

PEOPLE PHOTOGRAPHY THE STORY BEHIND THE PHOTOGRAPH

By Fred W. Kurtz

I love all kinds of photography, however people photography is one of my favorites. For me, it does not matter who I am shooting – young, old, pretty, or not so pretty... everyone is unique. People photography is challenging because the photographer must decide whether to ask permission or just take the shot. Asking permission gets the subject looking directly at you with a nice smile and pose. Not asking permission can allow for a composition that is conveying a special moment that would be ruined if permission was requested.

For getting great and unique people photos, you need to constantly scan your surroundings as timing can be everything. One second the shot may be there and the next it may be gone forever.

I started taking photo tours in 2007 and have amassed a decent collection of people shots. Some of them have stories behind them that I will always remember, and some of them are just nice shots that resulted in being in the right place at the right time. I have included 25 of my all time favorite people photographs and the story behind them.

FIRST TIME

Norway 2007: My very first photo trek was with Mentor Series and Dan was the mentor. I showed Dan a photo of a person I had taken, and he asked me if I asked permission. I said “no” as I was not comfortable doing so. He then gave me an assignment and said go out and take photos of people, and this time ask their permission.

I will admit I was pretty nervous doing this. So I set out on the mission and worked up the courage to ask this barmaid if I could take her photo. She said “Why?”, and I about died. I told her I was part of a photography group and I was given the assignment to photograph people and ask their permission first. She said “Ok.” Mission accomplished.



FRIENDSHIP PART I

Italy 2008: This photo was taken in the Piazza del Campo in Siena. These girls were on a balcony enjoying the activities. They saw me and agreed to pose for me.



FRIENDSHIP PART II

Amsterdam 2012: Fellow NE Explorer Sue Wolfe and I were walking the streets of Amsterdam, and as we were passing these girls they saw our cameras and asked if we would take their photo. One of the girls was having a 30th birthday. The funny part was they just wanted their photo taken and did not even ask for the image to be sent to them. This is the first and only time this has happened to me.



CHILDREN PART 1

Cuba 2014: One of my favorite subjects to photograph are children. They are so full of life. These school girls are in uniform and just cute as a button.

I was photographing a couple of girls jumping rope. I gave each of them a little pack of M&M's. All of a sudden the street flooded with children and they wanted M&M's too. I ended up giving away my entire stash.



CHILDREN PART II

Romania 2014: I was walking by a school when I noticed these three girls looking out the window on the second floor. They loved being photographed.



ICONIC PHOTOGRAPH PART I

London 2011: When I saw this man looking at Big Ben I knew it was an iconic photograph. I blurred the background to draw the eye to him. Being in the right spot at the right time made this photo happen.



ICONIC PHOTOGRAPH PART II

London 2011: I was shooting the lamps at dusk when I noticed this photographer in the frame. I thought he added a lot to the photo so I shot him silhouetted.



READING

Italy 2008: I came across this man absorbed reading his newspaper. I really liked the composition and asking for permission would have spoiled the moment.



DECEIVING

Amsterdam 2012: This is a very deceiving photo. Everyone would think this bicyclist was angry at me for taking her photo. Since I was there, I am the only one who knows what actually happened. A car pulled out in front of her and she was angrily gesturing at the driver of the car. Again, timing and luck played a part in this shot.



HAPPY SHOPPER

Italy 2011: I had not planned on taking a picture when this lady saw my camera and decided to strike a pose for me. When I showed this to my father-in-law he fell in love with it and printed it out. This is the only photo of mine he has ever done so. He passed away recently so every time I see this photo it has special meaning.



TENDER MOMENT

Amsterdam 2012: I loved this shot for the tender moment it conveyed. I changed the photo to sepia as the color version did not reflect the same powerful moment.



YES AND NO

Ireland 2013: I was walking by a pub and saw these two guys having a drink. I asked them if I could take their photo. The guy on the left said "yes" and the guy on the right said "no". Too late – I listened to the guy on the left. The result speaks for itself.



SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL

Italy 2014: I ran across a mother and daughter walking the streets and thought the daughter was very beautiful. I asked her if I could take her photo and she said "Me?" and I said, "Yes, you." And she let me.



POWER OF PERSUASION

Italy 2014: I saw this wonderful older woman approaching me. I stopped and asked her if I could take her picture and she said, "No, I am not beautiful." I tried my best to persuade her, and she still said no.

Then Dan joined the discussion and told her how beautiful she was. After some discussion with Dan, she finally relented and let me take her photo. Tanya was nearby and photographed Dan and me negotiating.



GAZING

Italy 2014: I was on a terrace when I saw this woman gazing at the landscape. I saw a wonderful composition and raised my camera to take the shot. As soon as I captured the moment she turned around and sat down and the shot was gone forever. Sometimes timing and luck are everything.



POPEYE

Italy 2014: I came across these two guys having a very animated discussion. I did not know if it was a friendly or angry discussion. So I took the shot of the two of them and then waited to see what kind of discussion it was. I finally determined it was friendly so I asked them if I could take their picture. I really liked the old guy in the hat so after taking several shots of the two men together, I took him individually, and it instantly became one of my all time favorites.



DATE NIGHT

Slovenia 2014: I was walking past this restaurant and saw this couple dining. I stopped at the window and they looked up and saw me. I raised my camera and pointed at it to see if it was OK to shoot them. They started waving, so...permission granted!



MILLENNIALS

Romania 2014: I was walking through a covered bridge and noticed the “hip” couple in front of me and knew I wanted to shoot them. When we were at the exit of the bridge, I stopped and asked them if I could take their photo and they agreed. I just love their look.



MODELS

Slovenia 2014: I was out walking by myself when I stumbled across a model shoot. I asked somebody that was shooting the models if I could shoot too and he told me I could. I shot and shot and shot. As I was shooting this photo, the leader of the group came up to me and said I had to leave, that this was a private shoot. I was actually done anyway so I left satisfied.



OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Croatia 2012: This is a shot of a shop keeper waiting for customers. I did not want to ask for permission to photograph her because I would have lost the perfect expression on her face.



CAUSE AND EFFECT

Sicily 2013: A sequence of events made for a really nice photo shoot. We were walking the back streets when we saw this abandoned couch in the street. We saw a couple walking by when our leader asked the woman to stand on the couch and pretend to be an angry Italian. She played the part perfectly.

We were taking some time to shoot her when I glanced over and realized we were blocking traffic. This gentleman was in his car patiently waiting with a smile on his face, and I loved the result.



RELAXING

Lisbon 2013: I saw this family sitting on the curb looking totally worn out. I immediately recognized this was a unique photo and took the shot.



LOVE

Lisbon 2013: I was walking the streets when I looked up and saw this couple. They looked friendly enough so I shouted for them to “kiss” and they did.



CHOICES

Italy 2008: This little girl was walking in the Piazza del Campo in Siena, and I noticed both mommy and grandma reaching for her hand. Which one did she choose? I loved the innocence of this photo.



BIANCA

France 2017: At dinner one night I was sitting with Dan and Tanya outside on a beautiful terrace having dinner. I looked over at another table and saw a beautiful woman with the sun shining through her blond hair. I shot the photo without her knowledge and then showed her the results and asked if she spoke English. She said yes and told me she was from Chicago. Her name is Bianca, and I emailed her the photo.

