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25

Lessons

The Art of Living

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"If" on page 22 by Rudyard Kipling. "To be or not to be" monologue on page 65 by William Shakespeare.

Portrait on page 102 and on back cover in HP *Be Brilliant* advertisement by Gillian Crosson. 72nd Street portrait on pages 94 and 103 taken by Chelsea Hollander, design by Lorenzo.

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For Nicky and Enzo

You know what Nicky?

“You love me...”

That’s right...I do love you.

Advance Praise for 25 Lessons and Flickr Testimonials



The Catcher in the Rye generation now has a new book to call their favorite, finally!

Forget learning about being in *the power of now*—forget reading about stopping to appreciate life—forget studying how to see the special moments—this book is the experience, *it is the moment*.

After reading *25 Lessons* you can no longer settle for your status quo. Lorenzo! steals the night, capturing all he sees, teaching us through photography what he experiences as he goes through a metamorphosis from the inside out.

If you yourself don't drastically change after reading, aren't purely inspired, then start on page one again, because you weren't listening. Take it all in and begin on your own journey of self-discovery.

— **Beth Jannery**, Author of *Simple Grace: Living a Meaningful Life*—

Testimonials from flickr.com

Jim Van Meter: Rochester, NY, USA

"...I had never seen any other photographer who was able to capture the essence of NYC street life in such a unique and distinctive style... in many of my conversations on great photographers, I frequently mention Lorenzo's work and prided myself for my early stage recognition of his talent.

Lorenzo has been able to capture moments in time, which allow the viewer to study relationships that cannot be observed in the real-time dynamics of life. Even more intriguing are Lorenzo's sequential photographs, each one remarkable in itself, but viewed together are nothing less than a visual urban poem. It has been my pleasure to watch Lorenzo's rapid growth as a leading photographer of our time."



Carmen Padró (pijus): Barcelona, Spain

"... No hace falta entender de fotografía ni ser un experto en temas formales de técnica, luz o composición para quedarte sin palabras delante de su obra. Y eso, probablemente, es lo mejor.

Sus fotografías llegan a todo el mundo, independientemente de la edad, religión, nacionalidad o estatus social.

Lorenzo adora Nueva York y eso se nota. Retrata como nadie su ciudad, sus gentes, sus colores, sus sentimientos y, en general, su atmósfera. En realidad, todo se resume en la esencia; como fotógrafo, no reproduce simplemente lo que tiene delante, sino que es capaz de capturar su esencia, su espíritu. Y eso, que él consigue en cada foto de manera natural, es algo realmente muy difícil de alcanzar."

Leni Miranda: Rio de Janeiro, Brasil

"Lorenzo é um grande fotógrafo, entrar em seu flickr é a certeza de poesia em forma de fotos, um raro talento, habilidade excepcional em se comunicar através das imagens. Sua fotografia é movimento, emoção, um olhar atento, apurado e artístico do mundo que nos cerca, por onde transitam cores, formas, impressões e muita paixão. É um prazer ímpar poder admirar sua obra e seu belíssimo trabalho..."



Barry Shapiro (barryshap): Los Angeles, CA, USA

"Let's cut to the chase: Lorenzo is a master. His body of work is some of the very best on flickr and may very well be some of the best being done in the medium today. His street/city work follows in the tradition of Paul Strand, Cartier-Bresson, Garry Winogrand and Larry Friedlander. But he doesn't simply imitate nor work within previously defined boundaries. Lorenzo's "street" approach goes beyond studied and safe, offering new vision, compelling the viewer to see what they have seen before differently... freshly. Lorenzo's work is not limited to a single genre. He transcends categorization... Great, great stuff. Inspired and inspiring... and educational.



Lorenzo's *25 Lessons* are a must for anyone who raises a camera to their eye. They are well thought out, deceptively simple—easy to grasp—and applicable to all phases of the photographic art, as seminal a piece of writing on the how of photography as Ansel's dissertation on the zone system. And make no mistake, they are not (merely) a basic primer for beginners. I found them to be reenergizing, perceptive and extremely useful.

No one can create images as Lorenzo has without integrating the tenets of discerning vision and the richness of details of life without having an extraordinary level of passion. It is clear Lorenzo is passionate—about his work... and about life. I have been touched by his story, his writings and by his work. I can't imagine anyone not being so."

John Terry: Newcastle, UK

"Literary and photographic genius. A man of the people. A fraction of what half of us could only wish to be. Keep up the inspiration Lorenzo."



