



# WORKING WITH FILM

A PLACE FOR ANALOG IN THE DIGITAL AGE

BY BILLY NEWMAN



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This portrait of myself was taken by Marina Hansen in the Yosemite Valley while we were traveling through the area during November, 2012. The days spent in Yosemite were crisp, clear and cold... Very much like you might think the mountains would be in mid November.

The era of film was already beginning to fade out by the time I took an interest in the craft of photography. I am a relatively young photographer and being so makes me a part of the digitally native generation. I grew up during a time when many of the analog tools used in the past were being replaced with digital equivalents. This disruption was seen across many different industries and practices but it is particularly visible in the field of photography. Because of this change in the medium, I began learning about photography with digital tools. I learned about memory card formats before I ever considered learning how to load film into a camera. I was training myself to use Photoshop before I had ever seen darkroom equipment.

I was 12 when I received my first camera, which was digital, but it was not until later in school that I became serious about refining my skills as a photographer, and developing my eye to create stronger, more artistic photographs. When I decided I wanted to advance from taking snapshots of the elements around me with a digital point and shoot, and learn how to make better photographs, I began learning how to use an SLR film camera. This process of working with an SLR taught me so much about the craft of photography. I learned about the effect shutter speed and aperture had on my photographs. I educated myself about the tools involved in making photographs.

This love of the visual arts combined with a passionate interest in the developing world of digital communication lead me to study and eventually earn a degree in New Media Communications from Oregon State University. When I went to college, I began taking photos with a Nikon DSLR and I worked with it for years. I took thousands of images, and made thousands of mistakes, but my brief background in film gave me a strong foundation in the way a camera worked.

I felt comfortable using my camera in manual mode. Over time I learned more about composition, lighting, and the visual language. On occasion, I'd get frustrated or find myself in a creative rut and put my camera down; sometimes for far too long. However, I tried to engage in opportunities where I could take photos. I worked for the school paper as a photographer, and over the summers I found work photographing white water rafters along the Rogue River in my hometown.

Following the completion of my degree I set out to travel the western United States to dive into photography and begin working to refine my craft



## BEHIND THE SHOT

While driving through Northern Arizona, smoke from a distant grass fire was illuminated by the light from the setting sun.



and my creative process. For this trip I was camping in the back country and living out of my car the entire time. As with all travel, this experience gave me a new perspective. This trip solidified my passion for capturing the natural beauty of the outdoors. I followed this trip by traveling for 100 days through the west coast, exploring the light land and people of the area with my camera.

This book is intended to expand on the lessons that making film images has taught me as a photographer and discuss the influence it has had on my creative process. My hope is that these lessons can be implemented by anyone or with any camera.

## BEHIND THE SHOT

On a hot July afternoon, I took this photograph of Marina against the side of a shop in an alleyway downtown. The alley was filled with light from the copper roof top on the adjacent building. The warm diffused light added a luminance to this photo that really pops with the duotone conversion.



## **BEHIND THE SHOT**

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This image was taken just outside of Yosemite. The passing storm began to break up as it rolled over the hillside. The clouds cast down large shadows that rippled along the rolling snowcapped hills.

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### BEHIND THE SHOT

Zoey waited nervously on the shore this morning while Loren was in the water surfing.

This past year I undertook a personal project to reintroduce film back into my photography. This project of working with film along with my digital camera was meant to help me slow down and focus. These intentional constraints help me develop my creativity and continue to learn.

I began to feel like there was an implied expectation with digital gear. The modern DSLR is one of the most versatile photographic tools ever made, but there are so many features and options, so many lens choices and ultra lowlight CMOS sensors that make it feel like photographers are set on an almost unattainable mission to make perfect, noiseless high dynamic range photos. This project was to discover what would happen if I had none of that. If I gave all of that gear up for an old film camera from the 80s with a few manual focus lenses.

Photography is simple; it is not grandiose or high art. It is taking your camera and pointing

# PROJECT

it at something. Better still, is pointing your camera at something you care about.

Photographer Marc Riboud is quoted with saying “Photography is savoring life at 1/100th of a second.” This return to working with film was with the simple hope that I might try to savor life more than I savor my camera.

I found that placing these creative constraints on myself helped me make more genuine, intentional images. In this project I wanted to practice taking photos that captured a specific moment. I wanted to create photos that took advantage of the aesthetic look and tone of film. I wanted to retrain myself to think more intuitively about the photograph I was capturing. I placed these constraints on myself because I wanted to grow and develop my photography.

