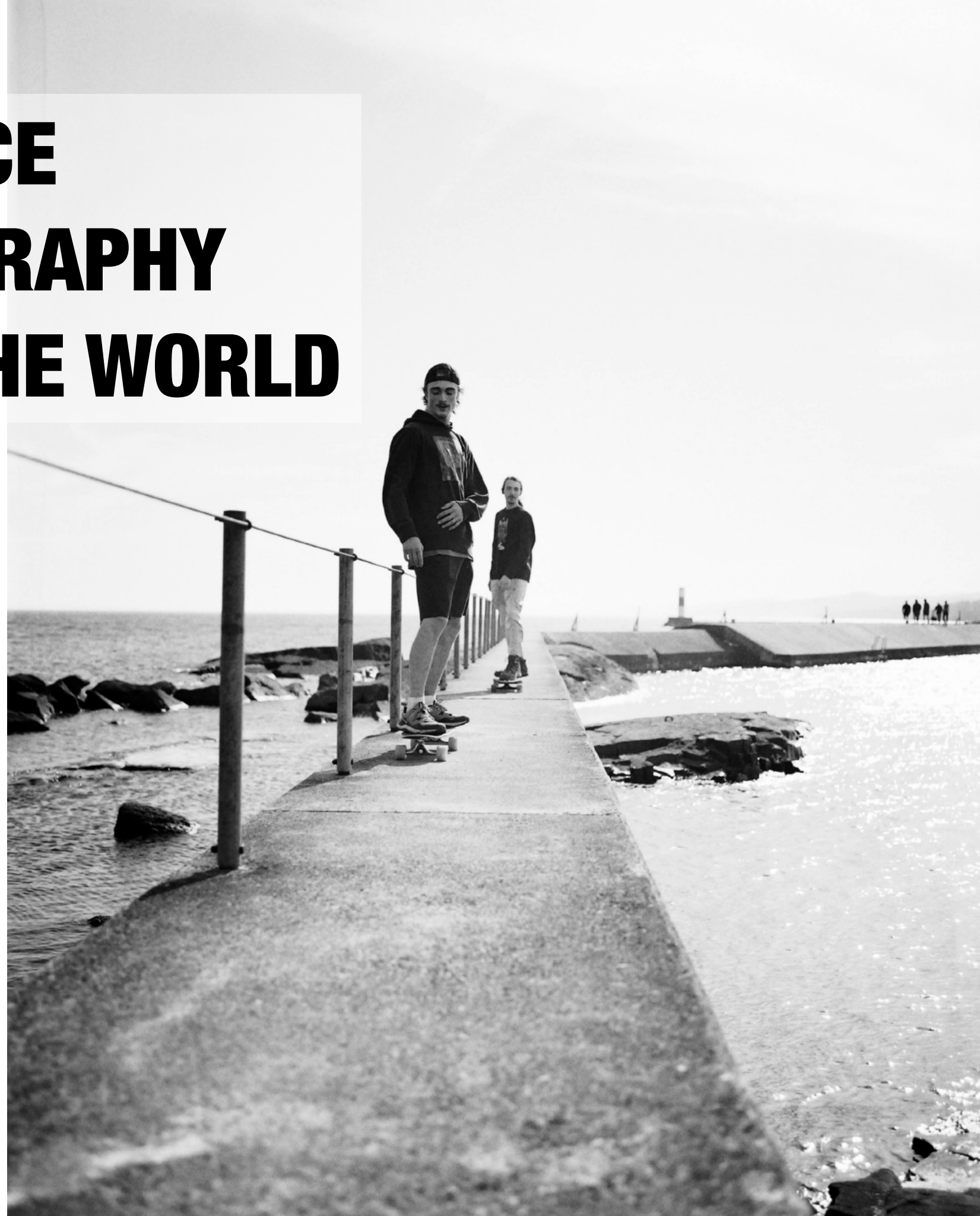
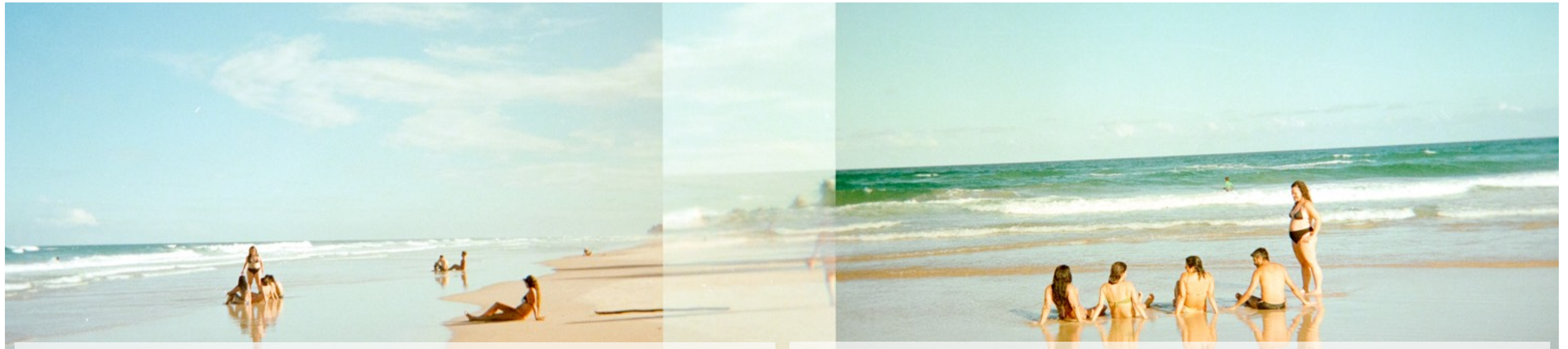


