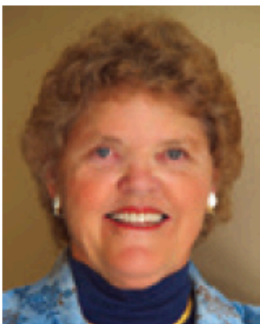


Appreciating the Quiet Moments on a Photo Tour



Waiting for Food



By Donna Judd

Maybe it's dangerous when a photographer gets philosophical, or maybe it is just that what I am trying to say here is not easy to explain, but here goes. In looking back at my most recent trip to India, I realized the most meaningful moments had actually happened in the "down time" when I was not experiencing a highlight boldfaced in the itinerary/ brochure. I was most profoundly affected by what was happening around me when I was not rushing around shooting, shooting, shooting, but, rather, when I stopped to truly experience the beauty or the atmosphere around me.

And a surprising bonus is that my photos seem

somehow better, more reflective of the essence of place and experience, after I have taken a break from photographing. Likewise, making personal contact often resulted in better portrait/street shots. In essence, I had acknowledged the humanity of my subject before I photographed him, a mental *Namaste*, the perfect approach for India.

Our photo tour brochure certainly did not list "interaction with hotel servant boy" as a tour highlight in remote Pashina, India, but that's what happened. After a morning shoot in an Adivasi tribal village which included photographing a three-week-old baby with fly-encrusted eyes, and a newly-widowed 25-year-old with nine children, I skipped the afternoon tour to rest my back. Later I explored the grounds of the seventeenth-century palace our host, the local Maharaja, had converted into a boutique hotel. A small, barefooted boy tailed me. Apparently, he was supposed to be available as needed by anyone whose room faced into the courtyard mine did.

Since no one else was around, he followed me. I hid and initially scared him, but he soon joined in a spirited game of hide-and-seek. Back at the room door, he proudly opened the huge padlock I could not figure out. I impulsively pulled a pink necklace from my luggage and draped it around his neck. His face beamed with pure happiness, and, after a few pictures, he ran off, returning with a friend. Another necklace and soon they were hanging from the second-story gargoyles, showing off and loving how I pretended to be afraid they would fall.

That night I gave our host some money for the boy. The Maharaja told me the tribal boy's father had died and the grandfather had begged him to take



Bright Eyes



Young Mother and Child

the child in. Satish was unschooled, but at least now had a mat to sleep on, food, and wages that were helping keep his family members fed. Sadly, his mother, if she was alive, never came to see him. The grandfather came every week, but never bothered to see the boy, just picked up his wages!

As Satish worked the next day, his eyes never left me. His thin, taunt body shook as I gave him candy and hugged him goodbye. We drove off, with the Maharaja's last-minute question swirling in my brain: "The boy would do everything for you, all your work. Do you want to take him with you?"

Quite obviously, Satish had an impact on me, and I feel my photos of him are better for it. Thinking about how unplanned brief events have affected my travel experiences and my photography lead to these photo-specific suggestions. I am forced to take breaks thanks to knee and back issues, but perhaps you could benefit without having to ache first.

Consider forgetting about photographing occasionally in favor of truly experiencing an event, not just seeing it through your lens or bus window. Put interacting with someone ahead of taking their picture. "Get real!" you're thinking. "Who's going to do that when we have paid megabucks to photograph in this once-in-a-lifetime, exotic local?"

Good point, so let's compromise. How about taking occasional mini-breaks? Thirty seconds



Girl in Alley



Talented Hands



Children by School



Henna Hands



Along the Road

maybe all that's needed. Lower the camera, take a deep breath, look around and just drink in the scene around you, with no conscious thought about photography. Engage all your senses. For example, as you approach a chaotic market scene, relax your shoulders, listen to the noise and smell the odors swirling around. Really listen, separating individual sounds out of the din. Only then began scanning for intriguing subjects and great light. Your photos will be richer for that brief pause.

Notice the people on the sidelines, the shy ones watching us photograph their outgoing friends and neighbors. In a tribal area of Rajasthan, our group jostled around trying for the best angles on a talented potter working in a dusty, narrow alley. By pausing before venturing into that smelly alley, I noticed a girl hidden deep in the shadows, quietly watching the strange *firangs*. I maneuvered for some good shots of her, and later the potter, when the crowd had left. Yes, I missed the next preplanned artist, a sculptor, but making my own contact with the girl was a worthwhile trade-off.

These small suggestions could lead to deeper awareness and better photos. On a far different level are what an expat friend called "lifers", travel memories so powerful they last a lifetime. I'm guessing Lifers are unique to each individual. But what causes such a rare event to occur? For me at least, these special experiences were always visually powerful, but never solely visual. They involve other senses, and usually occur when I

am alone, and feeling emotional, as happened in Myanmar.

Two weeks of independent travel back in 2006 found me at Inle Lake, at a small market without a single tourist in sight. My sister and our guide had gone for a hike up the mountain, and, an hour later, I decided to follow. On the way, I talked with a young college student, born without arms, who copied calligraphy with his toes, watched women washing clothes in the dirty river water, crossed the bridge and found myself among empty, dilapidated stalls. I passed through and the path open up onto a vista of stupas, haphazardly sprinkled up the mountainside. As I paused to take in this view, a crystal-clear, beautiful young voice suddenly began singing behind me. I felt tears in my eyes and sank down on a nearby rock to listen. I never saw the singer, but I'll never forget that moment.

It is impossible to orchestrate an unforgettable memory, but being alone, and with my senses fully engaged increases the odds for me. It might be beneficial to think about what factors affect you.

"They" say LIFE is actually made up of the little things that happen while we are waiting for the big moments to occur. It can be true of our photography as well. By taking a mini break, your photography should benefit. Making these small adjustments does not mean you will experience a "Lifer," but, at the very least, it will help keep you mentally fresh for photography. Good luck!

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