



## TWOPEASINABUCKET.COM PHOTOGRAPHY COURSE: 12 WEEKS TO BETTER PHOTOS

By Mark & Joanna Bolick

### LESSON ELEVEN: Your Daily Environment

Instead of running you all over the place (like we have in past challenges) this week we're sticking close to home, or, at least, to the familiar. We want you to pay attention to what you do (and specifically, what you see) on a daily basis. This week is all about documenting those places, people, and things we're around day in and day out, and paying special attention to what might be neglected or missing in our photography because it's such a part of our routine that we take it for granted.

#### **Your Daily Environment**

We challenge you to document the ordinary. Please note that the use of the term "ordinary" is not meant to imply that what we're photographing lacks worth. The challenge, really, is seeing the value, and appreciating the simplicity and beauty that is before us everyday.

A terrific example to get you started is the following blog: <http://3191.visualblogging.com>  
This blog is a collaboration (they call it a daily photo conversation) between 2 women who live 3191 miles apart and share a part of their worlds. The current focus of the blog is *A Year of Evenings* (last year's focus was *A Year of Mornings*, which will be published in book form toward the end of 2008.) Every day they choose to document a small snippet of their lives.

We want you to be observant as you go about your day. Carry your camera with you: take it to work, take it out to eat, take it to the grocery store.

#### **Create a Visual Record of your Day**

An easy way to embrace your daily environment is to create a visual diary of your day -- for one entire day take photos of your normal routine.

For example, consider photographing your typical morning:

*your alarm clock, bathroom, toothbrush, bedhead, bathrobe, slippers, workout*

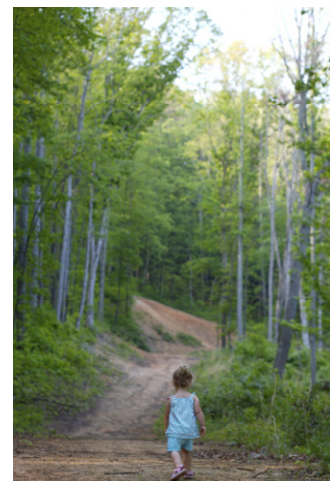
*your home, vehicles, school bus, sidewalk, mailbox, morning paper or morning walk*

*your commute to work, office, cubicle, studio, scrapbooking spot, retail space, favorite chair*

*your coffee cup, cereal bowl, latte, tea or coffeemaker, energy bar, box of doughnuts*

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If a whole day feels overwhelming to you, start with an hour or 30 minutes of your day. Here's a series of photos we took while on a walk with our children last year.



The key, really, is to tell a story with your photos.

Here's the narrative for these photos:

*Today we took a walk.*

*I would really call it a stroll, with a lawn mower, a scooter, and lots of lolligaging.*

*We stopped to smell the mountain laurel... (it wasn't very smelly.)*

*We transcribed our names in dirt.*

*We played hug-the-harper (guess how much she likes that?!)*

*We pondered how small we really are.*

*Then we ran back down the hill toward home.*

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## Photojournalism

According to wikipedia (<http://wikipedia.org>) *photojournalism*, in its truest sense, is about creating images to objectively tell a news story. Documentary photography is a type of photojournalism where "the photographer attempts to produce truthful, objective, and usually candid photography of a particular subject, most often pictures of people. The pictures usually depict a certain perspective of the photographer."

If we had a mantra it would be this:

*Use photos to document your lives.*

When you take classes to improve your photography.

When you get frustrated with your camera or subject.

When you want to learn it all in one day.

When you are producing photos for others.

Always keep in mind the ultimate goal:

*You are taking photos to tell a story.*

## The Technically Perfect Photo vs. The Emotionally Perfect Photo

*This week our guest writer is Karen Russell. The following is an excerpt from her new photography class, Snapshots of a Good Life. You can check out Karen's blog at [www.karenrussell.typepad.com](http://www.karenrussell.typepad.com) and her website at [www.snapshotsofagoodlife.com](http://www.snapshotsofagoodlife.com).*

*text & photos by Karen Russell*

I was itching to take some photos a few months back and since Coley is usually the kid who complains the least and cooperates the most when I am taking pictures, he seemed like my obvious target. So I told him to wash his face, throw a clean shirt on and to meet me out in the front yard. And then I proceeded to rattle off about 50+ pictures of him.

And this was my favorite one out of the bunch. I love that look on his face. I love those dimples. I love that mole on his left cheek. I love it all.

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And from a technical viewpoint, it's a nice photo too; good composition, great lighting, a nice shallow depth of field, clarity, catchlights, etc. It's got all the makings of what might be considered a technically perfect photograph (if I do say so myself).

In fact, if I were a professional photographer and had taken a photo like this photo for a client, I would have been really excited to show it to them. But I'm not a professional photographer. I am a mom and a scrapbooker and a woman (and a lot of other things too) who truly feels like one of the most important things that I do for my family is documenting our lives through photography.

I document it all, the big events, like birthdays and sports and the first day of school, but even more important to me are those little, everyday events; a typical morning around our house, the kids out in the backyard picking blackberries, the smiles, the laughs, the connections... because, to me, it's all those little moments, those small, seemingly insignificant things that really make us who we are.

In fact, I think that the richest parts of our lives are actually found in those little details. And from that perspective, even though that particular photo I took of Cole might be considered a "technically perfect" photo, it's still missing something for me. And what it's missing is a story, a memory, a connection.

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I guarantee that Cole's never going to look at that photo, with a smile on his face, fondly recalling that wonderful day that I made him wash his face and sit in the front yard while I took pictures of him. And so, as much as I love that photo, it certainly isn't one of my favorites. This photo is actually my hands-down, all-time, absolute favorite picture of Cole.



This was the first photo I snapped when we got to the beach that day. And it doesn't matter one bit to me that it's blurry or that I accidentally cut off my oldest son's head in it. I just love the excitement and the emotion and the bruises on his shins and the wet swim trunks and that mouth-wide-open-loving-life smile on his face. And I think that in all its blurriness and imperfection, it still managed to not only capture the moment perfectly, but to capture Coley's personality better than any other photo that I have ever taken of him.

It is (in my opinion) an emotionally perfect photo. And really, as much as I would love for all my photos to be technically perfect...that's not what drives me. What drives me is capturing an emotionally perfect photo. What drives me is documenting a truly authentic moment. I am not nearly as driven by the technical aspects of photography as I am by the emotional aspects of photography. Of course, if I could "have my cake and eat it too", all of my photos would be emotionally perfect and technically perfect.

But if I had to choose one or the other...I'd choose an emotionally perfect photo any ole' day of the week.

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## WEEKLY CHALLENGE: Playing Favorites

Here's the question we want to consider this week:  
*What makes a photo your **favorite** photo?*

### Your Daily Environment

*Embrace your daily life!*

- 1. Capture a small snippet of your life that usually goes unnoticed*
- 2. Create a visual record of your day*
- 3. Share your favorite photo(s) with us (and tell us about the emotional connection you have with it, whether or not it's technically perfect)*



Absolutely one of my favorite photos  
(taken by Mark.)

*We expect to see a huge amount of photos in the gallery this week!*  
***Thanks for your participation these 11 weeks!***