## BEHIND THE SHOT

The man in the photo was shoveling ice on to the fresh fish at pikes place in Seattle.



MOMENT





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This photograph was taken in early September 2012 at the gum wall in Seattle, Washington. I was walking through Pikes Place and some of the back streets and alleys surrounding the gum wall when a family walked by me as I fiddled with my camera, adjusting some settings when their daughter, who had fallen behind them, looked ahead and began to run to catch up with her family.

As she raced down the alley way to rejoin them, I was fortunate to be in the right spot. I saw that the little girl would be a good subject to add drama to the photograph. The girl was about 25ft away and coming toward me fast. I looked down and tried to adjust my aperture, I then brought the camera to my eye, focused on the girl, and framed the scene for only a moment.

I knew that whatever I did next would be critical in creating a powerful image. I wanted to catch a powerful moment, one that would show movement in the frame.

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I waited for the girl to take her next stride; the moment came and the composition felt right as the girl pushed off the pavement with her left foot. I pressed the shutter, and within a second the girl rejoined her family and the moment was gone. There was no preview screen, and no way for me to review the image to see if I got it. It was nearly a week later when I finally saw the photographs on that roll of film.

The moment that a photograph is made can be very unique. Sometimes it might last for a few minutes while taking a photo of a landscape, and at other times it may only last for a split second. I found that when shooting with film there were a number of physical constraints that changed how I would approach taking a picture. When I began working with the creative limitations of film I had to retrain myself to

### BEHIND THE SHOT

I photographed this flower in the backyard at my home. Notice the bee coming in for a landing on the pedal of the flower.



## **BEHIND THE SHOT**

This image was taken in Pacific City. I waited far too long to try and capture this seagull taking off. The light in the sky gives an incredible soft and saturated appeal. The seagull finally got fed up with me and departed.



## BEHIND THE SHOT

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Just after a heavy Autumn rain, I took this photo to capture the intense color of the changing leaves.

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be more intent on selectively pre-editing the photographs I might make while looking through the viewfinder of my camera. Pre-editing required me to make the judgment of whether or not a potential photograph was good enough for me to press the shutter.

I found it more rewarding to capture photographs at the right moment, to allow the elements in the frame to come together before I took a photo that lacked the power or emotion that drew me to the scene in the first place.

Recognizing and capturing a moment might be as simple as taking a portrait of a friend and waiting for the right smile or the right look in their eyes before taking the photo. It could be capturing a climactic moment as a bird takes off from its perch, or capturing a bee the moment before it lands on a flower.

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## **BEHIND THE SHOT**

This soft morning light only lasted for a short time while we were camped near Sisters Rock. The turquoise water and light blue sky work well with the warm colors of the sun lit rock just out from the shore.



Training myself to take photographs with this process has greatly improved the number of “keepers” I seem to find in my photo library. Working with film cameras was an intentional step to train myself to make photographs that were more consistent and sincere; photographs that appeared to be more deliberate in the moment they represented.

## BEHIND THE SHOT

My radiator went out on me while I was on my way to work. Not a huge surprise though. This Camry had just passed 345,000 miles but she’s still kickin’.

# INTUITION





Intuition was perhaps the most important element I came to understand by learning to shoot with film. This image was made during early October while my cousin Loren was surfing near Sisters Rocks along the Southern Oregon coast. This was the only image that I captured of him surfing this wave.

I transitioned into shooting with my Nikon FG-20 which most of the photos in this book are made with, and a 200mm manual focus lens. A beautiful warm morning light broke over the hillside and cast itself down through the marine layer of high fog to light up a section of the shoreline.

While tracking him through the viewfinder of the camera I knew that I had one photograph that I could make before he would move out of the wave. I tried to

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## **BEHIND THE SHOT**

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For me, there is nothing better than a fresh doughnut. Grabbed this shot of the process at the local farmers market

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watch the moving elements in the scene, I waited for the waves to ride him into the sunlight then I took the photo.

While working on this project I began relying more on my intuition when making an image, and less on the display screen located at the back of my digital camera. The process of making photos with a film camera created the necessity for me to be more perceptive and observant of the changing elements I was photographing.

With film I did not have the option to shoot 8 frames a second to capture an image. I had to learn to rely on my insights about the subject to compose a stronger picture. I know that I often feel out of touch with my intuition.

