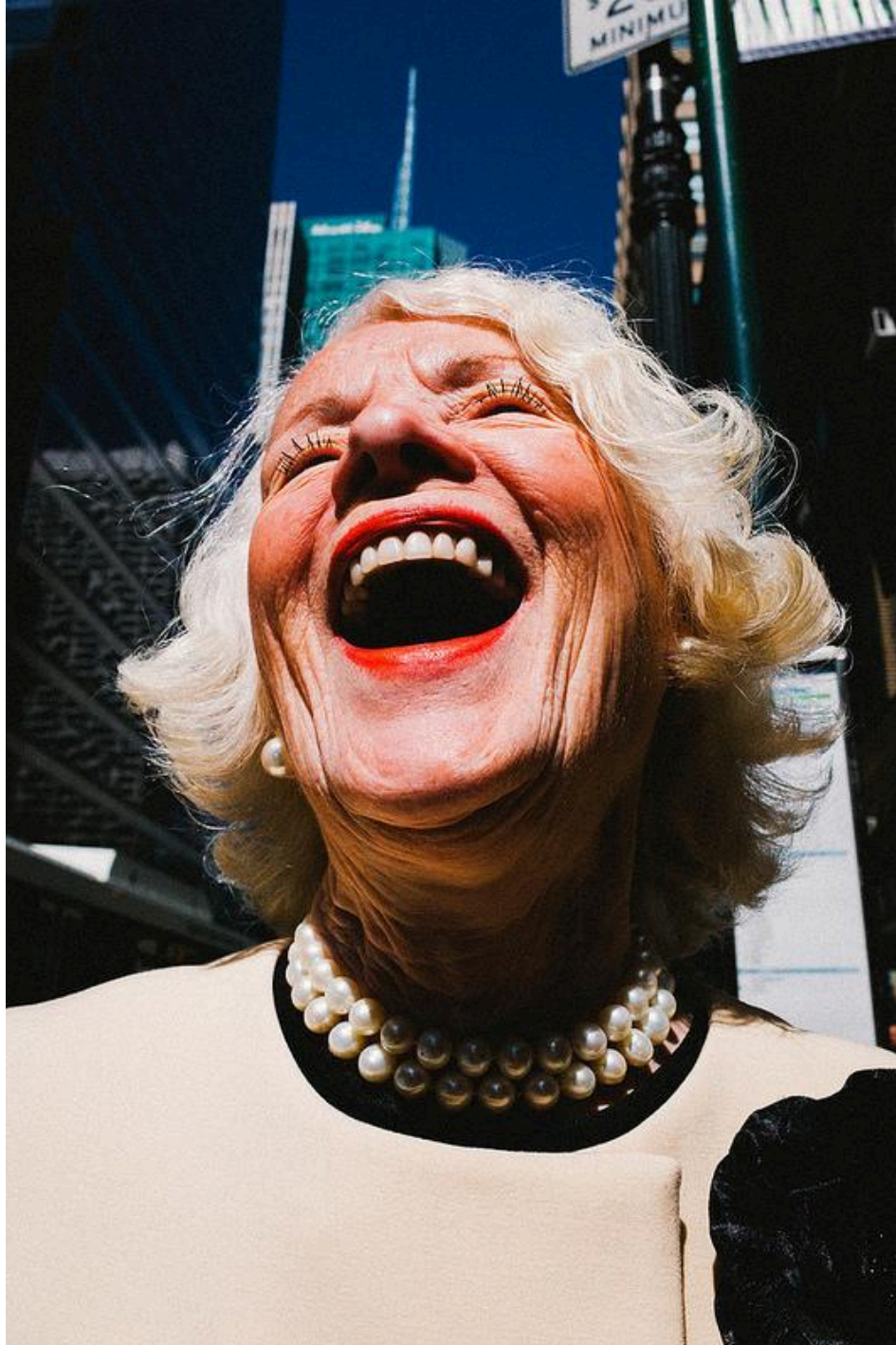


# How to Be Happy in All Circumstances in Photography



Dear friend,

I just finished reading a book by Roman philosopher Epictetus, titled "[Of Human Freedom](#)." It got me thinking a lot about my own freedom in life, how to be happy in all situations, and how to treat some of the "diseases of my mind."

