



*“Being creative is seeing the same thing as everybody else but thinking of something different.”*

### **Philosophical Ramblings / Charles Campbell / November 2000**

I am endlessly fascinated by the creative process which is photography. In this brief essay, I hope to touch on some of the reasons that myself and others find photography so compelling and rewarding.

#### ***Inspiration***

My motivation springs from a deeply-rooted appreciation of the wilderness landscape and from a faith in communicating my personal vision. Putting emotion and feeling into what I do creates my best work. Like a poet who strives to be expressive, imaginative, and sensitive to life’s experiences, I am drawn to the challenge of creating a two dimensional image, that with any luck, may elicit an emotional response from the viewer.

#### ***Vision***

A good photographer sees more than what’s in front of him – he photographs his vision of what’s there. What makes a good photograph? It has the potential to enlighten, uplift, and inspire the psyche. Adopting this as my goal has rewarded me with a renewed sense of purpose and a heightened sense of awareness to the world in which I live. Photography has evolved into a personal metaphor for life. It’s an authentic and genuine connection to my sense of purpose.

I like photographs that stand own their own merits, complete in themselves. For this reason, I’ve never been interested in photojournalism. With photojournalism, the message is part image - part expla-

nation. It's much harder to communicate in image alone.

### ***What is a Good Photo?***

For me, a good photo happens with just the right synthesis of IMAGINATION, TECHNIQUE, and MOMENT. This usually translates to some unplanned transitory moment so ephemeral in nature that it cannot be produced again. Essential to this end, one must maintain an open receptiveness to the unanticipated moment and a technical prowess equal to the task at hand.

The very best photographs have immortality and speak to impressionable generations yet to come. Where do we begin in the face of such a lofty notion? Find the truth within yourself. Tap into what makes you tick. What is it that touches you emotionally and intellectually? What makes you feel alive? Learn to communicate that with your camera and lens. Beyond that you must launch a genuine effort rooted in hard work and plain luck. I make no claim to such titles – like you, I can only reach for the sky.

### ***Creative Pathways***

For me, it comes down to creativity. That's the end goal and the most satisfying reason for pursuing photography. *Being creative is seeing the same thing as everybody else but thinking of something different.* It sounds almost preposterous when expressed this way – but it's true. The more you depend on your own ability to think, the more proficient you will become at thinking up new ideas. New ideas spring from thinking differently from everyone else. Our educational system is failing us in this respect. We are rewarded by regurgitating what we are fed. Relying on ourselves is much harder, but far more rewarding.

One way to learn how to think creatively is to associate yourself with creative people. Look for people who are fun to talk to and have a keen sense of interest in life. An individual who can stimulate your thought process is what you're looking for. Experts and consultants should be viewed as collaborators, not dictators. If you rely on someone else to solve your problems and tell you what to do, your creative abilities will shrivel rather than flourish for lack of exercise.

In my experience, there are three general ways of achieving creative solutions.

- serendipity
- similarity
- meditation

Ah yes, serendipity ... the lighting, the subject and the composition are delivered in pure form - ripe and ready to be plucked. While this sounds easy, you may be so distracted and self absorbed that you might not see it all. This happens to me all the time. I'm looking for something predefined and I miss everything else that is happening. This is where the Art of Observation comes in. You must learn to react to what you see versus what you intend to see. I find that this skill is much harder to pass along to my students than the nuts and bolts of photography. The

conflict is that you have to stay mentally focused while remaining completely receptive to any and all possibilities.

The environment can stimulate creativity and influence serendipity. For one person that might be the hustle and bustle of a busy metropolis while another might find peace and solace in nature. One of the reasons I moved away from the big city and to the quiet peace of the Oregon coast, was so that the environment would facilitate creativity. I feel alive when I walk the beach. All my senses are stimulated and stirred by the dynamic landscape. I find that certain environments also refresh and renew the spirit. This is more than another cliché – it's a powerful alchemy for the mind and soul.

Another process of creativity is similarity. Photography is a combination of learned skill and intuitive skill. It's possible to produce good images by applying the same set of skills to similar situations while allowing intuition to guide you. The endless diversity of subjects and situations will dictate a creative outcome to some extent.

Meditation is another path to creativity. Spend time meditating on your own worthiness, reading about other creative people and creative solutions, concentrating on the positive power of your own creative forces - these activities, combined with a belief in your own intuition and creative abilities, will help improve your confidence and creative will.

What else can you do to increase creativity? Give yourself permission to do things creatively. Work on overcoming your personal blocks to creativity. For some people, being creative involves trying not to be embarrassed by their own ideas; for others, it is a matter of being aware that things can be done in many different ways. Some people are self-aware or confident enough to have fewer inhibitions and can just let their creative natures work. Surround yourself with people who love and support you and you will be even more creative.

Learn to recognize your own abilities so that you have some sense of the areas that may give you difficulty or require more energy to solve. Hone your photography skills so that they don't block your ability to see a creative idea to fruition.

In conclusion, I fully believe that creativity can work for anyone. It requires patience and a willingness to work for a creative outcome. It is much more than simply waiting for enlightenment. Enjoying the journey is the key to overcoming the frequent and numerous setbacks that come from working with an often uncooperative environment. Most of the time I am exploring and hoping to find something worthy of capturing on film. I don't know when the next image will come. Cold, heat, darkness, insects, and vexing winds are tests of will and determination in the photographer. All is forgiven when just the right moment occurs and a new image is frozen in time by the mysterious process which is photography.