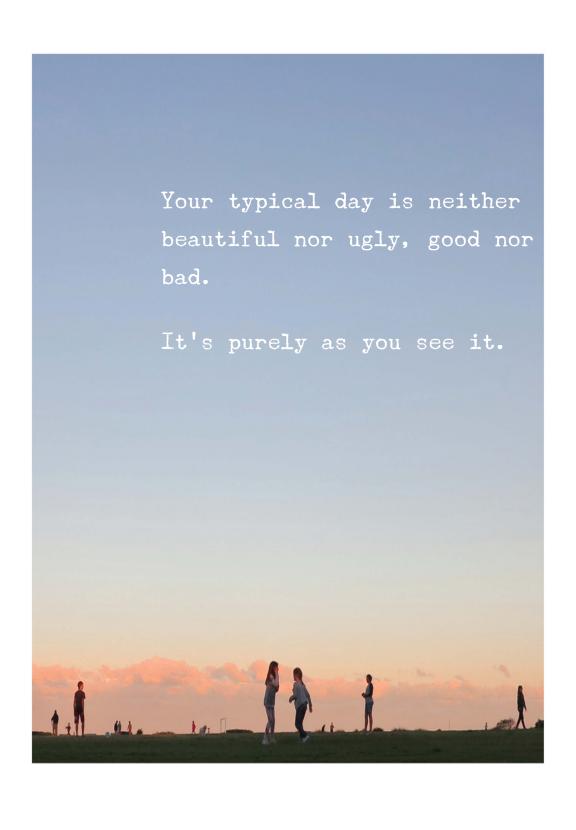


Written and photographed by MATTHEW JOHNSTONE

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CAPTURING

MINDFULNESS

A guide to becoming present through photography

Written and photographed by Matthew Johnstone

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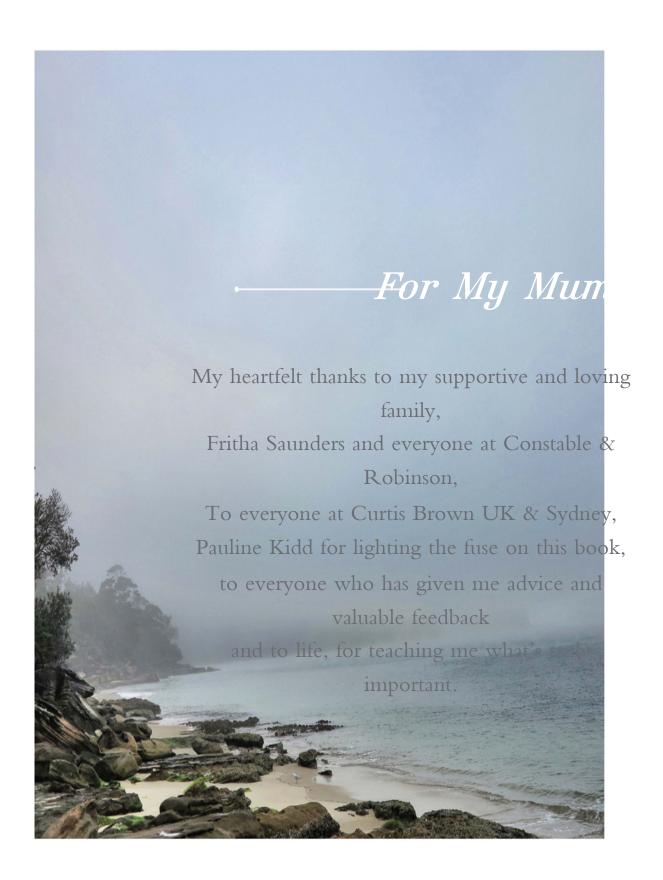
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Design by Matthew Johnstone



Foreword

During the course of making of this book people asked what it was about; I'd explain I was

creating a book about developing mindfulness through photography. I often got that look of a

dog that cocks its head when hearing a whistle somewhere in the distance.

For the average person *being in the moment, being present, becoming mindful* sound

familiar but these are rarely practised or understood.

Modern-day society is generally about deadlines, ladder climbing, list ticking, friend and family

wrangling, social networking, commuting and paying stuff off. All this 'busyness' can exact a

hefty toll on our mental wellbeing and physical health. When overloaded and constantly stretched,

our minds can become like an engine going at full throttle while in neutral.

There's a lot going on

yet we're not getting anywhere.

Mindfulness, simply put, is a heightened awareness or an act of paying close attention to what

we are doing, where we are and what we're thinking; all without judgement

Mindfulness can be practised during everyday activities such as eating, walking, listening,

doing the dishes and driving. In my mind, one of the most wonderful and creative conduits to

this often-elusive mind state is photography. I've been undertaking what I term a **photopresent**

practice for over 15 years and next to meditation this is one of the greatest ways I can attain

mindfulness in my day-to-day life. Photography, after all, is all about focusing and capturing

the moment.

I am not a technical or a professional photographer but I am truly passionate about light, colour,

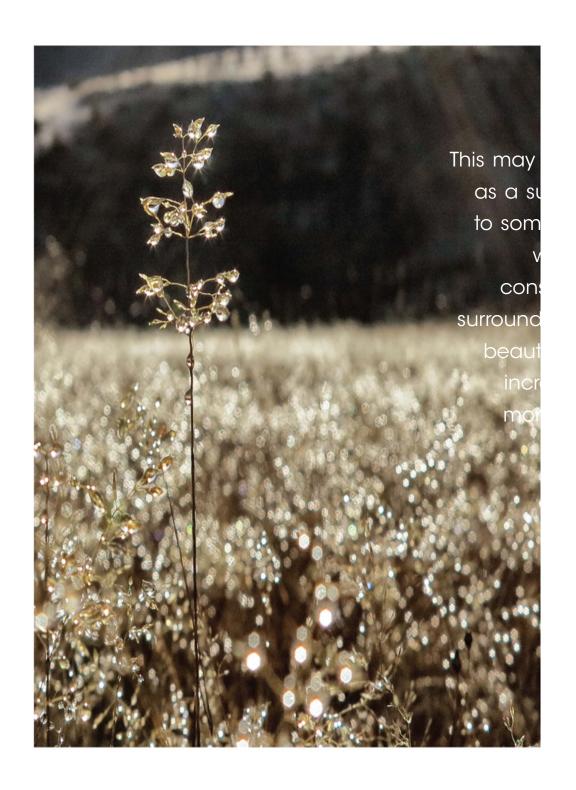
composition and trying to see the world different