One of the things that I found the most interesting was how one can be happy despite his/her circumstances.

For example, let's say that we wish that we had more time to shoot, we wish we had more money (to travel, buy gear, books), that we wished we lived in a different city, that we were younger or picked up photography earlier, that we were more famous, had more Instagram followers, got more "likes" and meaningful comments on our photos, if we were more inspired, or if we knew more interesting photographers in our own home city.

What is the problem with all of these things I just mentioned? They are all things that are out of our control. Sure we do have *some* control of these things, but complete control? Not at all.

How do we be happy, undisturbed, and grateful in all circumstances in life regardless of our situation in life?

**One of the secrets is to find the hidden benefit of every "negative" in our life.**

For example, let's say that you don't have that much free time to shoot. Rather than complaining or feeling frustrated that your day job doesn't allow you more time and flexibility for your photography, you can see this as a benefit. By having limited time, you don't waste your time when you actually *do* have time to shoot. You are more grateful for your time, and you end up shooting with more focus, intensity, and drive.

In-fact, the common mistake I see photographers make is hoping that they had unlimited time to shoot. In reality, too much free time makes us lethargic, lazy, unmotivated, and uninspired. Sometimes the constraints of a day job in terms of time helps us to be more inspired.

Let's say you wish you picked up photography at a younger age. You might have traveled a lot in your life, and regretted not having taken photos at that time.

But picking up photography at a later time in your life can be a benefit. Why? When you're older, you have more wisdom, life experiences, time, and money to pursue your passion.

*"But what if I am really old and don't have many years of my life to live, I will probably pass away in 10 years, if I'm lucky!"*

Well, remember; **it doesn't matter how long you photograph, but how well you photograph.** Life is like a play, if we are an actor, it doesn't matter how long we perform on stage. What matters is the quality of our acting. I would rather be a photographer who shot for only 5-10 years and created 1 great body of work, rather than a photographer who shot mediocre landscape and HDR photos for 50 years.

Let's say that you own a "shitty" camera, and that you wish that you had the newest and flashiest camera. You might be frustrated by the poor image quality, the low-ISO performance, or how soft your lens is.

But remember, this can be a benefit.

How so?

Well, if your camera doesn't have good image quality, then you really have to find good light to shoot in. Any camera, regardless of how poor, will perform well if you have good light. So now you will begin to pursue to shoot only in conditions and situations where the light is actually good. This ends up being a benefit.

Let's say that your lens isn't sharp. Well, isn't it [Henri Cartier-Bresson](#) who said: "*Sharpness is a bourgeois concept*"? In-fact, I dislike photos that are too sharp. Sometimes I prefer softer lenses, which evoke more of a dreamy look and feel.

For example, [Junko Nishimura](#), a talented Japanese street photographer, shoots with a Leica M5 (commonly called the "ugliest" Leica camera ever made) and an old 50mm Summaron lens (known to be very soft and un-sharp). But this helps him create a unique look in his work, that evokes the past. If he shot with a high-end digital camera with super sharp lenses, his images wouldn't have the same emotion and feel.

Another common complaint a lot of photographers have: that they wish they lived somewhere else; that their own hometown is "boring."

But know that "boring" is just an opinion. You can live in New York City or Tokyo and still call it "boring." It is all a state of mind, and how you see things.

If you were an alien that just landed on earth, imagine how interested you would be in your own neighborhood. Consider all the interesting people, buildings, and sights.

Another benefit of living in a "boring" city; it hasn't been photographed as much, which means you have a greater opportunity to make a unique body of work. [Mark Cohen](#) photographed in a very "boring" town for his entire life, and still was able to make a strong body of work.