### BEHIND THE SHOT

I was leaving a supermarket parking lot when I saw this man watching over his three weiner dogs. I asked him for permission to take a photograph and he nodded kindly.



## **BEHIND THE SHOT**

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The Yosemite Valley may be one of the most photographed locations on earth, but with good reason. The dramatic sweeping lines of the landscape make it a spectacular site.

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**BEHIND THE SHOT** More than you would think went in to capturing this llama with all four feet on the ground in profile to me while it walked by.

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Many of the modern conveniences and digital tools

offer an almost unlimited amount of data, and analytics as a foundation for our decisions, but very few of these tools make use of our intuitive nature. Learning to rely on intuition when taking photos requires a photographer to be more attentive to the elements in the scene rather than focusing on the data coming from the camera.

I found that I can intuitively know that a photo's horizon line is crooked in the same way we all do when we enter a room with a crooked picture frame hung on the wall. I intuitively know if the subject of my photo is in the right place to compose the shot.

Allowing myself to become conscious of my intuitive choices about the photos I made helped me see past simply being a technician behind the camera, and become more

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# INTUITION

comfortable creating behind the camera.

Following my intuition is simple. For me it means to be aware of the changing subject and environment.

Following my intuition may be as simple as recognizing that the horizon line creates an implied line in the photo that will cut right through my subjects head. In this example, I would try to recompose the frame so that the horizon line will not distract from the final picture.

Recognizing and following my intuition could also be understanding that the light on a hillside is becoming softer and warmer as the sun moves closer to the horizon, which would give me the light I might want for a landscape shot. Intuition is not focusing my attention on the camera's exposure meter more than I am the scene in front of me.

While walking through downtown, I passed this open red door to see this painting illuminated by the evening sunlight.





I shot this in Scott and Robert's home studio while they were tracking lyrics on a new project. The original color film image was shot in really low light and had strange color casts through the black tonal range, so I choose to convert the image into black and white. I had a great time hanging out and watching Robert and Scott work through the creative process of recording.

# INTUITION

Developing intuition takes time, patience and lots and lots of experience. It is a broad idea and can be applied to different aspects of my creativity all the time. If I will be photographing a subject, I try to take a few moments to observe it and connect with it. I try to take note of how the scene makes me feel. This familiarity informs the intuitive choices that I might make while taking the photo.

## BEHIND THE SHOT

The arm on this cat statue waived at passer by ers at the country fair this past July. Instead of rushing the photo I intuitively knew to wait for the hand of the cat to make it back to its apex position before taking the photo. The gesture of the cat would be completely different if taken only a moment later.





CHARACTER



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In this image I photographed Beauty, our family cat who has been with us for 18 years. I made this photograph on a visit home between parts of my last 100 day camping road trip with Marina Hansen.

It was a bright morning in early October, and Beauty was sitting warming herself in a spot of sunlight that was cast down through the window. The dramatic angle of the lighting lit up the fine detail of her fur. For this image I wanted the dramatic lighting and the character of the animal I was photographing to work together. I wanted her gesture to add to the character and peculiarities of the photograph.

I placed the camera down low to be at eye level with Beauty, and I waited. The expression of herding cats has been used before, but photographing cats may be just as difficult. Beauty was classically

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## BEHIND THE SHOT

I noticed these tiny skulls in a small vendor's showcase while walking through the Country Fair. The gang of little skulls with sunglasses seemed to have a bit of character endowed upon them through the handmade nature of their creation.

uncooperative. She then moved her head quickly and stuck her tongue out to clean herself; this image of Beauty with her tongue out seems to capture a bit more of her character than the regular image.

Capturing the core of something's character within a photograph can be very difficult. Part of it will come from the mood set by the lighting and the setting of the image, and part of it will come from the presence and personality of the subject of the picture. Through my work with film, I found that focusing on character created more interesting, story filled images.

Making decisions to include a powerful sense of character in my photos has helped lead to images that are more evocative. The process creates photographs that describe the way a



You never know what you might find walking through the Wal Mart parking lot. I had the pleasure and good fortune to see Bigfoot, Captain America and Spiderman under a rainbow.



All sorts of folks show up and express themselves at the Country Fair. These two interesting characters were taking a breather when we passed by and asked for a photograph.