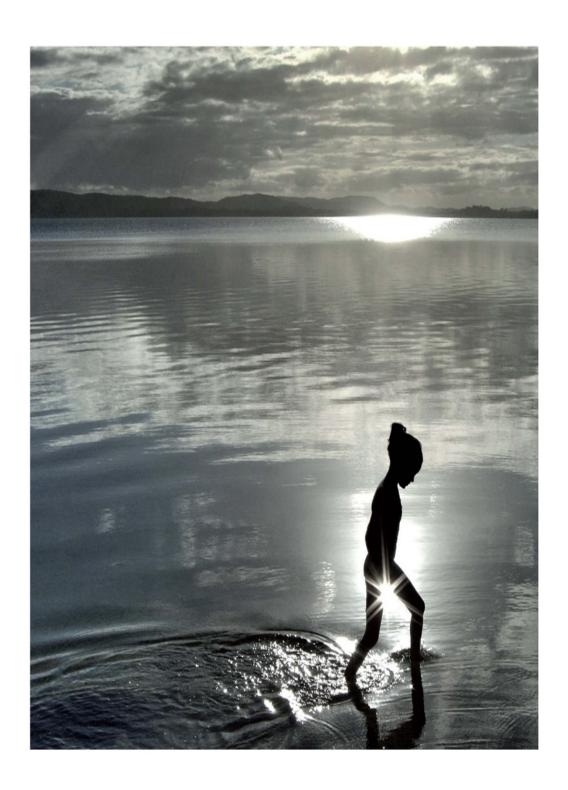
Photopresent for me is an excited quell am hyper-aware of all that is around me; time slows,

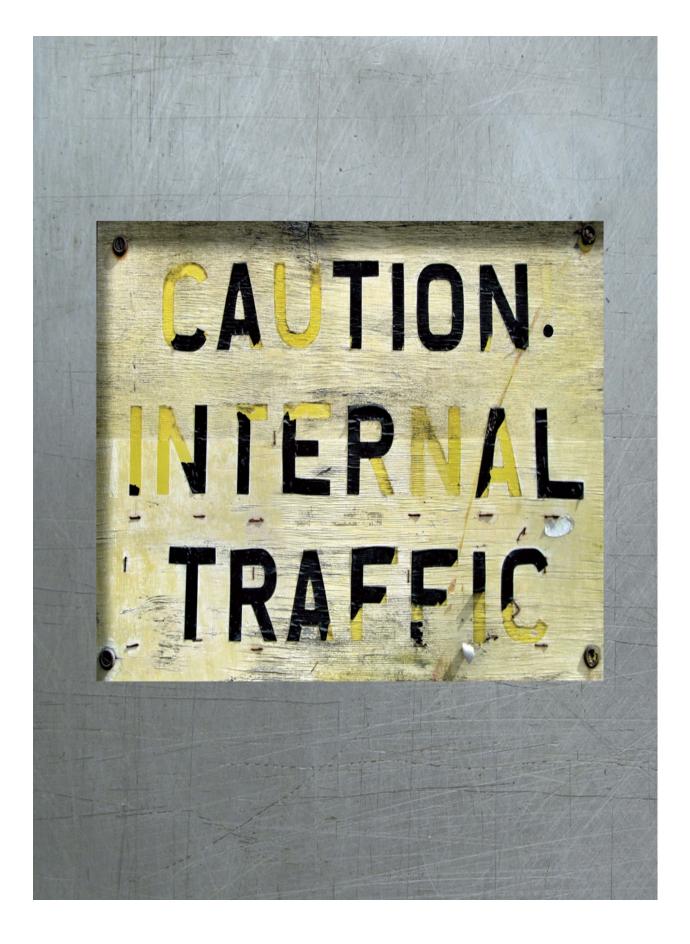
my mind and eye sharpen and there is no hing do directly in front of me.

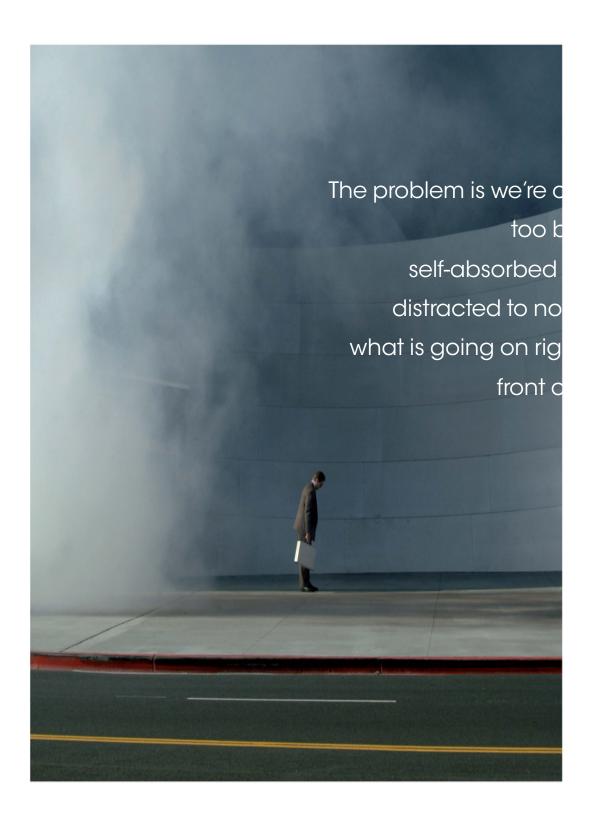
I truly hope the images within this book in spire you to go and find the space between a breath to capture the tick before a tock or simply moments.

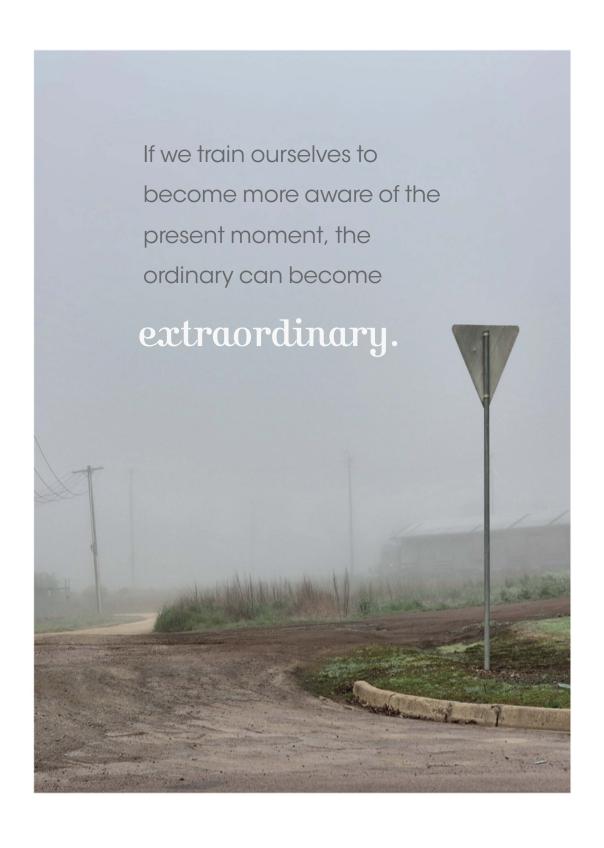
when it's just you and the universe.