# **HOW TO PRACTICE STREET PHOTOGRAPHY ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD**

**FLAVIA FONTANA GIUSTI**



# FIRST THINGS FIRST...



Thank you for downloading this document and trusting me to guide you with your street photography practice.

Street photography is one of the most challenging but also one of the most rewarding things you can do to improve your photography. Practicing it helps you master your tools, refine your skills and find your voice.

These few pages are meant as a starting point. The insight I share here comes from my personal experiences, and it will be up to you to make it your own.

Duds are part of any good street photographer's experience, and the most important thing is to move on and not let them discourage you. Also, like in every skill, street photography ebbs and flows, but it's pushing through with practice that will truly help you get better.

I chose to make this guide about a practice “anywhere in the world”, and not out traveling, because you do not need to be traveling anywhere fancy to find interesting scenes to photograph, however, getting out of your house helps.

In general, it is considered good advice to always carry a camera with you. I don't do that. I take my camera when I feel like it.

I personally believe that intention is key to being ready, and when you're busy doing other things, you will not be paying attention or be available to take the shot. Also, don't we all carry smartphones with us everywhere anyways?

**So don't take my advice too seriously, but pay attention anyways, and I hope you'll find this guide helpful!**



# #1 YOUR GEAR

## KEEP IT MINIMAL, KEEP IT SAFE & DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

Common sense advice you'll usually read is to find your gear, get to know it like the back of your hand, and stay faithful.

You'll be shocked to read that I sing to a different tune. If you want to try something new, I think you should do it, you might discover something magical.



The one thing I can recommend, though is to use only one camera/lens/film stock at a time.

And that takes discipline. Trust me, I know.

Every time you see me carry a 35mm camera and a square medium format camera - say a TLR, know that I will regret it, because different formats require different parts of my brain to work, slowing me down, and because it's more stuff to tote around, and it gets heavy...

**By ‘*anywhere*’ I also mean ‘*in any weather*’**

So in an attempt to not be a fairweather photographer, I do carry a plastic bag for my camera, the stupid kind you get at the supermarket, just in case it gets wet.

And if I feel very unsure about the overall safety of my gear (risk of theft, risk of damage), I will unapologetically choose to only pack a plastic camera, to avoid losing precious or irreplaceable equipment.

