

Mistakes

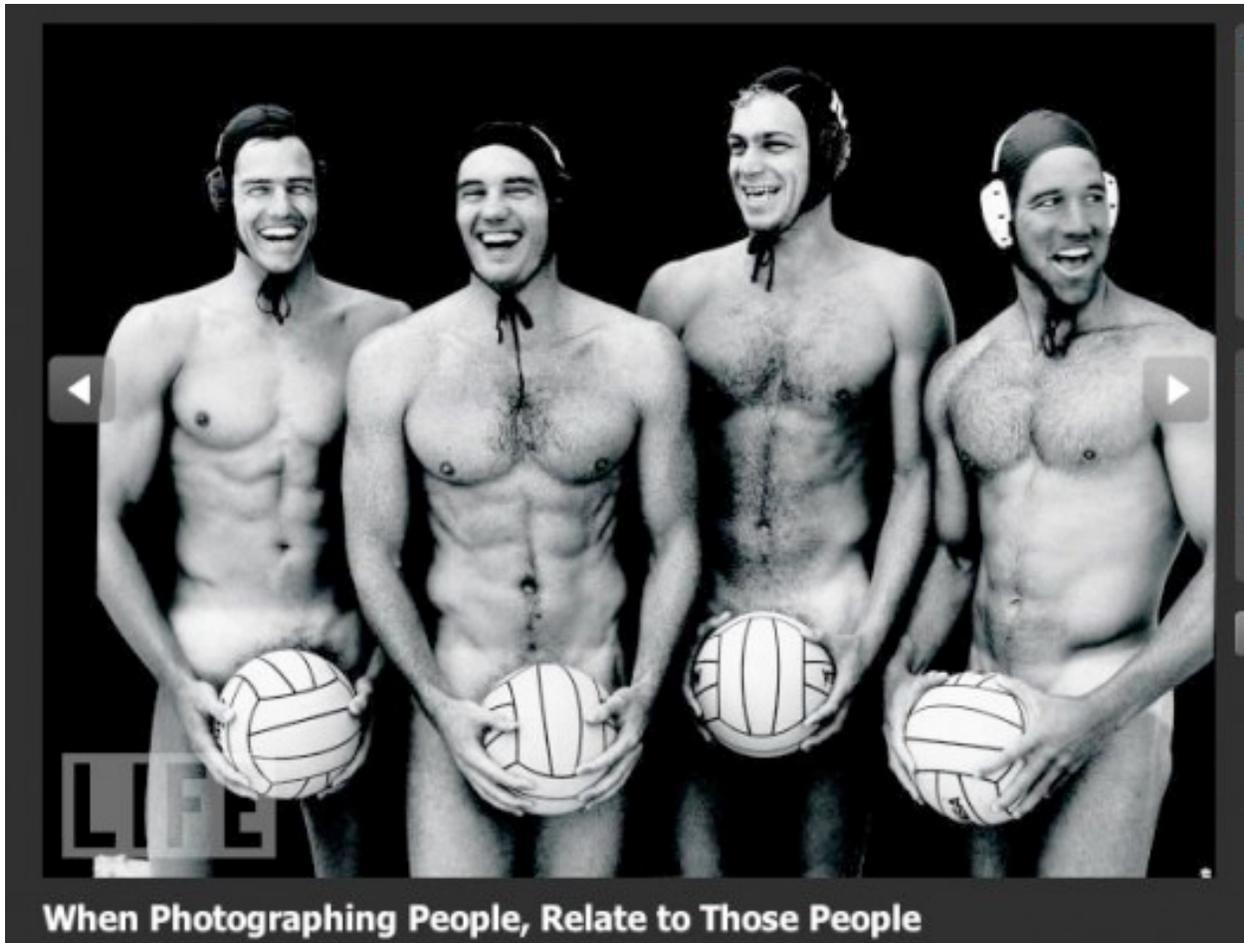
Blog Post by Joe McNally

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My buds over at LIFE.com asked me to come up with a list of [common mistakes](#) folks make when starting out with a camera in their hands. Okay. No shortage of material here, right? And they came to the right source, 'cause I've made every mistake, basic and advanced, that one could possibly think of. Hell, I've even *invented* some mistakes. But they did a nice job, matching historical photos from the voluminous LIFE library with my ramblings. They also edited, well, some of my more irreverent language, which, this being my blog, I include below:-)



