TIPS , TRICKS & THOUGHTS

After the Beautiful Image, Now What? BY MARY DOO

Most of us in PSRI already know how to make beautiful images. For years, we've talked about chasing the best light, the best landscape scenes, the best mist, the best composition, the best wildlife action... You've nailed the rule of thirds, your bokeh is dreamy. We post "wow" shots on Facebook, and they roll in with "likes" and hearts. And we keep doing more of the same.



I wonder if there's a moment when we might ask: why? Is there more to photography? (Dare I ask: is there more to likes - and to life?) I'm not suggesting we discard beauty. I'm asking whether our images can also carry meaning - whether they can serve a purpose beyond aesthetics. What if we, with our training and talent for capturing beauty, opened our eyes to something deeper - not just the bird or the waterfall, but the world surrounding it? - Something with a story beyond the surface?

Think about it. You've got the eye, and probably more gear than socks and underwear in your drawer. You have the willpower to wake up before dawn – even when you're not a morning person (well, maybe you do miss the alarm every now and then). You've laid down in mud for that perfect angle, almost fallen off a cliff, dropped your filter - or even your lens - into a Yellowstone hot spring, fended off mosquitoes bigger than your lens cap in Maine, slipped and fell in water with your camera and lens as you waded through strong currents, or gotten your vehicle stuck in no-man's-land somewhere in Grand Staircase-Escalante.

So what if you channeled that same energy into documenting something that truly matters to you? Or something you happened to see while photographing something else? Is there a potentially powerful story you once overlooked? An issue you care about - maybe something that even keeps you up at night?

Your stunning images already command attention. Now imagine using that visual power to shine a light on stories that need to be seen. Stories that could move people, that potentially can inspire change.

Traditional print media like Life Magazine and The Saturday Evening Post may have faded, but the desire for meaningful storytelling remains strong. People still crave to feel, not just to see. A single image, with context, may have the capacity to speak much more than words.

Some years ago, I photographed the squatter neighborhoods of General Santos in Mindanao, Philippines. "Squatting" - living in abandoned or unused property without the owner's consent - is often a symptom of homelessness. I didn't have a clear purpose then - just a sense that what I was seeing deserved attention. So I filed the images away. I probably had the eye, but not the intent.

Now I see them in a new light. They may not be just scenes - they might be stories that need a voice.

One image shows a young mother holding her child amid rusted rooftops. Another, a crouching woman hand-washing laundry in a narrow space. A third captures boys laughing as they leap into the sea from a makeshift platform - happy to repeat the jump again and again for my camera. Isn't that a reminder that joy and struggle often coexist?





Maybe you, too, have work waiting for deeper meaning. After years of honing your craft - your award-winning images, your sharp eye - you're ready. You already make beautiful photographs. Perhaps now it's time to make them meaningful too. Much like an HDR image, maybe it's time to add another dimension to your work.

Long time PSRI members would remember Jack Dykinga, an exceptional landscape photographer whom we invited to run a workshop at PSRI. Interestingly, his Pulitzer Prize didn't come from his landscape - It came from his documentary series on psychiatric institutions in Illinois. His intentionally composed, powerful images stirred so much public outcry that the state was forced to increase mental health funding.

And of course, we know how photography has shaped history: the "Napalm Girl" image exposed the horror of war. Eddie Adams' execution photo on a Saigon street changed the course of the Vietnam War. Dorothea Lange's Migrant Mother gave a human face to the Great Depression.

Documentary photography isn't just about recording - it's about interpreting. It evokes empathy. It can potentially spark action. It's not only about what's happening out there, but about what we choose to notice. In a world hungry for meaning, your camera can become the story someone needs to hear.

You don't have to photograph wars, presidents, or climb Everest with a drone (but if you do, I'd love to see the shots). But what about local homelessness? Conservation efforts? Erosion of natural habitats? What about the wonderful charity down the road that's doing great work? There are so many untold stories around us.

I don't claim to be a documentary photographer. But I believe photography can hold more than just light and form - it can hold meaning. If, like me, you've ever made images without quite knowing why, maybe now's the time to look again.

What stories might you have now in your archives, waiting to be seen with new eyes? What truths could you see if you pay attention?

PSRI PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY of RHODE ISLAND

End of Year Banquet

Tuesday June 17, 2025, 6-10pm

The SafeHouse
195 Old Forge Rd, 1st floor
East Greenwich, RI 02818

Event Schedule

6:00–7:00 PM Cocktail Hour with assorted cheeses and crackers
7:00–8:00 PM Buffet Dinner:
- Caesar Salad, Focaccia Bread
- Gemelli with Rose and Prosciutto
- Chicken Marsala, Baked Scrod
- Roasted Broccoli, Roasted Potatoes
- Coffee/Tea, Cookies & Brownies

8:00–10:00 PM Award Ceremony, 50/50 Raffle, and Door Prizes

Dinner Preferences

Vegan, vegetarian, and gluten-free options are available. Menu selections can be made at the event. To indicate your preference in advance, please email Tara at arat1031@aol.com.

Cost: $45 per person *(incl. service fees and gratuity)*

PayPal (preferred payment method): treasurer@psri.us (include PSRI EOY Banquet in the memo).
Check by Mail: send to Ted Lawson, 30 Burgess Road, Foster, RI 02825.
In-Person: pay by check or cash.

Looking for answers or advice?

Experienced photographers from PSRI offer their technical advice as mentors. If there's a feature of your equipment you can't figure out, a technique you want to try and need guidance on, or if you want to learn more about a specific software program, check out the Mentor list available (for members only) on our website.

PHOTO & VIDEO Hunt's EST. 1869

Hunt's Photo & Video, located at 66 Branch Ave in Providence, offers PSRI members a 10% discount on accessories.