# #2 START CLOSE TO HOME

People do people stuff everywhere there are people. Everywhere and anywhere.

Duh.

But, yes, they actually do, and you do not need to live in a megalopolis or a charming medieval castle town to run into interesting scenes.

Plain and regular city street photography actually offers some nice benefits:

- people are usually more approachable, less busy, and more willing to engage and be curious about what you are doing, so you can ease into it and get comfortable;
- you might have to look harder and work more, because there will also, inevitably, be less people around and less picturesque sights, and in my opinion that's a good thing, because it will force you to train your attention.

Don't get me wrong, I love myself a good crowd, but to me it can quickly become overstimulating, making it actually more difficult to find and isolate interesting scenes to photograph.

So there is no excuse, wherever you live, start close to home. Step outside, go to the closest business area near you, hit the streets and learn to observe!



# #3 DON'T BE SCARED OF (ANY) PEOPLE

BE PLAYFUL AND RESPECTFUL. WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK FOR PERMISSION.



This is Jason, and he's homeless.

When I started, I felt that photographing people who had no choice but to be on the streets was wrong. It seemed unethical, but it also didn't feel right to turn my gaze away and pretend they weren't there. So one day I approached Jason to ask him if I could take his portrait, and not only did he say yes, but we became friendly.

Now he comes to me with ideas for portraits, like here sticking his tongue out.

In exchange for all this, I usually try to bring him something to eat or to drink.



Children are increasingly a sensitive subject, and with good reason, but it doesn't mean you should avoid them.

Here, the parents were nearby and I asked for permission.

In other instances, a candid image can be taken quickly and discreetly. I honestly think it's fair game. Just don't be a creep.

The golden rule, as always, is to stay respectful, don't do to others what you wouldn't want them to do to you, and always be ready to have a friendly chat and explain what you do.



Does this image feel sleazy to you?  
Does it even feel sexual?

I was drawn to this woman protesting for abortion rights by the Wisconsin State Capitol, because she emanated power and confidence, and her necklace, spelling VOTE, was a compelling message.

As with the other photographs, because she was bare-chested, I had to overcome some internal reluctance to take her portrait, but once I asked for permission, it was the most natural thing to do.

# #4 BUDDY-UP WITH LOCALS



## AT HOME

Connect with other local street photographers: go to meetups and photowalks, get in touch through instagram. They might help you find new spots near your home where there is a lot to photograph, they might get you out of your house when you need a push, and they might quickly become the friends you didn't know you were missing.

And take it from me, you can always learn a thing or two by watching other people work. Like Maddie, here, she fearlessly enters buildings, pushes open doors and finds killer locations and unbeatable views.

## AND ANYWHERE ELSE

If you travel somewhere you don't speak the language, it can be helpful to have someone help translate - er, obviously.

However, this is something I'm not always comfortable with, because I focus and work better when I'm on my own, and I often feel that smiling and being very open with your intentions gets you where you want to be.

But if someone wants to tag along and offers to help, consider saying yes, it could help you find something you weren't looking for.





# #5 DON'T OVERLOOK THE TRIP

## ANYWHERE MEANS ANYWHERE, NOT JUST AT DESTINATION



I love airports, railway stations, buses and other places of transit. There are always people there, in high numbers, and from all walks of life. In other words, there is always a story waiting to be told.

If you have the time and the freedom (no kids, small luggage), turn your lens to situations around you: people keep doing people things even while they travel, and the background architecture is usually pretty cool.



I admit it can feel weird, and you'll definitely get some startled stares, but the goal is to get comfortable taking photographs of people, everywhere, so why not practice on the go?



# #6 WATCH THE AUDIENCE, NOT THE SHOW



Alright, *anywhere* takes you to a sports event. Consider missing the game, you'll see more.

It's easy for me at a baseball game - I don't understand the game, but it's a little harder at a volleyball game.