Don't take just one picture, or two....shoot lots....if it was exciting enough to you to put your camera to your eye to shoot a couple of photos, then it should remain exciting enough to shoot 20, or, even, 200. Remember, pixels are free. This isn't film. You're not running up a bill anymore at the local CVS.



When photographing a person, relate to that person. Don't hide behind the camera. Get out from that cubbyhole behind the lens where it's warm and dark and you feel hidden and get out there in that vulnerable zone in front of the lens, and share and participate in the adventure with them. Let them know they are in good hands, and this is important to you, and because you are going to work really hard to produce a good picture, it will therefore become important to them. Remember, if you're not confident, and you are visibly uncomfortable, they will be too. And, no, this doesn't mean I was naked when I shot this.



Remember, the camera is a machine. It does not have feelings, and it didn't go to art school.

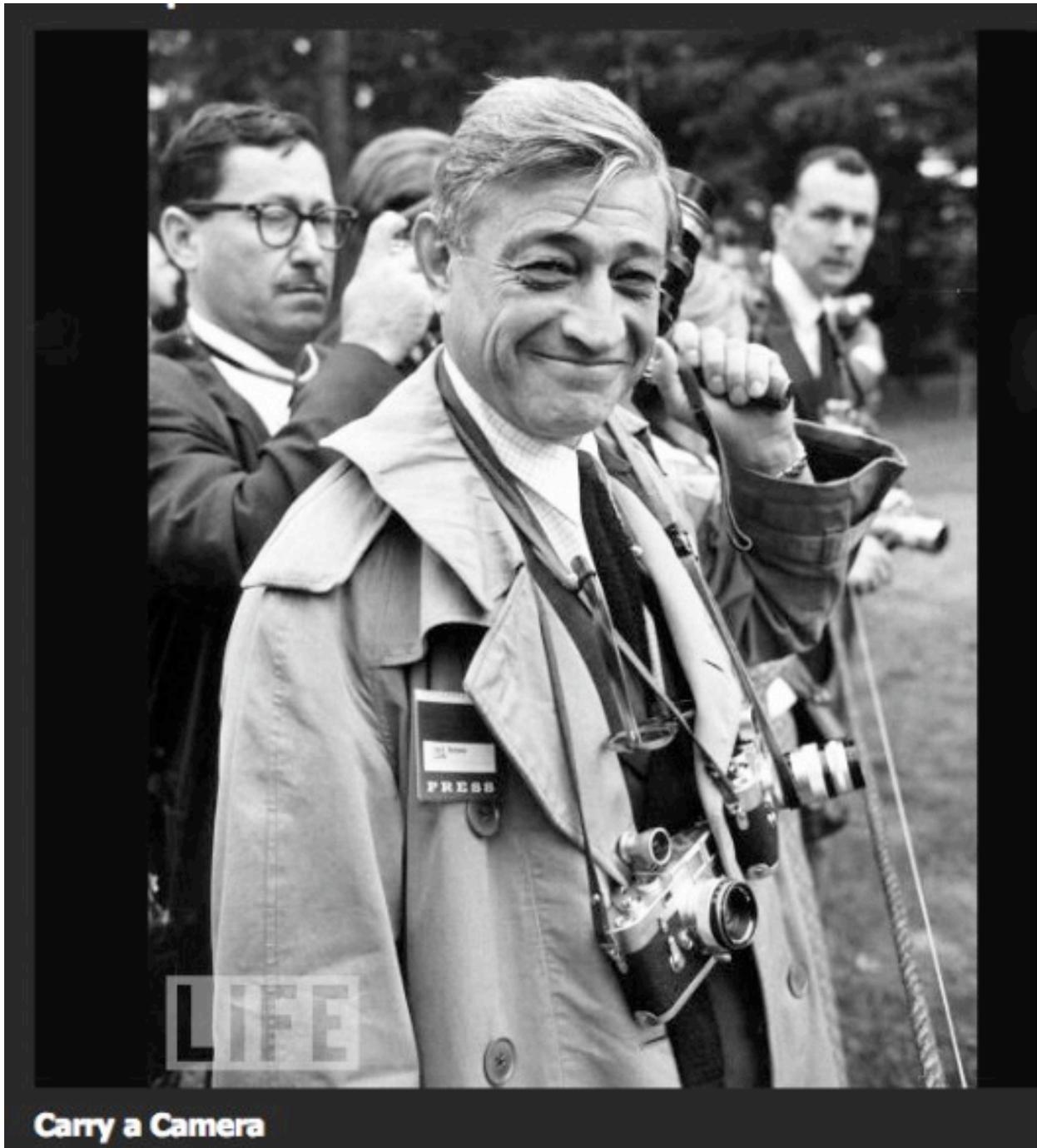


Try not to shoot outdoors in harsh, bright, high noon sun. (At least most of the time.)
The sun is a big dog, and you don't want to fight with the big dog.

