

i like to tell stories

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I Walked Towards The Door, I Stopped, I Shut My Eyes, I Took A Photograph Of Myself And I Hoped

On July 6, 2009 a gift was purchased for me at truck stop in Louisiana. In the story I was told, and delightfully also printed on the receipt, this gift was purchased from a woman named Crystal. This Crystal was remembered and spoken of in a high regard. I liked this story, I liked this gift.

After hearing this story, I decided then that if I ever found myself along this road in Louisiana, I would take a portrait of this Crystal at this truck stop.

Three hundred seventy one days later I found myself on this road racing towards Texas. It was almost midnight on a day that had already been too long. In the dark I approached an exit and it was not until I saw the name of this little town that I remembered this desire in myself. I almost missed it, I almost drove right by. The road was taking it's toll on my mind more than I wanted to admit this day. I did not have the receipt with the address on me nor had I written it down. I went towards the brightest place in all that dark, tried to remember every detail I could and as-

sumed this must be the place. It had to be the place. I stopped, I filled my borrowed chariot with gas and I looked at the clock, it was almost midnight. I wanted it to be the next day as soon as possible.

I walked towards the door, I stopped, I shut my eyes, I took a photograph of myself and I hoped that I was about to meet this Crystal.

I walked by the register, there stood two women, both with their name tags covered by other shirts or jackets and a tingle ran through my body, which one could it be? I found myself something to buy and approached the register. The man with the gun guarding the door was looking directly at me and my big ridiculous camera. I was almost the only one in there and I would be suspicious of me too.

I made my purchase, slowly counted my change and then explained my story. The two women looked at me up and down, then back at one another and then back at me. "Oh, yes, I remember Crystal. She moved to (this place)." We continued chat-

ting for a moment or two, I thanked them repeatedly and explained to them that if I ever happen to find myself here again, maybe I would try to take their portrait, tonight our story wasn't complete, for we had only just met.

As I walked out the door, that man with the gun standing guard, he said quietly to me almost too low to hear, "You have a good night." I told him to, "Keep this place safe," and I stepped outside just in time to watch it become a new day in the middle of the night. I then made photographs for the Crystal I could not find, wherever she happen to be this night, knowing it is entirely possible that I will never meet her or see her beauty with my own eyes.

I pretended I had met this Crystal, I pretended I had heard from the woman that gave me the gift Crystal sold her and I started walking back towards my borrowed chariot knowing my best efforts had not been enough.

So I made another photograph of myself with my eyes closed.





My camera had been slung around up onto my shoulder and was dangling aimlessly as I walked between the cars. I had walked too far from my borrowed chariot, still sitting at the gas pump from before I walked into the store. As I walked between the cars, I heard her voice before I saw her. “What are you doing?” she asked me. I assumed she saw me pointing that ridiculous camera at myself under the light. “Taking some photographs of myself so I can tell a story later,” I told her.

“Do you make any money doing that?”

“No, not really.”

Then she told me she was on her way to New Orleans so I told her I was on my way to Texas. Then she told me about some troubles she had and how hard life was for her and her babies. So I told her about my troubles and how hard my life was too sometimes although I had no babies. We talked a minute or two more, I thought we were getting to know one another as people do when they first meet over these tales of our shared woe. Eventually she asked me:

“Is there anything I can help you with so you can help me?”

I didn’t really understand the question and thought about it for a moment.

“Where is your truck parked?”

I turned and pointed towards the pumps in the distance, wondering why she thought I drove a truck.

“It’s over there, still at the pumps by all those cars, I wondered off.”

She told me another story about more of her troubles and that she only had \$6. I thought about her question some more. I knew I had \$10 left in my pocket from my purchase in the store trying to find Crystal.

“Can I take your portrait smoking that cigarette before you light it, I can pay you \$10 for ten minutes of portrait time, how does that sound?”

She laughed and asked why would I want a photograph of her smoking. I told her I just like to photograph people smoking and had my whole life. She kept laughing and said:

“Okay, just stand here and smoke?”

“Yes.”

She lit her cigarette and I started photographing her. I did this for one minute and twenty-one seconds, thirty photographs. My memory card became full. I reached for my pocket where the other one lives. It was not there.

“We are done, thank you.” I gave her the \$10 I promised.

“That’s it?”

“Yes, it was really nice to meet you.”