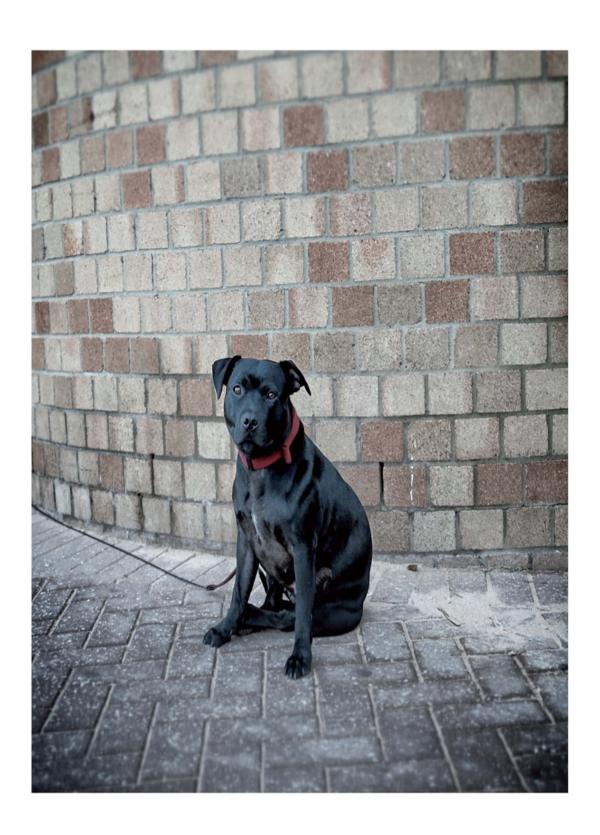


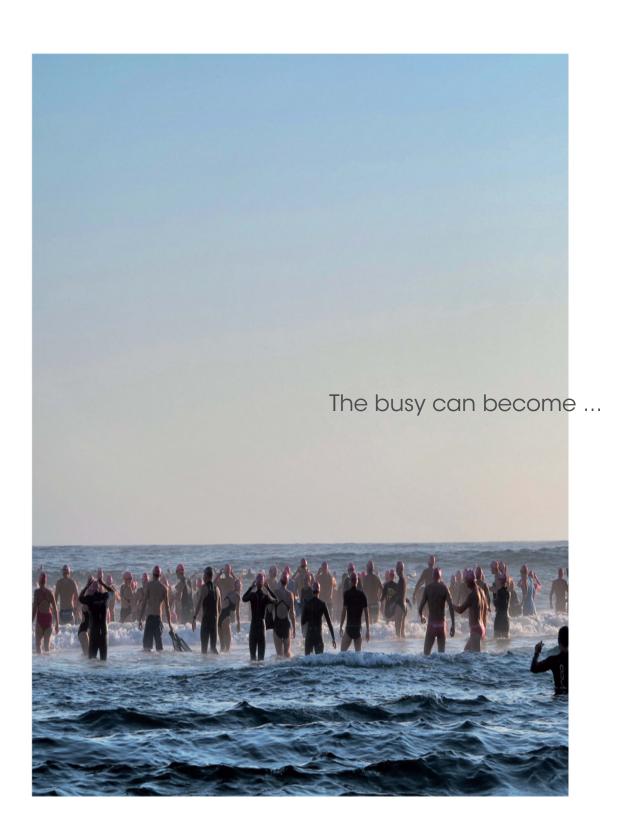










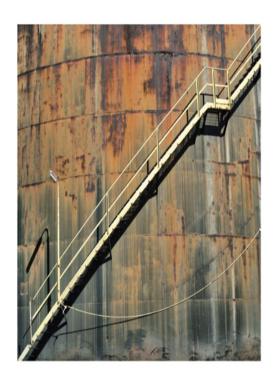


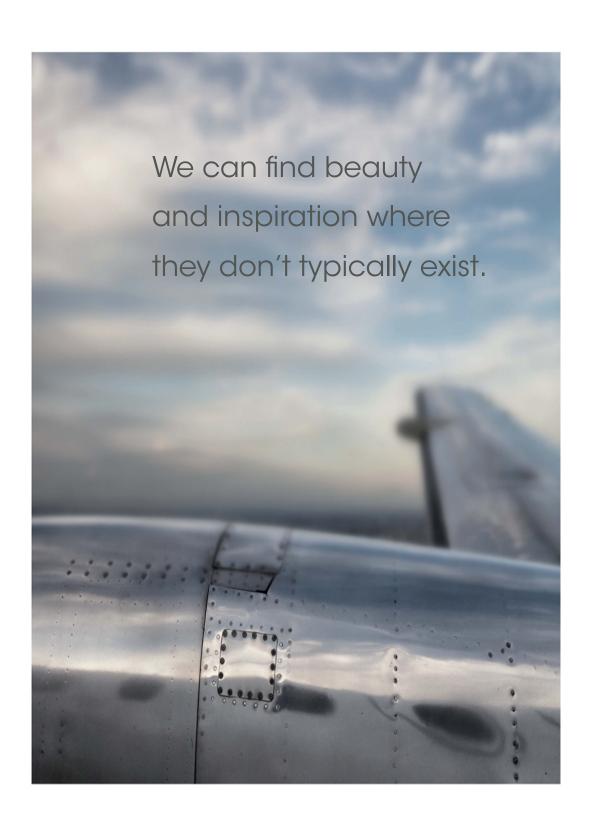












'Being in the moment' is easy to say yet tricky to do

for the simple reason our mind is constantly being pulled

in so many different and distracting directions.

Typically we are fast-forwarding to the future, rewinding

to the past or operating purely on autopilot.

Hence the present 'moment' is often missed or lost.

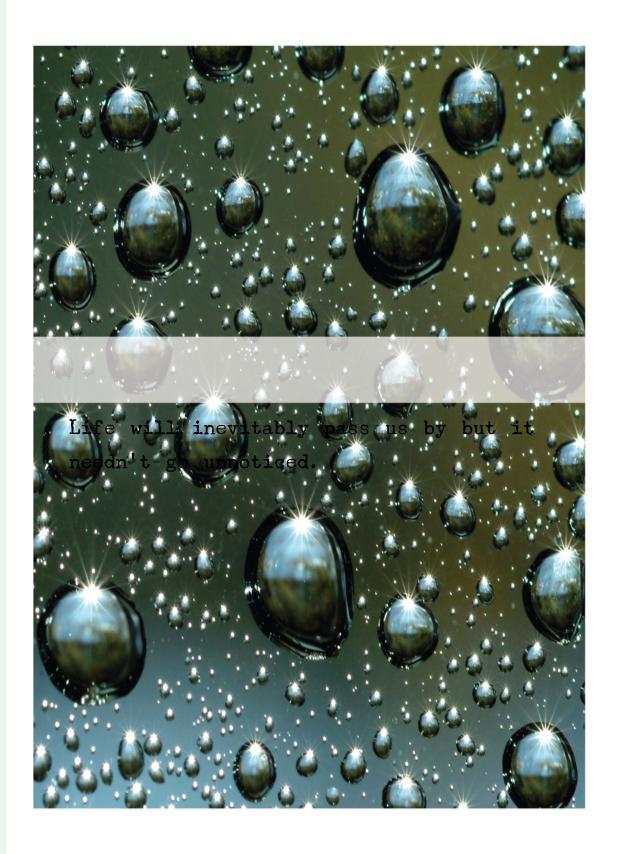
To become reconnected with our lives, learning mindfulness

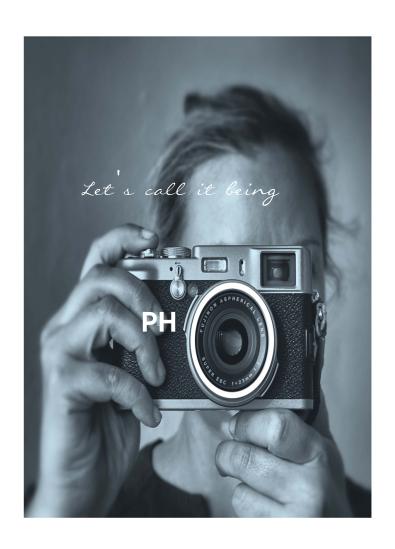
is not only life-affirming but it's incredibly good for our mental health and wellbeing.