## BEHIND THE SHOT

My friend Tyler, bouldering the Lost Rocks along the Humboldt county coast line one evening in February 2013

moment felt to me more than just the way it looked. I want my pictures to capture more than just a smiling person, or a dramatic landscape. I want there to be a strong sense of mood and emotion in the image. I intentionally try to take photographs of people and things that instill the fundamental nature of their character whether I am shooting with a film camera or with a digital camera.

I had been working on this project to create pictures that were more than just representations of the way people and things are, but pictures that in some way show how the moment felt for me when I made the image. I wanted to capture an almost surreal perspective of what makes a moment unique or peculiar.

When I approached a group of three people (young men I assume) to ask them



## **BEHIND THE SHOT**

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I found the layers of this scene to be interesting. Loren returning to land with his surfboard in hand, a mixed ocean, and a rim of coastal rocks and hills behind him.

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## **BEHIND THE SHOT**

Photographed on a foggy October day in San Francisco, the black and white city covered in a thick fog seems almost timeless.

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# CHARACTER

for a photograph in a Wal-Mart parking lot, I did what I could to isolate the peculiar, unique elements of the photo and remove anything else that would be a distraction. I made an image that day of Big-foot, Captain America, and Spiderman posing for the camera underneath the arc of a rainbow. I intentionally try to enhance the elements in the frame that communicate to me how the scene feels.

## BEHIND THE SHOT

I took this photo earlier in the Summer at Robert's Dutch Bros stand in Merlin. I really like the light and the mood in this photo. It is still kind of soft, but imperfect. The angle shows the space and the context of the stand, I like the lines in the image, they lead toward the open window with the girl on her bike waiting for her drink.



**TONE**



# TO NE

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This image was made in the Alabama Hills in late November 2012. This photo looks west across the hills and onto the eastern Sierra Nevada range. It's a really beautiful area; a very scenic mountain range. I had been working through a roll of 100 speed Kodak ektar film. We arrived in the Alabama Hills and explored the area after the sun had set behind the mountains.

I had one frame left on my roll, and I wanted to make it count. It was a beautiful area and would be difficult not to find something to make a photograph of.

I setup my tripod and walked around looking at different compositions. Most of them were similar. The problem was the mediocre light. The sun had fallen back behind the mountains leading to harsh backlighting of the mountain range making the east side of the range plunge into shadow. The photograph I wanted to make was just not there. I began looking at shooting the unusual water eroded rocks that make up the Alabama Hills.

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## BEHIND THE SHOT

I really like the distressed, damaged look of the sign and the container. It has a feeling like whatever it held really was toxic.

