



B DON'T L N K

HOW TO
TELL A
STORY
IN 1/500
OF A
SECOND

BY
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Previous page: Reading the eyes of President Clinton with the context explained here this copy is for position only. **Above:** Lone soldier Pulitzer Prize winner caption goes here. **Right:** Cambodian girl tearful moment explains details right here blah blah blah this is for position only. **Next page:** Describing the circumstances of the Luna bird shadow blah blah blah this caption goes here.

I'm a storyteller who has a fraction of a second to tell the tale. The hardest part of my job has never been taking photographs. Rather, it is finding the heart of the story. You can tell a story in one picture or a dozen, but however it's done, you must have a strong point of view and a sense of how to convey it. Here are seven points to keep in mind.

Knowledge. Learn as much as you can about a situation or a subject before you show up with your camera. To be a good sports photographer, for instance, understanding the game is essential. Neil Leifer, one of the best sports shooters ever, knew every type of game so well that he could have been a great coach. People would talk about his uncanny ability to be on the right player and in the right spot at the right moment. In many cases, he could predict the next move in a game or fight. Those brilliant shots came as much from his hard work and knowledge as from his extraordinary skill. Knowledge, research, and legwork are essential to all photo projects, not just sports photography.

Anticipation. Predicting how you'll make a good photo is not the result of luck, but of observation. During the Vietnam War, one of my pictures showed a lone soldier making his way across a blown-away hillside. As I watched him heading toward trees that had been shredded by shrapnel, I framed what I thought would be a good composition and prayed he would walk into it. It was one of the images that won me the Pulitzer Prize. More recently, I was waiting for President and Mrs. Obama to arrive at their second Inaugural Ball on 21 January 2013. The big buzz was about fashion: What would she be wearing? All the other photographers had gathered on the far right side of the stage to catch them head-on when they first materialized. I decided to go it alone on the left. When the Obamas made their appearance, the crowd went wild, cheering and applauding as they descended the stairs. From my spot, I had a great view of the first couple, but more important, the best angle of Michelle Obama's dress, which trailed behind her for a moment, allowing her to show it off in all its red glory. The president looked at her proudly at that same instant, making it a two-run homer in one frame. It doesn't always work out that well, but in this case, my solo mission paid off.



Taking pictures is like driving: You don't just look at the car directly in front of you. You have to look down the road to be ready for the unexpected. I'm always thinking about what might happen. It could be an airplane framed through a window, a train pulling into a station, the sun setting as people play on a beach. Keep your eyes on the photo road.

Approach. When you tackle an assignment, spend an hour or two with your subjects before going into shooting mode. This is essential if you're going to hang out with a family, in a neighborhood, or in a small town where everyone knows everyone. If you're working somewhere more chaotic – in a refugee camp, for instance – always talk to the leaders before you do anything. If they welcome you, so will everyone else. You also can avoid trouble by determining who doesn't want to be photographed. When someone is shy or hostile, I take it as a challenge to win over that person with courtesy. Nine times out of 10 it will work.

Respect. There have been times in my career when I have chosen not to take a photo rather than to intrude on a private or sorrowful moment. On the other hand, I've also found that some people want others to know about their circumstances, even if they are tragic. Being a compassionate photographer sometimes means helping others share their grief with the world. Look at your subjects and treat them as if they were your own family, with respect, deference, and politeness.

Humor. If something you see is funny to you, it could translate into a humorous photo. I was in Venice, Calif., recently and saw a cormorant swimming in the ocean toward the shore. I immediately raised my Canon 5D Mark III and tracked him as he came in. To my astonishment, he started walking out of the waves, flapping his wings, and looking much like a commuter trying to catch a bus. I was laughing, but I never quit taking pictures. That same bird also made for a nice backlit iPhone photo, which leads me to another pointer: Think long, think wide. When I'm in full-on shooting mode, I'm looking for pictures that can be made with a wide-angle as well as a telephoto lens. That busy bird gave me something with each focal length.

Portraits. A good portrait can sum up an individual in a single image. Portraits can be stand-alone works or the core of a larger picture story. But to make a good portrait, you should spend some time getting to know your subject. Listen to and



pay attention to what the person says. This will give you clues about what makes that person tick, and might even lead you to other stories. Many people are nervous about having their photo taken. I always tell them that having my picture made is kind of like going to the dentist. If they think you understand their anxiety, they relax and you can get started.

I recently did a portrait of the CEO of a big company. He was scheduled for 30 minutes, but when he walked into the room, his attitude suggested that he would put up with me for much less time than that. He was a busy guy, but everyone in the organization, including him, knew that this was an important session and that these pictures would be used as the public face of the company. We had a chat before he even sat down. I said that I knew he would be looking at his watch after five minutes, but I didn't want him to do that. "I've got you for a half hour, and I want you to resign yourself to the torture." He reluctantly agreed, and then I said, "The good news is you'll be out of here in 20 minutes." His face brightened, we had a great sitting, and the photographs were exceptional. After all, he was the boss, a negotiator, and I gave him what he wanted without having to engage in any tense back and forth.

On a technical note, you will get more impact with your portraits if you use a wide aperture for minimal depth of field. Focus on the eyes. I always use a medium focal-length lens. I find that anything between 50 mm and 200 mm is a good choice. If you have a lens that opens to 1.4, try that out. You'll be excited by the results if the image is sharp.

Gear. I've always believed in traveling light. My professional camera is the Canon 5D Mark III. I ordinarily use only two bodies, one with a 17-40 mm f/4, the other with either the 70-200 mm 2.8, or the 100-400 mm 4.5-5.6, one of the best lenses ever made. The 100-400 is great for anything from speakers at a podium to wildlife. For a flash, I use the small 270 EX-II Speedlite. The two other lenses I carry are the 85 mm f/1.8 or the 50 mm f/1.4, both for portraits. I also shoot personal pics with my iPhone 5. It's important that you don't get bogged down with too much gear so you can be ready to shoot at a moment's notice.

Care. Photography is not merely a profession. I believe in the power of the image to change attitudes, cast light into dark corners of the world, and enlighten others about matters both good and bad. There's no more potent weapon on earth than a concerned eye behind a camera. ■