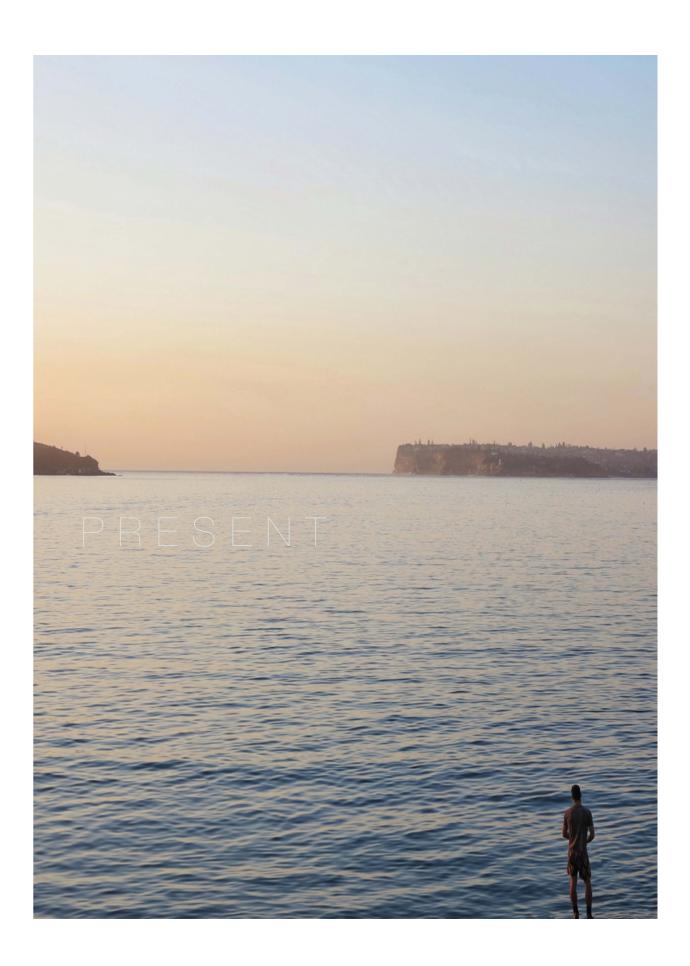
Mindfulness is not difficult, it merely requires a simple practice.