In all honesty here, a few years ago, when I was traveling in Kirghizistan, I almost made it to a game of Buzkashi (dead goat polo), and had it happened I probably would not have followed my own rule.

But as an observer of people, I find the bleachers more interesting to watch than the field. As exciting as it can be, the field is a game following predictable rules and moves, whereas the bleachers host real life.





# #7 KNOW YOUR HEROES, COPY THEM

## & SET GOALS FOR YOURSELF

Meet Emilio. He is my son, and when I took this photograph of him, he was 4 years old.

There was no school that day, so I took him with me on a photo walk.

I don't remember why I did that, maybe we both really needed some fresh air. Anyways, I made lemonade out of the lemons I had.

In that afternoon, I felt like I was walking in Vivian Maier's footsteps. And I was.

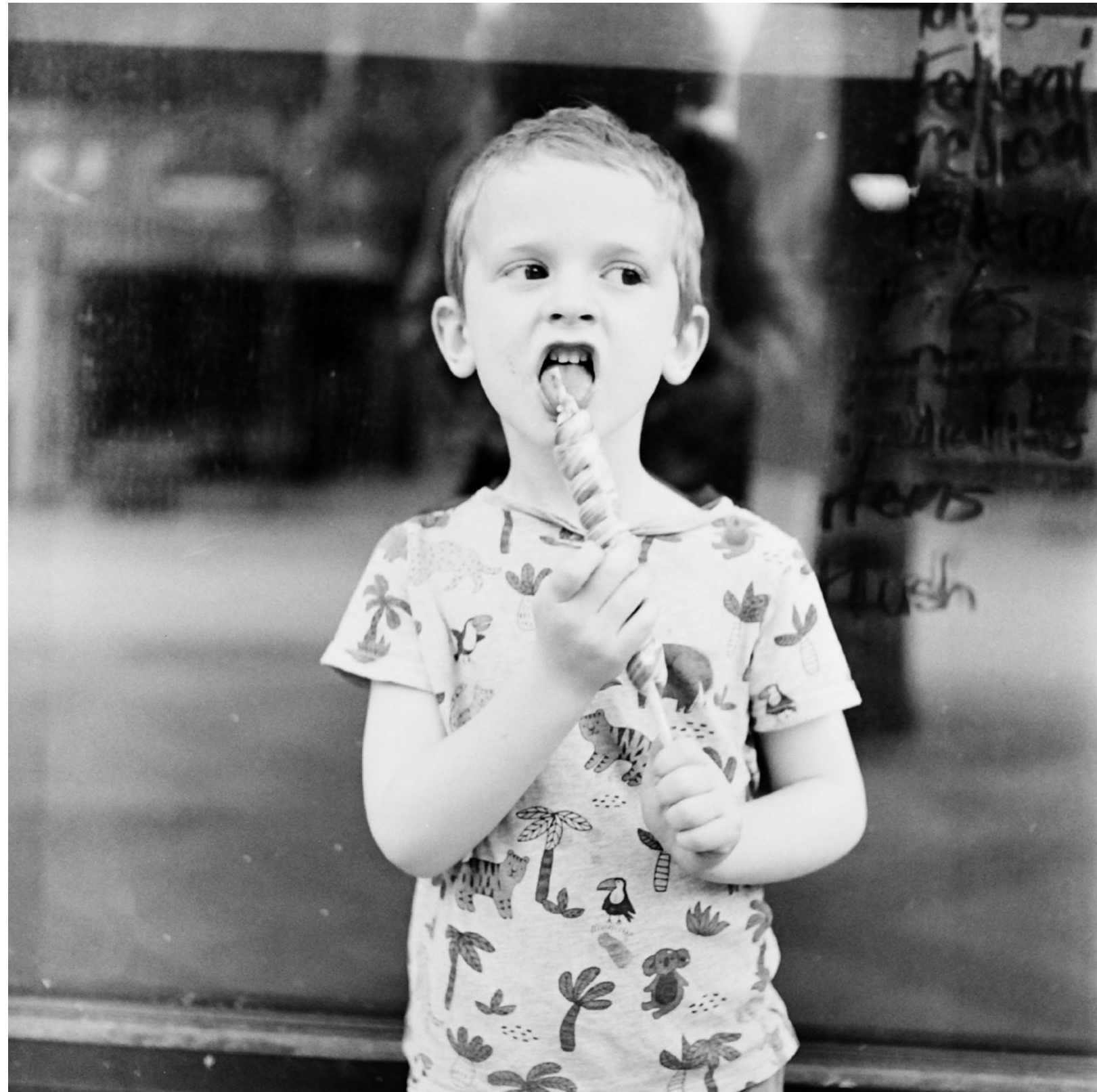
Now my admiration for her work knows even less bounds than before, because I've experienced how hard it is to do street photography *with kids in tow*.