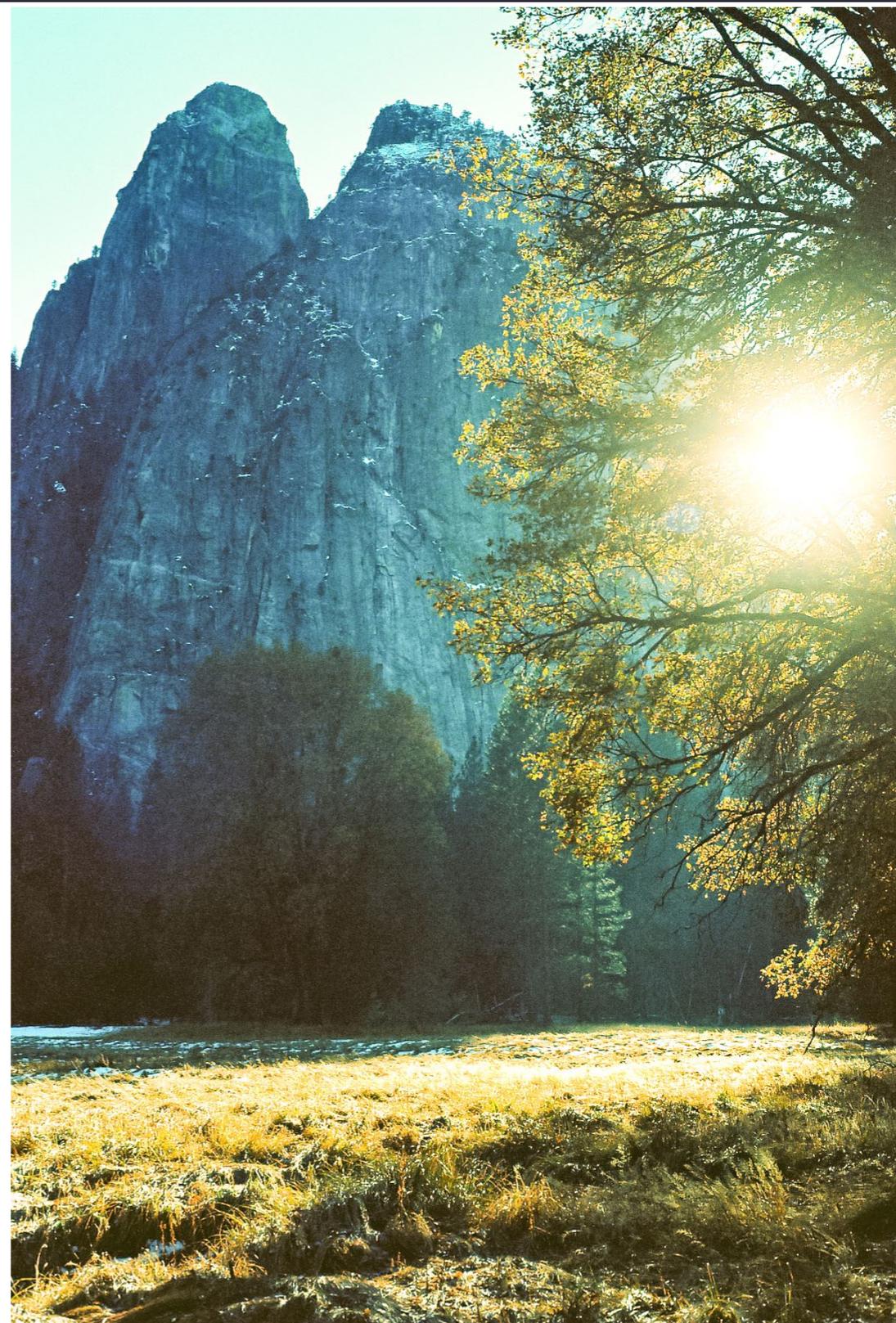
# TONE

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I turned my lens and tripod to face east to catch the warmer light of the sunset and fast encroaching twilight. I was very fortunate that day; a ridge of high clouds lit up as the setting sunlight caught it. The clouds turned a bright and unusually warm yellow, auburn color, and the warm light diffused across the open land that led up to the eastern Sierras.

Film has a distinctive look to it. The appeal of this look is not just the nostalgia of color casts and cross processing like instagram might like us to believe. The film itself has a unique tone and grain. There is a quality to film that is aesthetically different from digital image files. Neither look is necessarily better, or more desirable. But recognizing that there is an aesthetic difference between the two allowed me to choose the option that would best carry out my intent for the mood of the picture.

I once heard photographer Chris Orwig talk about the aesthetics of film in an interesting way. He likened the photographic mediums of film and digital to musical scales. In this



I captured this image while I was traveling through Yosemite National Park during November of last year. In this image I really like the low golden light that is coming in through the tree.



**BEHIND THE SHOT**

This image came out with a surreal tone that I really like. The large back lit stuffed animals and the giant bald man working the fair stands booth seem strange and out of place.



## **BEHIND THE SHOT**

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The Grand Canyon is a spectacular place. I took this photograph as the last bit of day light was leaving the canyon.

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analogy the digital images took the place of the major scale. Digital images are strong, bold and very present much like the notes in the major scale, whereas you may be able to think of film fitting more closely with notes in the minor scale. They are more subdued, more moody and can sometimes communicate more emotion.

The tone of a film photo is not always more realistic or color accurate to real life, but it can feel more genuine. There is a difference in the way film grain adds to the look and feel of a scene. Film photos will often show more contrast than their unedited digital counterparts. The pictures have deeper blacks and brighter highlights. The images will capture a more full bodied saturation.

Within some of the film photos I have seen, I noticed that the tone of film can add an almost timeless aesthetic. Some photographs could look like they were taken just yesterday or years ago. The tone of film, though sometimes more subtle than digital, can create a more striking effect on the viewer.

This photo of Half Dome and El Capitan was made just outside of the Yosemite Valley. The perspective and layers of depth in this photo made for an interesting point of view.



How does one reheat their breakfast with nothing but an iron?

The green and yellow tones of this photo of a Seattle Ferris Wheel were peculiar to see in the developed film.