photographics of the state of the state

One of the most satisfying and creative ways to

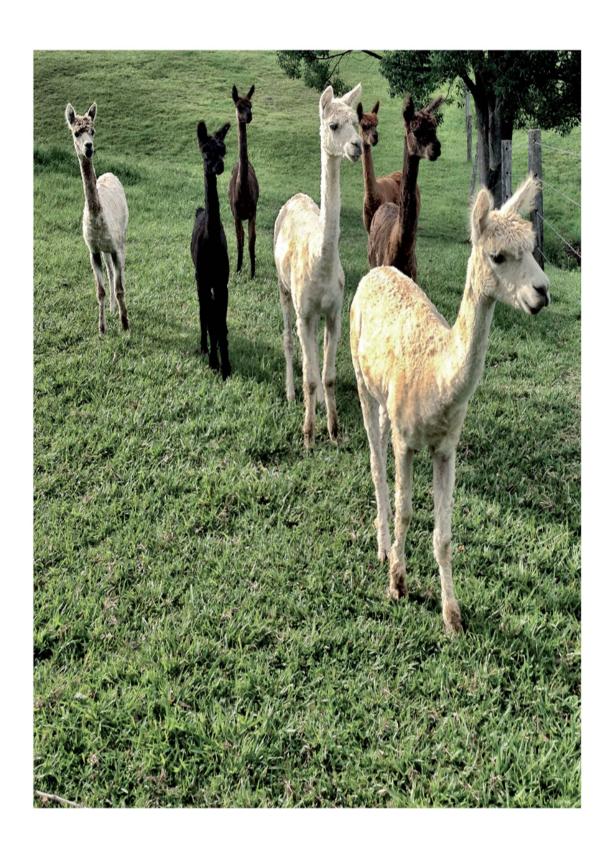




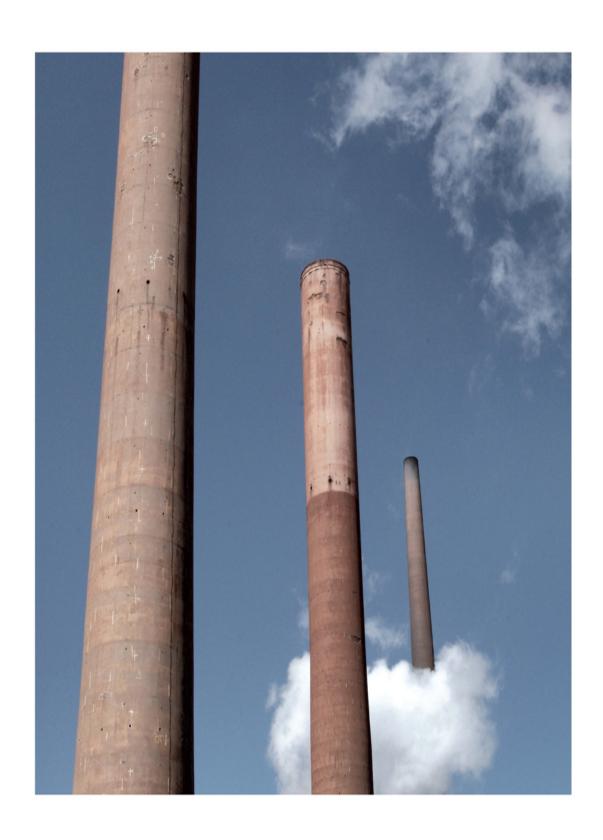




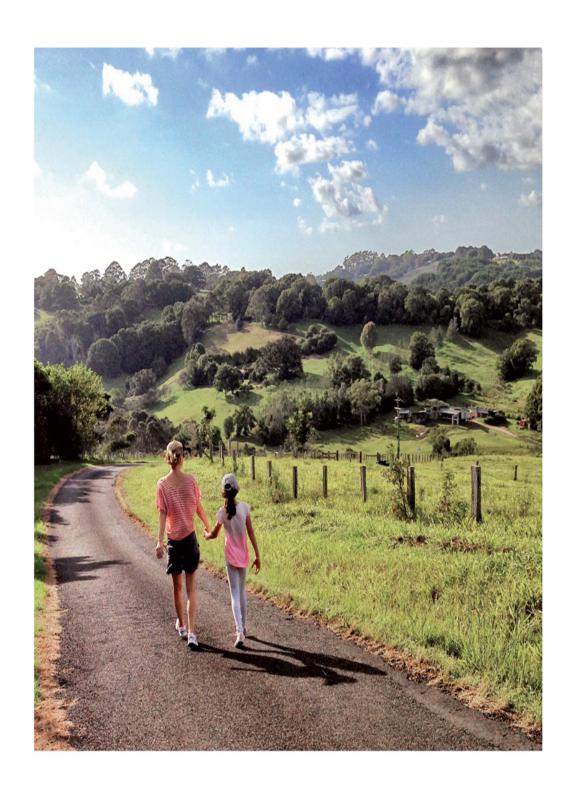


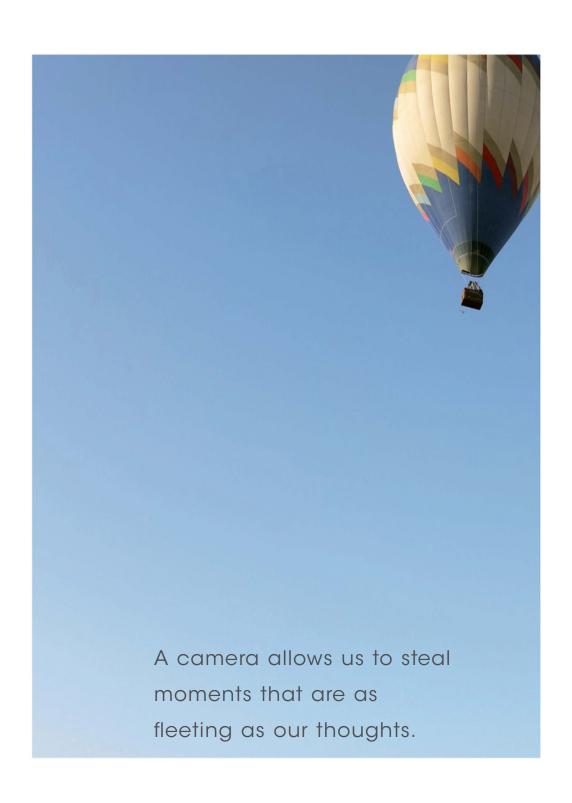






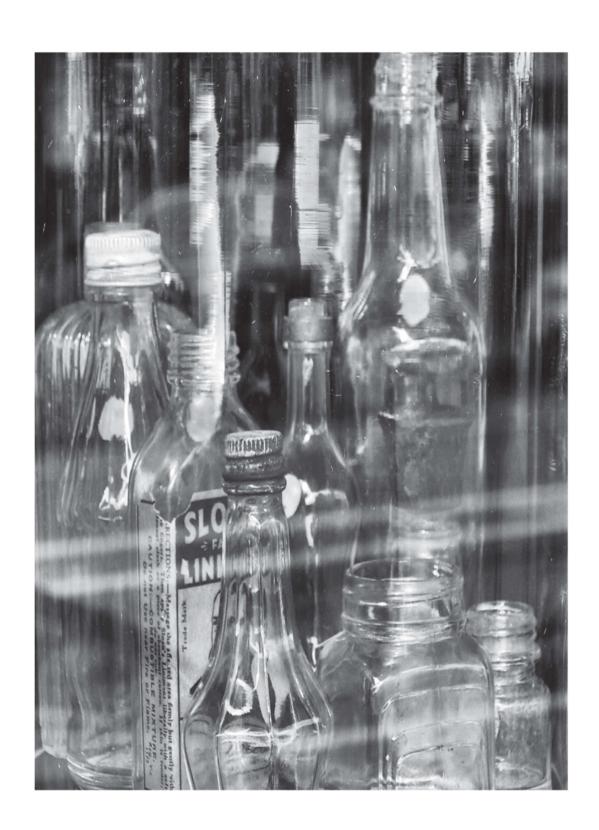




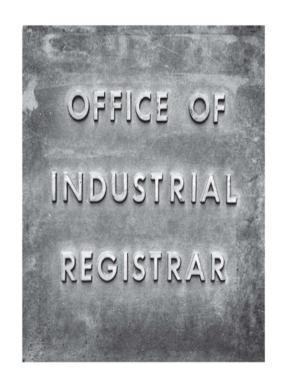




It encourages us to view the world in which we live

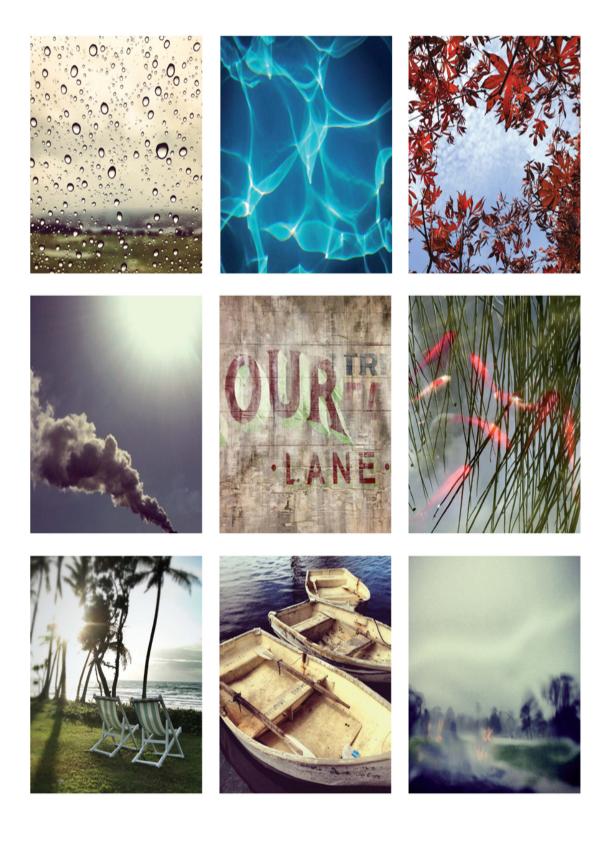












When we're present in the current moment we are no longer regretting the past or fearing the future.

We're simply appreciating I beauty in all its complexity.

This in itself can bring a certain calm and peacefulness.

It really is quite









FROM NOWHERE TO

NOW-HERE

Start with this moment **right here**, **right now** as you're holding this book.

Where are you? Are you in bed, on public transport, in a bookstore, at the office, at the library, sitting in your favourite chair?

Are you alone? Are you surrounded by others? Are you with someone special? Is it warm? Is it cold?

How are your thoughts: busy, vacant, foggy, agitated, tired, calm or happy?

Take a moment to centre yourself and then begin to mentally inhale your surroundings – try not to fixate on anything in particular. Try to pick up on the sounds, the smells and the light. Study this truly unique scene before you.