Also the benefit of photographing your own city is this: **you know your own town better than any tourist**. You know what shots are “cliche” and not, and you also know the paths off the beaten path.

Let’s say that you don’t have any followers on social media, and that you are a “nobody.” That can’t possibly be a benefit, can it?

Well, sometimes it is a blessing to be unknown. [Saul Leiter](#) shot his entire life in obscurity, and only enjoyed fame later in his life in his 70’s and onwards. But he found this to be a true blessing, because he wasn’t bothered by anybody. He could simply shoot how he wanted, without feeling constrained by the expectations of anybody else. I’m sure even if Saul Leiter wasn’t “discovered” before he died, he would still be supremely happy.

Let me bring in a personal example; I recently got my 11 Macbook Air laptop stolen in Paris. Instead, I bought a cheap Lenovo Windows 8 tablet/laptop device for 300 euros, which isn’t the fastest or most capable machine. I missed all of my Apple software (Pages, iBooks author) which I was using to produce my [new free e-books on street photography](#).

But the benefit of getting my laptop stolen and using a weaker machine is this: I discovered the joy of working on the Google cloud, and have enjoyed using Google Slides (see my free presentation: “[7 Lessons From the Masters of Street Photography](#)”), and Google Docs (which I am currently using this to write). Not only that, but I know that even if I fell into poverty and could only afford a cheap laptop, I wouldn’t be encumbered or held back by lack of technology. **Whenever I think that my computer, smartphone, or camera isn’t capable enough, that is just me making excuses.** My mind is always the ultimate limit.

When I am traveling, I am limited by the stuff I am able to carry. I don’t have access to my photography books, to my scanner, or other digital equipment. All I literally have with me at the moment is my laptop, smartphone, film Leica camera, film, [ThinkTank Perception 15](#) backpack (brilliant, bought it after my backpack got stolen), Kindle, Moleskine notebook, extra Uniqlo Airism shirt and [Exofficio boxers](#), and that’s it.

But having limited space while traveling ends up being a benefit, I learn how to **cut the extraneous things from my life, and only focus on the essentials**.

Let’s say that you wish you had more photography books in your library. I had a phase in which I bought 1-2 photo books a week, but the problem was that I only looked at them once or twice, never to be seen again.

The benefit of only owning a few photobooks is that you get to know them really well. In-fact, I think it is better to just own 3 photography books you really really like than have a library of hundreds of books that you barely look at. For those of you who are curious what

3 books I would keep it would be "[Exiles](#)" and "[Gypsies](#)" by [Josef Koudelka](#), and "[Chromes](#)" by [William Eggleston](#).

Ultimately I think the goal in our photography shouldn't be to become rich, famous, influential, to publish a lot of books, have a lot of exhibitions, own a lot of Leica's, or to be written in the history books. **Our goal should be to seek happiness, self-contentment, and peace of mind** in our photography.

Taken a step further, photography isn't the most important thing in our lives. It is to live a happy life. Photography is just a hobby which supplements our life.

As my friend [Josh White](#) says, the goal isn't to be a photographer and make interesting photos. The goal is to live an interesting and meaningful life, and happen to take photos along the way-- of your loved ones, family, friends, and moments which give you purpose and make you feel alive.

As a parting thought remember: **You can be happy in all circumstances in your life, regardless of the external situations.** Also remember, **you can turn all negatives into a positive.** It is all a matter of how you perceive and interpret reality.

Think to yourself: "What are some frustrations or restrictions that I have in my photography or life that I can turn into benefits?" How can limited time, limited money, and limited camera equipment help me be \*more\* creative, happy, and grateful in my life?

Fellow streettog, I wish you good luck, happiness, prosperity, and inner-freedom and tranquility. Now go seize the day!

Love,  
Eric

*Written at Exmouth coffee roasters, London, 12:39pm, with a lovely drip coffee (low acidity blend over some ice cubes)*