We shook hands and she stomped out her cigarette and I started off towards my borrowed chariot and she went back towards her small, red, dented, two door. As I got close under that canopy of lights, something started hitting me. Softly but hard with force, randomly all over my body as I got towards my door, desperately trying to remember her name. It was unique and I realized I had forgotten it at the same moment I realized I was being pelted by insects attracted to all those lights overhead. They were insects like I had never seen, even after 13 years in New York City, these were like roaches but different colors, had wings and were as big as my fist. I jumped into my borrowed chariot as fast I could only to realize I had left the moon roof open.

I jumped out, knocked off all the insects in a panic and started walking back to get her name. Standing there outside my borrowed chariot having a panic knocking insect after insect off me, I saw that dented little red two door go flying by me, windows down with her voice carrying outward as her tires squealed out over the insects littering the parking lot.

I had not noticed all these beautiful creatures when I arrived so shortly ago.

The moon roof now closed, the bugs all knocked off and a new memory card loaded, I sat at the fork exiting the truck stop. Left back to the highway, right to the hotel and food. I wanted, I needed to stop, yet it was clear to me in this moment, I needed to get to that Texas line. It was still many more miles away than I should be driving, I just wasn't yet ready to hit that highway, not yet. I went right, right to the Waffle House®.

I pulled up and there were no cars in the lot but the lights were on and there were two women sitting on the curb out front, directly in front of the door wearing Waffle House® attire. I pulled up next to them, put my window down,

“Are you open?”

“Yeah, we open, why everyone keep asking us that?”

“Because it looks closed,” I told her politely laughing. She laughed too and we all sat there talking for some time, me in the borrowed chariot, window down, the two women sitting there smoking. It took serious effort to understand each word, the accents had such specific beauty, I wanted to be sure I savored it. I didn't really want to go inside. I got out of the borrowed chariot, ridiculous camera still swinging from my shoulder. We kept talking.

A man boy arrived out of nowhere, taller than me (I am six foot one), taller than me by a great deal and skinny as a rail. He said something to me I swear wasn't even English and started laughing at his own comment instantly. I never got him to repeat it. Then it was the four of us, standing outside the door of the Waffle House®

telling one another stories. I could of stood there hours.

A group arrived next to us in a car, put their window down,

“Ya'll open?”

The two women looked at me and started laughing while they went inside. I stayed outside for a moment, watching the new car unload four twenty somethings that looked fresh out of Brooklyn, but had likely had never left Louisiana, all walk by me as if I wasn't there and go inside. The tall skinny rail was still outside too, thumbing around a burnt out cigarette and looking for more on the asphalt. I asked him if I could take his photograph smoking:

“Helya no you caint.”

He then went inside as fast as he could. I stood there a minute, wondering why, only as he had a minute ago been so curious. My hunger made me forget this and I walked inside. I stood inside the door, the Brooklyn kids were at the counter, no non-awkward spot was to be had there. There were three booths lining the front window, one was empty and dirty, the middle one had a young woman sitting there alone, head to toe in green and the last booth was also empty, but one woman who had been outside and friendly a minute ago, was sitting on the last stool directly next to it now glaring at me. There was no non-awkward spot to choose. I chose to head towards the one clean booth and to go ahead and face the girl in all green, head to toe all green, even if it meant we'd be staring at one another over the empty side of her booth and the empty side of mine.

Just as I started towards my seat, skinny rail jumped up from the counter where he had taken a perch next to the Brooklyn kids,

“Dooode, ya got a craze giant bug on you!!!!!!”

As he said this, the Brooklyn kids all jumped from their seats and ran towards the booths away from me, the waitresses ran away from the center of the restaurant and even the cook I only now noticed ran back from me. There I was, in the middle of this Waffle House® just after midnight, spinning in a circle with my ridiculous camera flying outward on its strap, slapping my body randomly to knock off a giant insect I had not yet seen, still on me from the truck stop. I stopped spinning and asked the skinny rail,

“Did I get it!?!?”

“Naugh maaan, ya arm pit, ya armpit!”

I had practically ripped my shirt off in the middle of this Waffle House®, big ridiculous camera bouncing all around, when I finally saw a large, giant black beetle or roach or whatever fall to the ground. I kicked it over and over towards the door, open the door, kicked it through and then turned towards the inside of the Waffle House®. The entire place was as far from me as it could be. I arranged my shirt back into place, placed my big ridiculous camera back under arm and asked the skinny rail, “Anymore?” He just shook his head no and sat down. I stared at my feet, walked to my awkward spot in the corner booth and sat down. The woman who had been friendly outside and only glared at me inside, got

up from her spot nearby at the counter, walked to other side of the counter and sat back down. I ordered and waited. The green girl across from my booth never once looked up at me or away from her phone. She had on a green bandanna of sorts high up in her dark hair, a green shirt with a giant frog on it and green stockings. She looked as if she was dressed for a rave and this girl was not kidding around about it, she was ready for her close up in a rave/club kid movie, here, in Waffle House®, after midnight, in nowhere Louisiana. It was wonderful and I couldn't stop staring. I was the sweaty, odd, oldest guy in the room who had just brought in a giant beetle. Everyone was done talking to me.