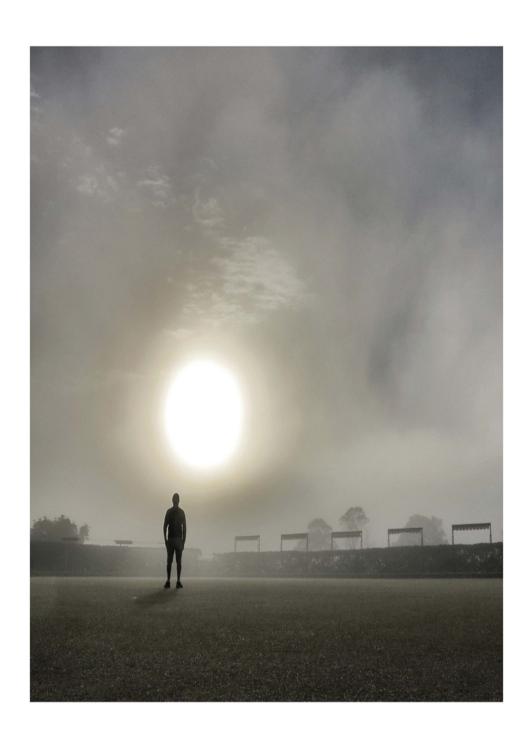
As you look around, consciously slow, lengthen and deepen your breath.

A slow and easy breath results in a relaxed and open mind.

Although everything around you may be busy, tell yourself to 'slow down'.

Become a momentary epicentre of stillness.

Most importantly, try not to judge what you're feeling or seeing, simply observe it. 'Acceptance' is the key ingredient to becoming more present.









Now bring your attention to the book itself. Feel its weight in your hand. What's the texture of the paper? What different hues of colour do you see? What light or shadow do you see bouncing off the page?

Choose a word; study that word until it ceases to be one.

Observe your hands holding the book: study your thumb; find something about your thumb you've never noticed before.

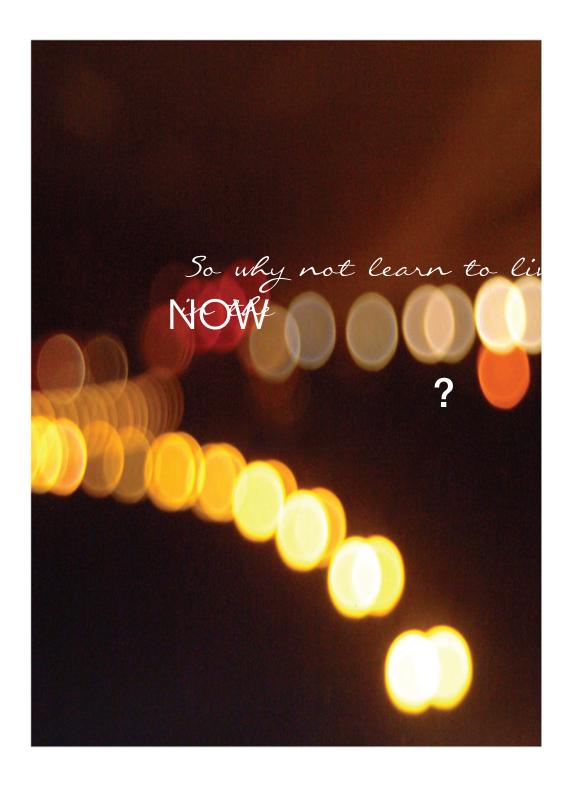
Become aware of the angle of your head, the nature of your breath, the touch of your clothing on your skin, your feet on the floor.

Again, hit the internal pause button, slow everything right down to this very moment; wherever you may be in the world.

If you can, shut your eyes for a moment and turn up the volume on all your other senses.

This moment you are experiencing right now will never happen again. There are, however, an infinity of other moments just around the corner waiting to be captured with your awareness and your camera.





Some quotes about mindfulness

'Mindfulness practice means that we commit fully in each moment to be present; inviting ourselves to interface with this moment in full awareness, with the intention to embody as best we can an orientation of calmness, mindfulness, and equanimity right here and right now.' Jon Kabat-Zinn,

Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life

'Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor.'

Thich Nhat Hanh, Stepping into Freedom: Rules of Monastic Practice for Novices

'Realise deeply that the present moment is all you have. Make the NOW the primary focus of your life.' Eckhart Tolle,

The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment

Some quotes about photography

'Look and think before opening the shutter. The heart and mind are the true lens of the camera.' Yousuf Karsh

'Be still with yourself until the object of your attention affirms your presence.'
Minor White

'Photography can only represent the present. Once photographed, the subject becomes part of the past.' Berenice Abbott

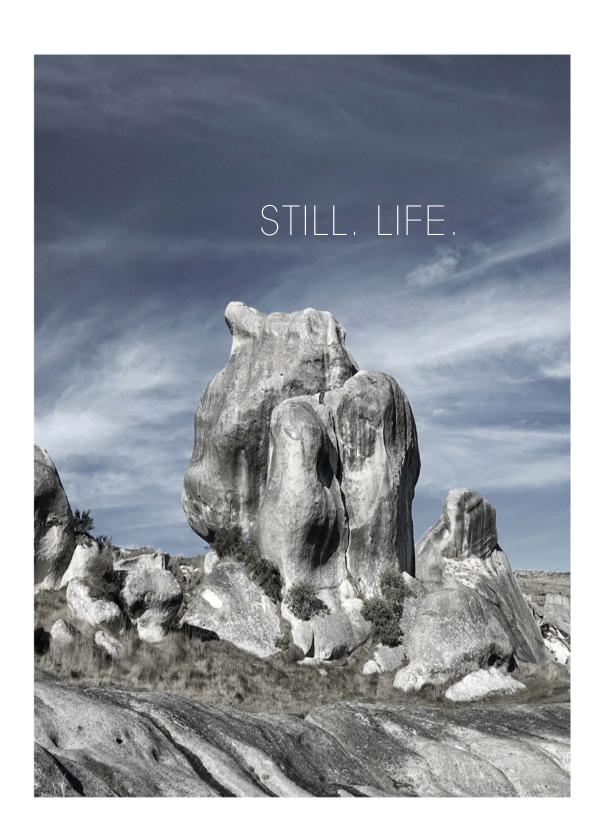












Thoughts to keep in MINDfulness

It could be said that people can lose entire moments by trying to photograph them: blowing out candles, first steps, the wedding kiss, a sunset, the portrait in front of a touristy vista, and so forth.

In itself, recording events for memory 'keepsakes' is not a bad thing but we can become so concerned about capturing what's happening or taking a good photograph that we actually miss the moment altogether. There may be physical proof that we were there, but often we're present and absent at the same time.

Being photopresent is something you set out to do with absolute intention.

It's a practice preferably done alone.

It's an 'eyes wide open' walking meditation.

It's not a time to worry about the technical aspects of photography.

It's a time to consciously slow down both mentally and physically and look at your world with a keen curiosity, as if seeing it for the first time.