**SCARCITY**



In the realm of digital photography the concept of scarcity is almost completely removed. A photographer can shoot as many frames as the battery of the camera and the available memory cards will allow. I have heard many people remark that they have returned from a great trip with something like 1400 photos. That is fine, and shooting more frames with my digital camera has certainly served the purpose of refining my photographs, but the scarcity of film has also refined and improved the pictures that I take.

The constraint of only having 24 or 36 frames available on a roll of film has retrained the way I approach taking photos. I become more intentional because I know each one will cost me. I cannot delete it, or review it instantaneously like I might with my digital camera. I am working consistently in a fully manual environment while I am using my film SLR. I am working with manual focus lenses and only a handful of frames on the roll of film. When using a manual film camera I do not

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A Summer storm built up over the mountains west of my home town. Late one Summer afternoon this enormous thunderhead moved into position over the city. The veins leading down from the bright rim remind me of some giant living thing.



## **BEHIND THE SHOT**

This photo was taken in eastern California near the Alabama Hills. I remember that the sun was setting behind the Sierra Nevadas around 3:30pm while we were there in November, 2012. This evening the clouds turned a bright orange magenta giving the high desert landscape a warm glow.





have the comfort of exposure compensation, 53 auto focus points or the option to instantly review the photographs after I have captured them like I do when shooting with a digital SLR. My intent with film was to avoid all of that extra technical stuff, and concentrate on composition, focusing my lens, and manually adjusting my exposure settings to get it right in the camera. I am restrained by the technical limitations of the equipment which force me to slow down in my process. Instead of making more images; I am focused on trying to create better photographs.

Realizing the scarcity of frames available to a film camera has taught me that it is ok to pre-edit; to recognize intuitively that perhaps the lighting is not right, or that the angle available should be changed. It shows me that I do not need to make every single photograph but rather; I should try to intentionally make one photograph that is just right. The lack of frames available to me in the camera, and the out of pocket expense to develop a roll of film helped allow me to be more present and thoughtful when I was out taking photos.

### BEHIND THE SHOT

I made this photograph over by a carousel during a Fair last Summer.



## **BEHIND THE SHOT**

While driving down HWY 395 I was really drawn toward the cool blues in the light near sunset. We pulled the car over and hiked up the hill to get this shot. I really like the rounded shape of the land and the stark line in the clouds above



## BEHIND THE SHOT

An early summer rain also brought with it this Rainbow that stretched up from the hills to the east.

# CONCLUSION



# CONCLUSION



This process, this workflow that I attempt to describe in the preceding pages is the method that we all go through when trying to make new creative endeavors and new art. Working with a film camera was just my way of learning how to slow down and how to be more intentional about my creativity. This is not to say however, that this way is the only way. Whether film or digital, whether driven by creative constraints like I mentioned here or not; this process of grabbing your camera and making photos is the only real photographic lesson that there is. It is simple, go out and make photos.

There is very little that is easy to do in the creative process. Similarly, there is very little in the process that is not gratifying or rewarding. In the course of describing some of the photographic lessons I have embraced while working with film, I have likely oversimplified the struggle and work that it takes to learn a new creative medium. Nothing is really further from my intent.

## BEHIND THE SHOT

The Wallowa Mountains are a stunning place to spend some time in the outdoors. This was the view from the lake at sunset toward the glacierly formed peaks.



This was taken at Pike Place in Seattle. I worked with my Nikon FG 20 film camera a lot during my time in Seattle. It's a really interesting place to work on photos; lots of contrast, lots of characters.



A wonderful public restroom I had the privilege of walking into while traveling through Monterey California . The green and yellow color added by the dim light fixture above made this scene look even worse.



**BEHIND THE SHOT**

This image of Marina was taken while we were camped out by Blossom Bar along the Lower Rogue. We woke up a little before 7:00 am, threw a few extra layers on and ventured out of the tent to photograph some of the softer morning light in the canyon.

