some of these moments were truly amazing. Like walking into the Lower Antelope Corkscrew Canyon for the first time, or cresting a ridge near Paradise on Mt. Rainier for my first full look at the mountain in all its glory. Or the time when I

stood a few yards from the big, Coastal Brown Bear in Kennack Bay or shot my first nude study outdoors in the dessert with a beautiful woman posing freely.

These are just a few of the amazing moments I've enjoyed.

So what makes a moment amazing? That depends. Sometimes moments borne out of tragedy or simple mistakes are amazing because of what you learn from them. Sometimes the chance to simply CREATE is amazing. So many of us walk through life going from task-to-task as if that is our only choice, until our time runs out. Being able to recognize our inner need to make a difference, to matter, to make something that lasts, to contribute – that is amazing.

Then there is the simple realization that not all amazing moments come when there is a camera in hand, or at least the camera doesn't matter. It might seem strange to read this paragraph on a photography site, but I don't think you can separate your photo life from your real life. They fuel each other. It's impossible to be the best photographer you can be without pouring the real YOU into each image. So it follows that the real YOU is something you should develop as fervently as you study your craft of photography. On occasion, I have been somewhere, or seen something, that was simply so beautiful and yes, amazing, that I didn't make a photograph. I got caught up in the moment, and merely forgot to press the shutter or just lost interest in making a picture. I decide to LIVE that moment instead of photograph it.

My first trip to Bosque del Apache was just such a moment. I went there to photograph what we call the "blast off." This is the moment when the tens of thousands of geese take off and make their way north each morning looking for food. They take off all at once. Sometimes, if you're lucky, and the wind's right and the conditions warrant it, they take off against a brilliant sunrise. On my first trip there, I'd been briefed on what to expect. But nothing I read or heard about the experience was able to really prepare me for its amazingness! The birds took off and like a statue, I stood there in awe. It was amazing in every way. I merely forgot to press the shutter. And guess what – that's okay if it happens to you too-really. Nobody has to know unless you're a fool like me, and you pour your heart out to thousands of people every day on a photography web site!

I've often said that being creative has little to do with finding something new and much more to do with simply being you. The bare, naked soul within you is your number one source for photographic inspiration. That's where the desire to tell amazing stories about amazing moments comes from.

If we live and photograph with purpose...If we make images because they matter – at least to us...If we participate in the amazing moments instead of just letting them pass us by, then we are not only better photographers, we're better humans. Oh, and we're likely to find more amazing moments as a reward.

I am spending what time I have left on this planet in hot pursuit of amazing moments. Both those I can photograph and those I that I can simply be a part of, no matter how small. I want to take big bites out of life. There's probably not as much left for me as there is for most of you. I'm not wasting any of my time and hope you aren't either.

My camera and my ability to make images with it have taken me lots of amazing places. I'm not settling for less any more. If it's not amazing, I'm moving on to where amazing is hanging out. We all deserve a chance to live for amazing moments, no matter how many we have left. I hope this post (long as it may be) has somehow inspired you to go find yours.

CONCLUSION

I hope you've enjoyed this free e-book. If I've done my job, you're thinking about getting off the couch, grabbing a camera, and going out to make some great photographs.

Motivation can be hard to find if you're looking in the wrong places. Read these essays and give the advice a fair try. You'll find something to light your fire if you open your heart and your mind.

My hope is that you will go looking for each the next time you set out to make pictures, not just take pictures.

Scott Bourne
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MOTIVATION

It's just the desire to do SOMETHING - ANYTHING.

The difference between thinking about it, planning to do it, hoping to get it done, praying about it and actually DOING it is usually - just motivation.

Award-winning, professional photographer Scott Bourne shares nine motivational essays on photography in this new free Ebook. If you enjoy this work, pass it around freely to your friends. There's always room for a little motivation...