

Lessons for life and landscape photography?

During this period of great uncertainty and social isolation, we must all be missing the great outdoors. I know for sure, as someone who lives to be out in the landscape as often as possible with or without a camera, I am one such person.

But perhaps during this time of necessary banishment, we, as a photographic community, may relearn and rediscover the true privilege that is nature. Perhaps landscape photography will regain its neglected and overlooked reputation, and certain elements in our wider community will no longer see it as old hat, irrelevant and unworthy. Those of us who love it can but hope.

Thinking on this has led me, in a round-about way, to re-remember an old music track from the '90's "Wear Sunscreen". It is an essay written as a hypothetical commencement speech by columnist Mary Schmich, originally published in June 1997 in the Chicago Tribune. The essay, giving various pieces of advice on how to live a happier life and avoid common frustrations, spread massively via viral email, is often erroneously described as a commencement speech given by author Kurt Vonnegut at MIT.

The essay became the basis for a successful spoken word song released in 1999 by Baz Luhrmann, "Everybody's Free (To Wear Sunscreen)", also known as "The Sunscreen Song".

So, partly as an aide memoir to myself and partly to perhaps inspire and encourage in my own small way, I set about rewording the lyrics to the song with landscape photography in mind. It is slightly tongue in cheek but hopefully poignant too.

Here is a link to the original if you care to check it out: <https://youtu.be/sTJ7AzBIJoI>

Ladies and gentlemen of the photographic community:

Wear wellies.

If I could offer you only one tip for the future, wellington boots would be it.

The long-term benefits of wellies have been proved by many professions - whereas the rest of my advice has no basis more reliable than my own meandering experience. I will dispense this advice now...

Enjoy the freedom of wellies - a good, decent pair of boots are your friends. They will keep your feet warm and dry and allow you to concentrate on your photography whilst you walk the muddiest footpaths up to your knees in gunk or slosh along the beach with the happy, certain knowledge that you can hose them down at the end of the day and not worry about wet socks. Wet socks stink more than you imagine.

Don't worry about criticism.

Or worry, but know that worrying is as effective as trying to take a panorama sequence with one hand whilst walking an eager dog. Don't take it to heart - the heart is for love. There are more things in the world to worry about other than that bright spot at the edge of your print that draws the eye.

Do one photo session every now and again that is out of your comfort zone.

Don't be reckless with the environment.

Don't put up with people who are reckless with it either.

Print.

Don't obsess about results. Sometimes you're ahead sometimes you're behind. The race is long and in the end, it's only with yourself.

Remember the good comments you receive, forget the bad - if you succeed in doing this, tell me how.

Rediscover your sense of wonder; forget your old prejudices.

Relax.

Don't feel guilty if you don't know where you want to go with your photography.
If it interests you then it's the right direction. You are your own worst critic and a judge's comments only seek to confirm or deny what you already know.

Have a plan and stick to it. Be flexible.

Be kind to your knees, you'll miss them when they're gone.

Maybe you'll enter competitions, maybe you won't; maybe you'll win prizes, maybe you won't; maybe you'll take home trophies, maybe you'll be published and dance all night at award ceremonies.
Whatever you do, don't congratulate yourself too much or berate yourself either.
Your choices are half chance, so are everybody else's.

Get up early and watch the sunrise. Nothing inspires or lifts the spirit like watching the first light fall on your chosen location and illuminate your soul.

Breathe, take your time and enjoy the moment before you release the shutter.

Read the 'rules' of photography – then forget them.

Do not believe all gear hype; it will only make you spend money.

Learn to recognise good light, you never know when it will be gone for good.

Talk nicely to the clouds, you need them on your side for great images. Shout at them and most likely they will rain on you.

Understand that the sun comes and goes, but for precious moments it is magical.

Work hard not to mess too much with your images – nature spent a long time perfecting herself, you don't need to enhance her beyond recognition.

Go to the coast but make sure you know your tide times.
Go to the city but make sure you know your rights.

Experiment.

Go out in all weathers: feel the wind at your back; the rain on your face; the cold in your bones.
And when you do, be certain to remember: the glory of light after rain; the majesty of storm clouds above; the crunch of frost under foot.
Revel in all weathers.

Don't expect success every time you step outdoors. Keep your thoughts quiet but your mind alert, your eyes inquisitive but your vision focused and open to possibilities.

Never buy cheap outdoor clothing or it will let you down and ruin your day.

Don't listen to people who advise you that one camera is better than another.
Whether you use Nikon or Canon, Fuji or Sony, it's the person behind the thing that makes the image.
All cameras are stupid until you tell them what you want – then they are ALL amazing!

But trust me on the wellies.