I ate my food and waited for the check. Everyone else had left by the time it came. The woman who brought this check was the first woman who had spoken to me outside and laughed when I asked her if they were open. She was really sweet when she brought it and told me to have a safe drive. I told her to have a safe night and looked down at the check. Her name was Karen, just like my mother.

As I was going through the door, looking for the insect I had kicked out earlier, tall skinny rail was there. He made a point to jump out of the way and avoid me but more oddly, the downward facing lens line of the big ridiculous camera still dangling from my shoulder. I asked him why so scared of a camera and his response was that a man was holding it. If I had been a woman, he'd have been posing away for me.

I had only been stopped in Louisiana 66 minutes.

I was on the highway now. Not staying in Louisiana was becoming more and more of a good idea, at least for this night. I had started off on this journey so long ago and it was now just after one in the morning. I wanted that Texas line and it was not going to be easy. The moment that thought entered my mind is when I saw it. On the side of the road, coming up on my right, the only lights around in the perfect dark, was a U-Haul truck pulling a trailer and a car, all filled and bursting with extra items tied to them where there really shouldn't be. It was sitting there idle with a man standing out of the drivers door, high beams lighting up the road in front. There, just on the edge of the high beams and the edge of the asphalt, was a woman in a pink house dress, holding the hand of a small boy with his pants around his ankles, urinating out into the wild.

If that little boy can do that in a moment like this as fearless as he seemed, surely I can make Texas. I put the windows down, I opened that moon roof back up and turned up the music.

I made that Texas line. I again almost missed noticing it in the dark. I started looking for a place to stop. I have crossed this east Texas line twice now this year, both times felt the same and it wasn't the joy I hoped for, both times a total surprise of things I had desired so greatly going so wrong.

I ended up stopping in the one town I didn't want to, almost to spite myself. I couldn't keep my eyes open. I checked into a hotel and went to the room leaving everything in the borrowed chariot minus the cameras. I took off all my clothes, lied down and thought the sleep would wash over me like a pleasant wave. The moment my head hit the pillow, I was no longer tired. I was ready to start the day all over again.

I had been awake almost 24 hours.
I had made 1,493 photographs.
I had made 77 videos.
15 hours 1 minute total trip time.
8 hours 44 minutes driving time.
6 hours 16 minutes stopped time.
I averaged 61.9 MPH.
I traveled 541 miles.
I drove across 5 states.



Looking For Crystal



The Last Minutes Of July 11, 2010 - The First Minutes Of July 12, 2010



I laid there a few hours, shut my eyes and pretended to sleep. I stayed in the hotel as late as I could, ignoring the call of the road to get out of this town. I packed my gear and went to check out, I had received no receipt under my door. At the counter there was a woman who politely helped me. For reasons I still don't know, it took over twenty minutes to check me out of the room I did not sleep in. We chatted, I made jokes, she laughed, she smiled and I told her stories. I didn't want to leave that counter, please have a more difficult time checking me out. I asked her if I could take her photograph and she simply replied that she hated having her photograph made. Yet there I was, snapping, as the camera sat on the counter not quietly making images. Her eyes charmingly rolling and rolling at me.



Then I was on the road again. It was no longer an adventure, it was an errand. I pulled over before the town line. I pulled into an abandon looking driveway and I called that hotel in which I did not sleep. The same woman I had been photographing answered just as I had hoped. I asked her to have lunch with me and I could hear her eyes rolling at me again as she politely declined.



I got back on the road.





My Typical Thumb & The Inappropriate Finger Next To It | August 1, 2010

Two women that knew me well enough and did not know each other have each used different words, single words, to describe me, what I make or the combination there in. Neither of these two words had I thought about myself before and now I cannot forget them.