Brenda George (princessbren2006): Adelaide, Australia

"Lorenzo...has a passion for life, photography and writing. He is a linguistic genius, a storyteller through words and pictures. He captures with his camera the world as he sees it, its feelings, love, beauty and all it that it has to offer..."



Christoph Moser (vividBreeze): Germany

"This guy is amazing... Many photos are shot with an old Canon PowerShot—how many people are able to get out the best of this rather vintage camera? The themes, angles and exposure are brilliant!"



Testimonials *continued on page 114*

25 Lessons: The Art of Living

Preface

In the spring of 2005 my wife and I agreed to separate. It must have been a sign of some significance because for once we agreed on something. We had gone through years of discord, until finally, she asked me to move out.

It was either this or a divorce, and I wasn't ready to accept the latter. But I had nowhere to go. For the first few days I called all the hostels and cheap hotels I could find in New York City, but to no avail. It would just be too expensive to stay anywhere; there was a mortgage and lots of bills to pay. And since my wife stayed at home with our two children and worked part-time on the weekends, we were, for all intensive purposes, a one-income household.

In other words, we couldn't afford for me to move out.

Instead, she agreed to let me sleep in the basement of our family home, until I found somewhere to go. It was an uncomfortable alternative, but at least I wasn't homeless.

Out of shame and a stubborn streak of independence, I did not tell anyone that we were separated. Neither family nor friends were aware of my situation. As days passed into weeks, I started to feel more and more alone. I decided that I would seek help and talk to someone, someone who might be understanding and non-judgmental, forgiving perhaps; someone who might ultimately point me in the right direction.

Having grown up Catholic, one of my first thoughts was to go see a priest. They were good, guiding, and spiritually redeeming counselors.

So, on one cool spring morning, I walked into a little sanctuary called the Church of the Transfiguration, which was three blocks from my office, and took a seat in one of the back pews to listen to the presiding priest give a sermon. I had passed the church every day on my way to work for the last six years and had long felt the urge to attend one of their spring lunchtime concerts; but I always found myself eating lunch at my desk instead.

The church itself had been around for over 150 years, and for most of its history had served as a refuge for those in need. Its basement served as a safe haven for runaway slaves escaping via the Underground Railway. And during the Civil War, the founder of the church, Dr. George Hendric Houghton, took in African-Americans threatened by enraged immigrants participating in the Draft Riots of 1863, despite warnings from the police that they could not ensure his safety.

In 1870, a gentleman by the name of Joseph Jefferson sought a sanctuary to hold the funeral of his dear friend George Holland, a thespian. Rejected everywhere, Jefferson was near despair when he was led to the Church of the Transfiguration around the corner. Jefferson then responded by exclaiming, "God Bless the Little Church Around the Corner!"

The sobriquet has stuck for the last 137 years. And ever since, the theater community has frequently viewed the church as their own. In 1923, an actor's guild was formed at the Little Church, and the partnership between those of the cloth and those of the stage eventually succeeded in turning the church into an historical landmark in 1973.

Preface

In this serene place, listening to the priest finish up his sermon, I distilled my emotions and let them spill out. By the time I had a chance to speak with him, I was all choked up and had to excuse myself a few times. I could barely say what I had rehearsed repeatedly while waiting.

In those few moments — that seemed like an hour — I demurely made a request for a meeting. He asked that I return at noon.

Seven minutes before noon: I get up from my desk and walk up the block and around the corner. I enter in by the red iron gate, through the small garden, past a spray of pink blossoms, and into the quiet church office where the receptionist asked me to wait in a little room for Father Harry.

When he came in a few minutes later, Father Harry smiled and kindly asked me how he might be of service. I began sheepishly, but soon a deluge of sorrow poured out, and I broke down and wept, just like a man who had been thrown out of his home and had kept it all inside for weeks. Father Harry listened attentively. At one point, he placed his hand atop mine, and I immediately felt a certain peace, perhaps the comfort of God, overcome me.

It didn't matter that I had renounced my faith more than 20 years earlier, as a student at a college prep run by the Jesuit Order. I did, however, continue to believe in some part of what I had been taught through Sunday mass and my saintly mother; I believed strongly in the Christian principles of love, forgiveness, altruism, tolerance, and acceptance, especially in the purest sense as they were originally laid out as allegories in the Gospels that recounted important moments in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

After telling Father Harry about my idea of finding a shelter or social service center where I might be able to volunteer, in exchange for a little space on a floor to sleep on and a small hook to hang my suit, he paused and then said, "We actually need a little help here ourselves. And we have an empty apartment where you might be able to stay."