So whether you're team Cartier-Bresson, Diane Arbus, or Jamal Shabazz, study the work of your heroes, copy them, walk in their shoes, connect with them.

There's no reason not to, and there is so so much to learn!

When you know where you stand with your chosen masters, set goals for yourself.

My obsession for Vivian Maier turned into a long term observation of hands & gestures. Personal goals give purpose to your work.





# #8 HAVE OPINIONS

## FULLY EMBRACE YOUR OWN POINT OF VIEW



Your street photography is yours, subjectively yours. You have your tools, they're your voice, so use them and tell us what you think and feel.

Find out your point of view and it will reveal your personal style. The two go hand in hand.

I show up at protests that matter to me and document it. You'll have your own ways.

Look at paintings, read the news, write a poem. Absorb it. You'll learn without even realizing it, until you look at your photographs and you see all the influences.

Stand by your opinions, because there's no such thing as an objective point of view, so make your images mean something.





# #9 LEARN THE RULES - DUH!

## AND THEN - BUT ONLY THEN - LEARN TO BREAK THEM

Learn the rules of photography, this is about mastery of the craft.

My non-exhaustive list includes:

- The many many rules of composition
  - > start simple, keep learning more, but don't obsess either
- Getting close, even closer
  - > sometimes it's worth backing up to get the full picture
- Aiming to get it right in camera
  - > yeah, but there are editing and cropping tools for a reason
- Metering & reading the light properly
  - > and also using the point-and-shoot
- Knowing how to use the sunny-16 rule
  - > just learn it, it's easy and it might save you one day, somewhere, *anywhere*



With that being said, please bear in mind that some rules should never get broken: please don't break the law, ever.

I also think that no photograph is worth putting yourself in physical danger, but I'll leave that up to your own judgment.

Other rules I would try not to break are:

- Don't to be an asshole, and de-escalate confrontations.
- Be respectful, but also
- Don't be serious. Cultivate that sense of humour, your ability to laugh at situations is a wonderful tool in street photography.



# #10 SHOOT IT WITH FILM #sorrynotsorry



Yes.

And because you're not going to take 15 shots of the same thing on film (not when you see how much materials cost), give yourself one shot, maybe two if the subject is good.

Get intentional. Get tactile. Count your frames.

Aim to get it right in-camera, then move on to your next scene, and so on, finish the roll and get it developed. When you finally see your scans, let them sit, learn to love them.

Resist instant gratification and that elusive quest for perfection.

Our photographs are worth the wait, they're worth the extra effort, not to mention that extra thrill you get from film.

*- and yes, film photography can be expensive, but it can also not be if you take the time to learn a few things -*

Just don't take it too seriously.

Embrace imperfection, and maybe experiment?

Also, don't be a snob, whichever tools you choose.

Some people hate film, and there's nothing wrong with that. Do what works for you, you want it to feel right.

How about you at least give it a try and find out?



# BONUS: GET A TOY CAMERA AND LET GO





# LET ME KNOW YOUR THOUGHTS

**& MAYBE SHARE YOUR OWN TIPS WITH ME? I'LL PASS THEM ON.**

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