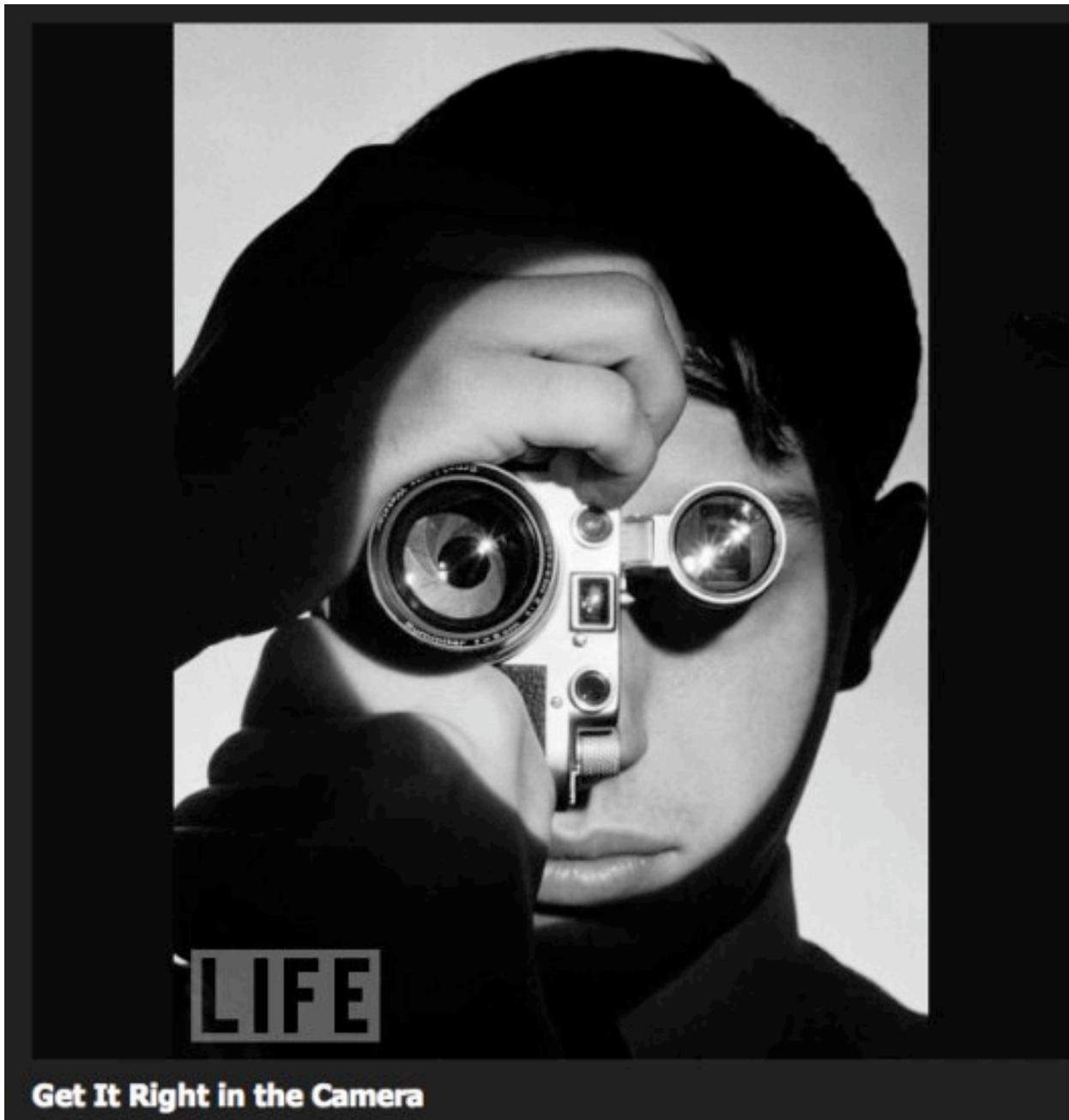


Don't Shoot Everything From Eye Level

Don't shoot everything from eye level! Get high! Get low! Climb something. Lay down. Get a different perspective.



Carry a camera. As famed photog Jay Maisel says, it's hard to take pictures without one. (Pictured above is Carl Mydans, my personal hero, and mentor. Carl said, very accurately, "The camera is the greatest force for social change in history." He was right. Carl was a historian, an orator, a gentleman, a scholar, a teacher, and a photographer. He was a photographer perhaps least of these things, and he was a great photographer. When he put his camera to his eye, the pictures that resulted had the beating heart of decency and sympathy for the human condition.)



Get it right in the camera, don't say I'll fix that later. Photoshop is not an emergency room for grievously wounded pictures. Work hard in the field to master the camera, the lens and the techniques of shooting. Unless you like being a mushroom, sitting in your dark basement in front of a glowing screen for hours on end, trying to take the exposure from frame 101, the composition from frame 209, the expression from frame 333, and also eliminate the tree branch growing out of the bride's elaborate hairdo that she spent a lot of money on. If it looks like a problem, it is. In other words, if you see something in

your lcd that is bothersome, it won't go away, it will just become more bothersome when you look at it on your home computer.



Move yer ass! (Another Jay-ism.) Zoom with your feet! Don't stand there with all the energy and dynamism of a house plant. Move! The world moves, constantly. You must move with it. Zoom lenses are nice, but they don't replace your legs.



Don't forget to zero out your camera every day when you go out with it. Don't use yesterday's settings! You know, the ones that you programmed into the camera such as ISO 32,000 'cause you were shooting in a coal mine. Reprogram the camera to a normal baseline and go from there.



Don't think all the good pictures in the world live in Bali, or Antarctica. There are good pictures right under your nose. Shoot what and who you love. And shoot that which is easily accessible to you. If you constantly think you have to climb mountains or jump out of airplanes to get good pictures, it will become an impossible chore to pick up your camera.

And a few others....

If you're unhappy, don't keep shooting. A bad picture is a bad picture, no matter how many of them you shoot, or if you recompose vertically. Just stop, re-think, and go a different direction.

As my friend and fellow shooter Jim Richardson says, if you want your pictures to be better, stand in front of more interesting stuff.

Use your lens shade. Why is it on your lens, backwards? It's there for a reason. Use it.

Have fun! This is not brain surgery, an admissions exam, or the stations of the cross.

Oh, and by the way, take the lens cap off:-)