At that moment I couldn't help but feel a bubbling of renewed faith. Father Harry's act of kindness reconnected me to that important spirituality, one that I had nurtured for so long as an easy-going college student in California, but that I had progressively lost hold of over the years.

For I could see in Father Harry's eyes that he believed in me, without any doubt in his heart. That moment made an everlasting impression upon me, one that inspired me to continue looking forward toward making the best of my situation.

Keeping to his promise, Father Harry informed me two weeks later that the Little Church, indeed, had a place for me to stay if I was willing to help around the house (of God). We agreed that I could occupy the studio apartment right above the sacristy, the small room where the sacred ritual vessels and vestments are stored and where the priests get dressed and prepare for mass.

The tacit agreement was that I could stay at least until June, when the apartment would be razed to make way for a 50 story residential tower.

Preface, *continued*

Thus, I found myself living in a little church in the middle of Manhattan, in virtual isolation, for three months. During that tumultuous time, I had a chance to reexamine my life. I expected to catch up on all those books I had been meaning to read, to go to the gym, to meditate on what had happened in my marriage.

What I didn't expect was that I would end up going out every night into the city to take photos, tapping into a well of pent-up creative passion that would change my life. I never expected that viewing the world anew through the lens of the camera would prove to be an incredible journey, reminding me of some important lessons, lessons that I had forgotten somewhere along the way.

Ironically, I had given up on traditional film photography long ago, when, during my first trip to New York City in 1989, I ruined the first 35mm I ever bought by accidentally placing my oily lunch in the same tote bag. Thank God the digital revolution came along to reignite my passion, because my rediscovery of photography helped me to rediscover *life itself*.

Lesson 1: Everything is Beautiful

Everything has its beauty, but not everyone sees it.
— Confucius —

Soon after Father Harry passed on the good news, I moved back into New York City. Although I had worked in Manhattan since I moved here from California 14 years ago to attend graduate school, I had spent the past four years in New Jersey.

What a blur those past years had been: Graduating from graduate school, taking a job, getting married, moving from Manhattan to Brooklyn; and then, when the little ground floor apartment in a brownstone became too small for a couple, their two-year old and a newborn—moving to Jersey.

Over the years I had felt increasingly trapped, as if I were going through the motions, and that my life had come full-circle to the frustrating boundaries of my youth. I was back in dreadful suburbia again, but this time with a wife, two kids, a corporate job and a mortgage in tow.

But now that I was suddenly “free,” so to speak, I suddenly had to determine what I was going to do with all this extra time.

At first, I thought I would hole up like a monk and study everything that I hadn't had the time to focus on—foreign languages, art, science, philosophy, many of my greatest intellectual interests that I had neglected over the years.

Then serendipity struck. Around the same time that I moved into the Little Church, I discovered a photography website called flickr.com, which allows users to connect to other photographers around the world to share their work, their words, advice, and inspiration. I found myself eager to make such connections with others, especially since using images was an obvious way to overcome the limits of language; a photo was certainly worth a thousand words, unspoken.

One night I decided to experiment. I went out with my camera and began taking photos of the city. I was instantly mesmerized by all the vibrant colors, all the people scurrying off to meet other people, and the taxis speedily transporting them from here to there.

That night the city changed before my very eyes. When I had first moved to the city, I had been awestruck by this metropolis of possibility. But once I started working, the grit, the grime and the grind of New York had quickly lost its charm, and the paranoid, frantic and chagrined attitude of the city and her inhabitants no longer inspired me as it had done before.

But suddenly, with camera in hand, the city was no longer a dark and foreboding place; it was no longer the labyrinth of a rat race. No, now, through the camera's lens, I realized how welcoming the city actually is. The camera, I discovered, allowed me to stop and look, to step out of my hurried “I've got to get to work!” or “I've got to get home” mode; the camera allowed me to focus on life itself. For the pictures see what we do not see, if only because we are too busy to see them.



“If something is not beautiful, it is probably not true.” **John Keats**



Eventually, I began waiting on street corners and in the middle of sidewalks just to see what happened, to watch and appreciate the beauty of the moment in motion, and, hopefully, to get a few good pictures in the process.

At the end of the night I had taken a few hundred photos. I proceeded to edit and post these new photos online. I concluded that I would be wasting a golden, perhaps once in a lifetime, opportunity if all I did was stay inside and read every night. Besides, the books weren't going anywhere, but life was passing me by faster than ever before, and I had a rare opportunity to visually capture many of its wonderfully fleeting moments.



And on top of it all, I had fallen in love with New York City all over again.

Now that I was spending a lot more time away from my children, I realized how beautiful, how truly meaningful, they made my life. I did my best to convey this to my sons when I called them every night.