1999 | Los Angeles

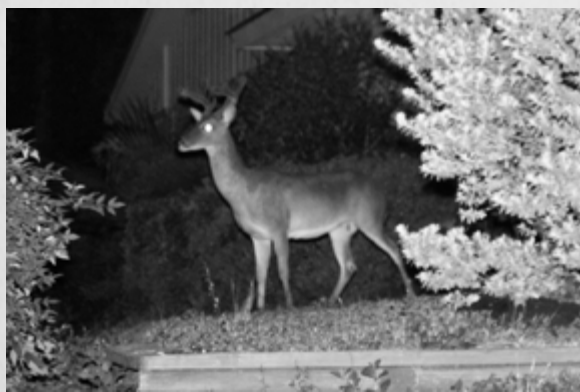
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One time, long ago, in photo school, during a critique in which I had not done the assignment nor attempted it, as I was too busy printing photographs that had nothing to do with anything, tacking them to the wall anyway, a girl stood up and was defending me. I did not know she even looked at the photographs I made before today. I was surprised. I remember her far across the classroom looking at me, through me, towards the professor. “Jonathan photographs rocks. Not like you or I would just take a photo of a rock, Jonathan makes that rock hurt you.”

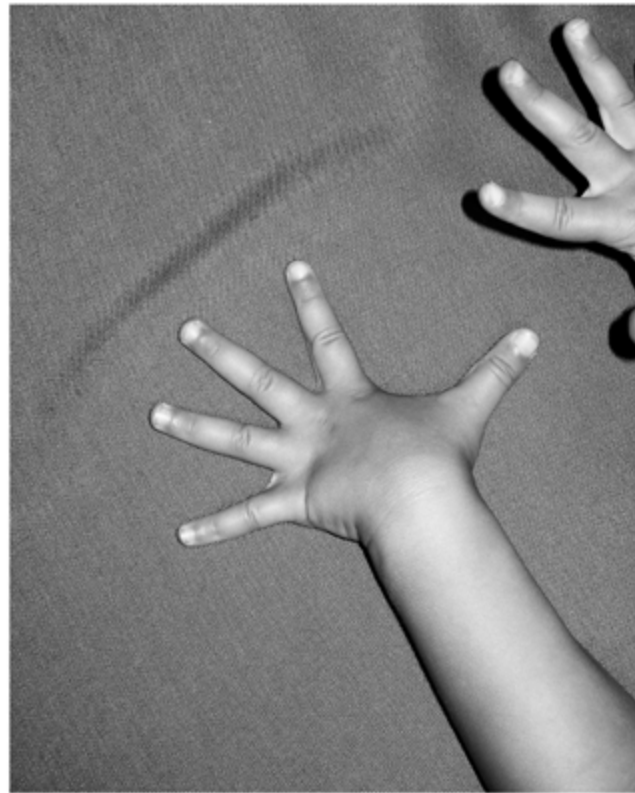
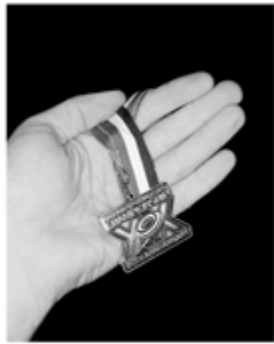
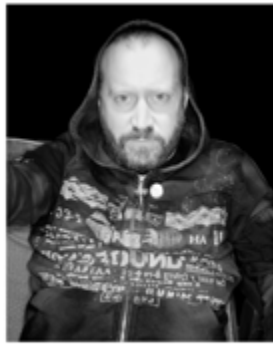
I looked at my feet and I blushed. It was exactly what I wanted.

I think her name was Victoria, yes, it was.

Your Left Eye



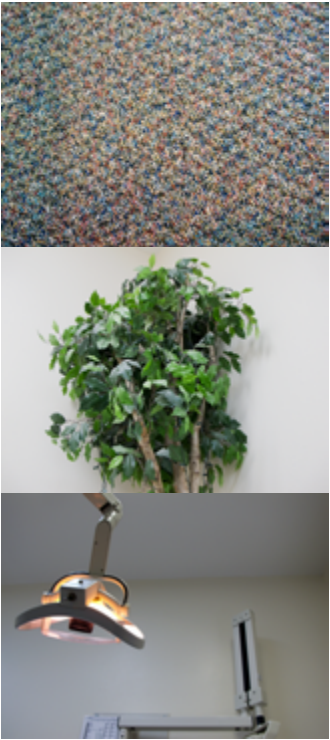
F U R





Today I was X-Rayed, I was cleaned and I was drilled. This took several hours, all today, in two different visits.

Then I told her every time it (you) hurt me, I will press that button.



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