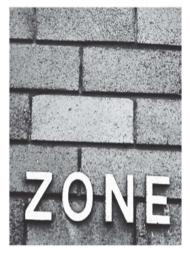






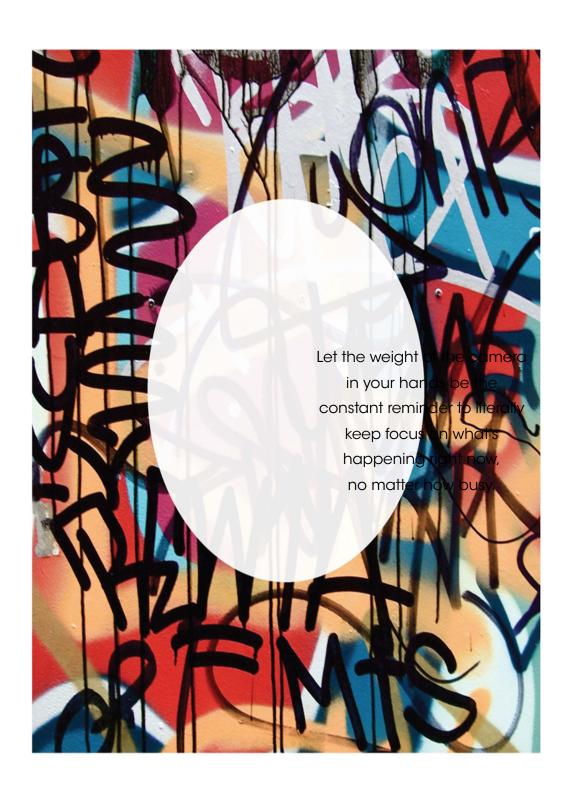


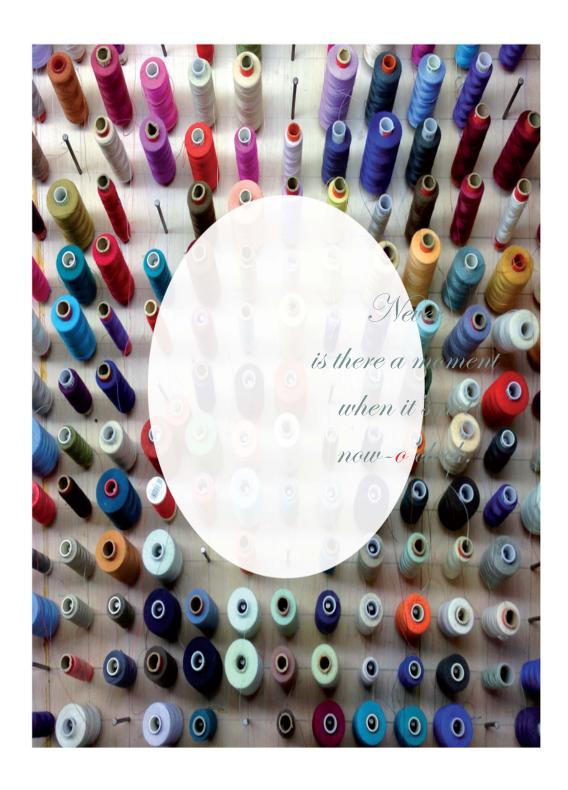


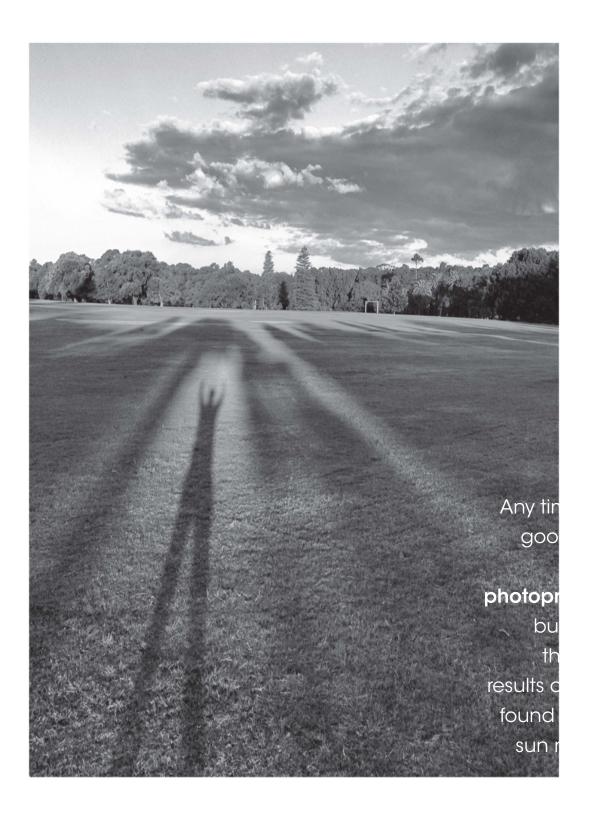


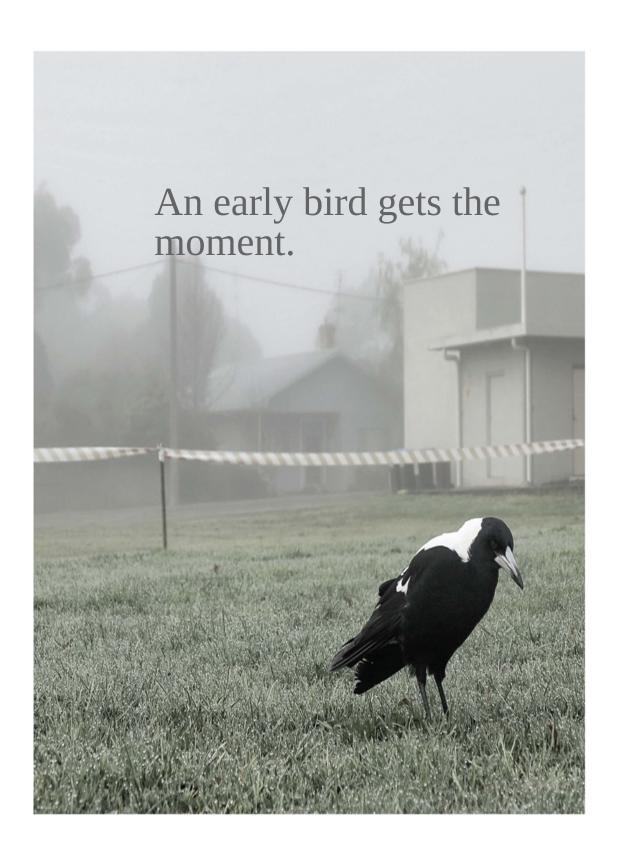


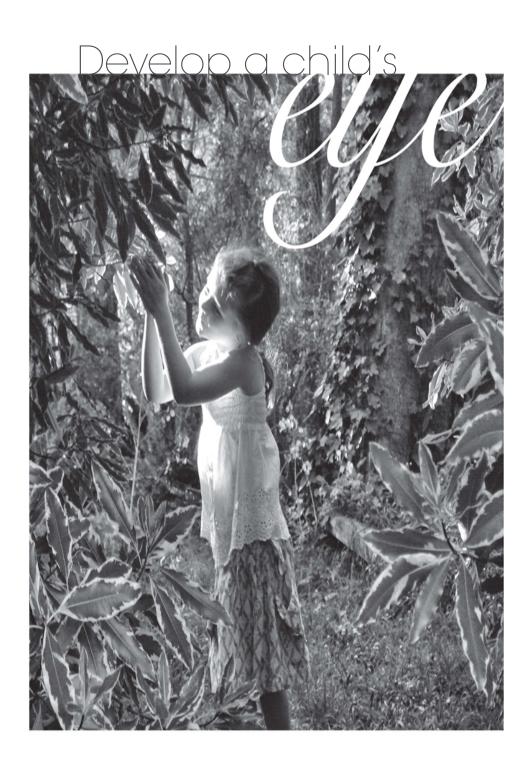












If you're looking for inspiration, look to a child. Children have an

amazing ability to be totally absorbed by what's in front of them.