More than ever before, my boys became my favorite models. Photographing them at every chance I got, I learned and practiced the vibrant subtleties of portraiture, including the need to create and manipulate an organic environment in which your subjects will not only behave naturally, but will also evoke expressions worth capturing.

Taking up photography allowed me to embrace the present, so that I could set out to make the most of every moment, stretching each night into a lifetime, seizing every second as if to capture and tame time itself.



The 19th century poet John Keats once said, “If something is not beautiful, it is probably not true.” That's because *Everything is Beautiful*, if only because truth itself is relative.

Hence, we must constantly remind ourselves that Everything is Beautiful; and sometimes you just have to see it from a different angle, point of view or perspective, in order to appreciate its true aesthetic worth and ineffable value.

It truly amazes me how some of the most extraordinary photos are taken of the most commonplace things, places and people—those subjects that we all tend to overlook.



All of us know of people for whom the sky is always falling or who whine about every little inconvenience, perceived insult or inconsideration. Their world is not very beautiful because they have chosen to view the world as such.

The way you choose to see the world—and life—is ultimately how the world and life will be for you. I've chosen and continue to choose to see it as something that is amazing and beautiful.

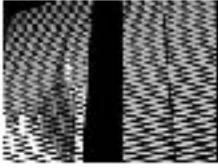


Thus, for me the truth is that we live in a world that is rife with beauty, for life itself is beautiful, and living is a beautiful thing—if only because living itself is a luxury. By choosing to see things as such, I prime myself to be open to them, to see, feel and hear them as they unfold before me.

Taking pictures allowed me to be free again, allowed me to be me again, and let me express the beauty that I saw everywhere, and in everyone.



Lesson 2: Everywhere You Go...



The walls were bare when I moved into the little apartment at the Little Church.

Although I had a splendid view of the Empire State Building from one of the windows, the barren walls made me feel somewhat lonely. So I decided to put up some photos I had taken in order to make it feel homier.



At the time, I was taking primarily black and white stills because I was far from schooled in how to capture motion, a moment, or simply the true vibrancy of color itself.

The wonderful thing about beginning with black and white photos is that it allows one to focus on one important element in a photo—*form*. Desaturated of color, a photo will reveal what I see as its skeleton: the lines, the curves, the patterns, the strong and exquisitely subtle blocks of light that together create the form of the photo.

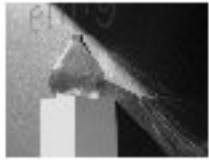


One day, I came across a little used bookstore on 18th Street, somewhere on the periphery of Chelsea. Outside, on the sidewalk, in the clearance rack, I found a ragged old book of paintings entitled *Images de la Peinture Française Contemporaine* (Images of French Contemporary Painting), which I purchased for \$1. For me, that dollar went a long way, for the inspiration that I derived from it was priceless. Inside the book, along with biographies of painters such as Paul Cezanne, Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso, Henri Rousseau, Georges Braque, and Georges Seurat, were photos of one example of their work.



After perusing through my new treasure, I got an idea. I immediately visualized how these colorful pictures could serve as the perfect complement to my own photographs.

Thus, after mounting my selections to foamcore, I interspersed them throughout the room; a colorful painting here, a black and white photo there... The paintings I chose to include were: *Le Sacre-Coeur* (The Sacred Heart) by Odilon Redon, *Femme Qui Tire Son Bas* (Woman Drawing Up Her Stocking) by Henri de Toulouse-Latrec, *Les Tournesols* (The Sunflowers) by Vincent Van Gogh, *Odalisque* by Henri Matisse, and *La Sainte Face* (The Holy Face) by Georges Rouault.



Besides serving as colorful decorations to the room, the work of these great painters served to inspire me, for I realized that—despite the depressing side of the separation—something special was happening to me. I was going through my own metamorphosis closeted up in this little room, this chrysalis. I was experiencing a transfiguration that would change my life forever—I was becoming an artist, something that I had wanted to be for as long as I could remember.



Looking around, I saw that the paintings I chose included pictures of flowers, Jesus Christ and harlots. I wasn't trying to be irreverent by placing these images side by side; if anything, my intentions were quite the opposite. For I strongly felt that the Christian principle of *Agape*—that one should love one and all—was akin to finding beauty in everything.

Lesson 2: Everywhere You Go...

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once described *Agape* in the following manner:

Agape is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return, it is the love of God operating in the human heart. On this level of love, man can love his enemies while yet hating their actions. 'It is a love in which the individual seeks not his own good, but the good of his neighbor.'