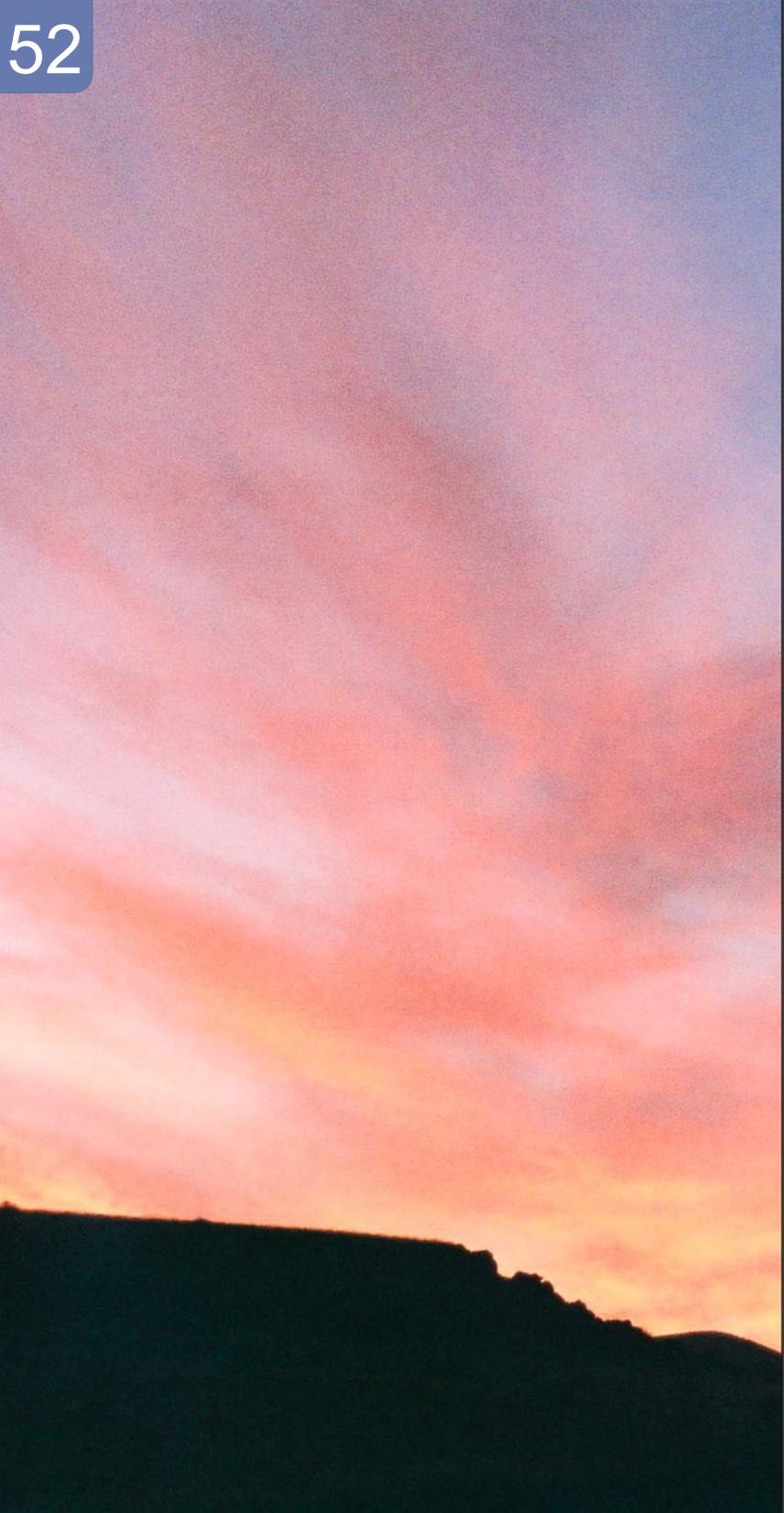
# CONCLUSION

My hope is that somewhere in this book I make it clear that there is a great deal to learn from adding constraints to our creativity. Working with a camera of any type, is working with a tool; whether a digital point and shoot or a medium format film camera. My intent is to use this tool to express myself; to express something that intrigued me: that I found beauty in or something that tells a story.

This book is meant to serve as creative inspiration, I have chosen to focus on what helped me grow and learn the most about being on the path of a creative. My photographs are continually evolving in style and refinement. The photographs that illustrate this book all mean something to me personally. They are images I have made with a dedication to creating simpler more refined, more intentional photographs. As I continue to make new photographs with my digital gear or my film gear, my intent is the same. It is to continue to simplify and refine my photos, to focus on the decisions and elements that matter in my life and capture them in a photograph.

I took this image in the Mule Creek Canyon on the Lower Rogue. I know, I know- It's a photo of a camera... But this is my digital set up that I carry with me while I'm backpacking. I like the cool blues in this image that come out from the dark rocks in the shadow of the canyon.





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- a division of Billy Newman Photo

info@outletcommunications.com  
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Billynewmanphoto.com

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