Their world view is uncluttered, funny, adventurous, beautiful and

wonderfully simplistic. They are the masters of nonjudgement.

They take the world as they see it and express themselves accordingly.

Developing a 'child's eye' can be helpful in your approach to taking photopresent images.

Practise being adventurous, playful and curious in the way you view

Lie on the ground
your surroundings no matter how familiar.
Shoot upside down, between your legs.

Dishegetrout to focus hould take a photograph:

- Be joyful. Be spontaneous. Be present.
- Pretend you don't care and you won't.

Not only will life become more interesting but so will your photographs.

BECOME A TROPHY HUNTER

Sometimes becoming photopresent can be easier if you have something in mind you'd like to be present about; it could be a colour, words on a wall, a sunrise, nature, people, clouds, and so forth. Hunting an object of your desire can help you stay tuned into your surroundings.

You could also limit how many photos you take; this will force you to be more selective as well as more observant.

It's important to remember that being **photopresent** is about creating some time for yourself while heightening your awareness. You don't have to share your imagery with anyone and there is nothing to prove. It's not so much about the outcome; it's more the process and the practice.

Hopefully, over time, mindfulness should infuse your life and the way that you look and interact with it. With or without a camera, it's a wonderful thing to be aware of where you are, what you're doing and how you're feeling.

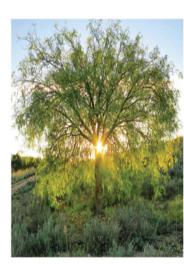
It's hard to be present all the time but with perseverance we can begin to take control of a wayward mind. We soon discover a calmer way of looking at the world and ourselves.



























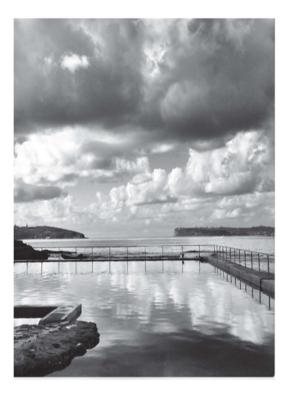


Someone once said that they thought my photographs had a sense of

isolation or emptiness to them. There may be some truth in this but I see

them more as having a sense of peace, stillness and tranquillity. I say this

because it's what I feel when I take them and it's often what I feel when I look at and reflect on them.

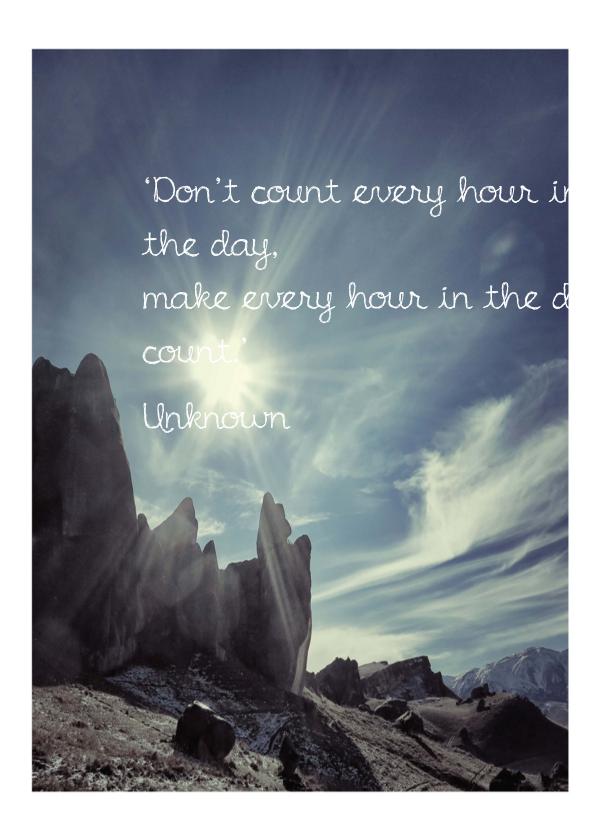




To me they are reminders that stillness can be found, harnessed and

appreciated in this frenetic, busy, socially networked world we inhabit.

I truly hope they inspire you to become more aware of whatere.



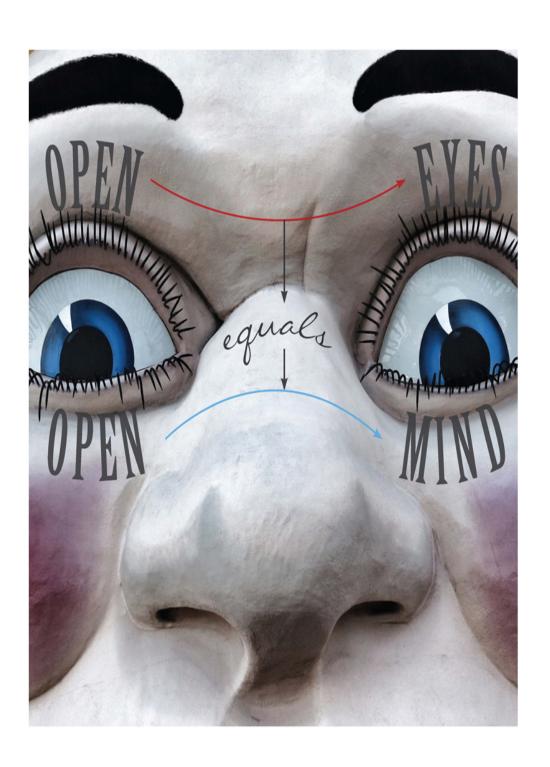


Final thoughts

- 1) I can't explain why, but one of the best residual and beneficial knock-on effects from a meditation practice is that you will naturally feel more present and engaged. It's a great springboard to being photopresent.
- 2) If you're going to use your smartphone while practising photopresent, switch it to 'Airplane Mode' so you're not tempted by everything a smartphone has to offer.
- 3) One way to focus more accurately on your surroundings is to keep a thin black piece of paper or card with a rectangle or square cut out of it. This can help frame whatever you may be looking at. It's also bigger than a viewfinder or an LCD screen.

There is one included at the back of this book.

4) Go slow. Breathe slow. Be curious. Don't judge. See fresh. Take time.



Recommended reading

Collard, Dr Patrizia (2013) Journey into Mindfulness:

Gentle Ways to Let Go of Stress and Live in the Moment, Gaia Books Ltd

Dalai Lama (2010) The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living,
Riverhead Books

Harris, Dr Russ (2008) The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living, Robinson Publishing

Kabat-Zinn, Jon (2004) Wherever You Go, There You Are:



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