Like *Agape*, my passion for photography became an “overflowing love” that, at first, sought nothing in return. I simply took hundreds, and then thousands, of photos because I loved doing so. It was only when blog after blog began citing my work that I realized this new avocation could become something more than just another fleeting hobby.

In addition to stirring a proactive love of beauty, art, and life, the paintings I hung up in my little room also encouraged me to pursue learning how to best use color in my photos.

I consider myself first and foremost a writer. Writing was my first love and my mistress, my whore and my confidant, as well as my muse. As a result, I take photographs as if I were writing, composing a poem about what I am seeing at the moment that I stoop or run or brace myself and then—click!

I soon discovered that every once in a while, if I was ready and equipped, I was able to capture absolutely exquisite moments when all the elements simply fell together and created a photo that was a marvel to look at.

My pursuit of this type of picture was quite akin to the art of a well known photographer and painter by the name of Henri Cartier-Bresson, a Frenchman whose style eventually came to be known as one that captures “The Decisive Moment,” a term coined by Cardinal von Retz. The American publisher of Cartier-Bresson’s first English edition of his work, Dick Simon, used von Retz’s phrase as the title of Cartier-Bresson’s book (originally titled *Images à la Sauvette*), the first photodocumentary of decades of his work.

French poet Yves Bonnefoy aptly summarizes the magical quality of Bresson’s style in his description of his photograph *Place de l’Europe in the Rain* (1932): “How was he able to recognize the analogy between the man running across the plaza and the poster in the background so quickly, how could he compose a scene out of so many fleeting moments—a scene that is as perfect in detail as it is mysterious in its totality?”

Over the year following my stay at the Little Church I found that I too had a knack for capturing such decisive moments, especially as they occurred in the streets of New York City.

In retrospect, I also came to find out that Cartier-Bresson and I shared the same philosophy in regards to the equipment we used. The vast majority of his photos were taken with a Leica 35mm rangefinder camera with a 50mm lens, which in a sense is equivalent to the point-and-shoot I have used for all my photos, considering the much more powerful equipment that was available to both of us.

In photography, the smallest thing can be a great subject.
The little human detail can become a leitmotif.

—Henri Cartier-Bresson—



Lesson 2: Everywhere You Go...



Although I have been encouraged by fellow photographers to upgrade to something like an “SLR” (single-lens reflex), I realized that these heavier, more conspicuous, much more expensive and higher-quality cameras were not suited to my off-the-cuff, hit-and-run, street style. Cartier-Bresson believed much the same thing as he felt that he needed to carry a minimal amount of equipment because it needed to serve him as a “sketchbook, an instrument of intuition and spontaneity, the master of the instant which, in visual terms, questions and decides simultaneously.”



With the aid of digital equipment though, I have been able to take this a step further by capturing a series of sequential “decisive moments,” in which I have documented a moment in time, much as someone might do with a video camera, but in a fashion that stops time, so that one can actually see how a moment evolves or tumbles or explodes with action, energy, and color.

Oddly enough, a lot of people don’t see this and complain that they don’t understand why I post so many photos of the same thing.



“The same thing?” I often retort, if only to myself. To me, almost every photo has something new to offer that wasn’t in the previous or following shot—an emerging smile, a coincidental pairing of background and foreground elements, a sudden change in sunlight—all these things, and so-so-so many more, really do make each photo quite special to me. I continued to post photos in this manner, and after only a year on flickr I had posted more than 15,000 images.



Photography had become my passion, my obsession, my expression of love. Moreover, I became frustrated whenever I missed what I imagined to be the “perfect picture,” because exponentially I was beginning to see beauty all around me.

The late great Pop Art artist Andy Warhol perhaps said it first, but the message bears repeating. So, I’m saying it again: if you are an aspiring photographer or artist even—carry your camera everywhere you go, for you’re damned if you don’t.



I know this to be all too true, because there have been far too many great shots that I’ve missed simply because I decided to leave my camera behind — usually as an excuse to concentrate on some menial task that I had neglected in the wake of my latest passion.

Alas, I often found myself lamenting the sweet opportunities missed, and each time I concluded that I had been truly amiss with the decision to “just let it rest.”

Ah, but there is no rest for the true enthusiast; there is no repose when you are passionate about something and know you have a gift that needs to be nurtured.



When you see, feel, and believe that everything is beautiful, everything is bound to pop out at you and plead for recognition — “Take a picture of me! And me! Me!”—the inanimate will suddenly come alive and provide an endless source from which to appreciate life and create one’s art.

And so—you better be ready.

