



Photography with heart ♥

Developing a mindful photography practice to enhance your daily life and creativity



By Catherine Drea

Contents	Page
SECTION 1	
Welcome!	2
How I started	3
The Practice	4
The Path	6
Setting out	8
SECTION 2	
10 steps to creating Photography with heart 	11
SECTION 3	
Photography with heart; A year of creative practice prompts	26
Winter Contemplations	
Spring Contemplations	
Summer Contemplations	
Autumn Contemplations	
SECTION 4	
Some extra study	40

SECTION 1: Welcome!

For many years I've been walking this small patch of the world with a camera, observing my surroundings as a mindful practice. This has evolved over time and whenever I set out, repeating the same steps, I am often amazed at how it refreshes my creativity and my vision.

This short download is my gift to you so that you can explore some of how to practice **Photography with Heart** for yourself. Maybe you want to deepen another creative practice in art, writing or other work? Maybe you are a blogger or newsletter author and need a hand to improve your visual awareness? Or like me maybe you want to find a way to experience the joy and beauty of the world through everyday photography.

Whatever your reason to be here, I'm delighted to have you along for the stroll.



How I started

My relationship with cameras began the day my Dad gave me a tiny instamatic. I was 10 years old. It had a 12 shot black and white film in it and I spent a month eeking out and planning each one before I was allowed to get my next film.

My first proper camera was a Canon SLR which I bought in New York after working there for a summer on a J1 Visa when I was a student in the National College of Art. Again film and processing was an expensive item for any student and so projects that came to print were few and far between.

In 2002 I got my first digital camera and began to learn about the digital world. This enabled me to take as many photographs as I wanted to, to curate and store the photographs on a computer, to understand more about post processing, editing, cropping and eventually to use social sharing on line. Since then every one has become a photographer at some level and with mobile phones and video this continues to expand.

Over the last 10 years I have trodden the same path, climbed the same ditches and wandered in the same forest. I have finally understood that sometimes looking, capturing, and entering a moment of observation is in itself a mindful or contemplative practice. Finding your focus literally takes you into the present.

I am still very much a work in progress and challenged to the pin of my collar to keep on my path. But some how I do!! [You can read a bit more about me here.](#)





Rural farm buildings are impossible to ignore. The soft grey door, the whitewashed walls, the green hose. All together create such a beautiful example of balance and cohesion.

The practice: Photography with heart ♥

If you would like to use your camera as a creative practice, then what follows is a guide to building up your ability to observe and be present more both visually and with heart. I think this is actually a life time practice but if you really want to immerse yourself a year is probably a good stretch of time to make a start and experience the changes in light, weather, temperature and season.

For anyone learning a new skill especially photography, a lot of stress can build up about all the different aspects; technical issues, what the camera can or can't do, composition and getting what you want into the frame, subject matter and what to photograph?

This practice is about using the camera in an intuitive and heart centred way, exploring photography in spite of your level of skill. Regular practice will take care of the learning part! I would encourage you not to strive for perfection but rather to follow your curiosity as Elizabeth Gilbert says.

“The trick is to just follow your small moments of curiosity. It doesn't take a massive effort. Just turn your head an inch. Pause for a instant. Respond to what has caught your attention. Look into it a bit. Is there something there for you? A piece of information?”

Small steps.

Keep doing that, and I promise you: The curiosity will eventually lead you to the passion. And that'll be the end of boredom.”

This practice is about seeing and being. It's about sensing....touching, feeling, smelling, tasting, hearing.....noticing your own preferences and sensitivities. The more we are open and in the moment the more of the reality we can perceive and respond to. This is why artists see better than most of us. “One eye sees the other feels.” (Paul Klee)

It is a perfect practice for any creative person, artist or contemplative type. Photography is the medium but this practice touches on all aspects of creativity.



Looking down into a pond instead of at the whole landscape I found this collection of leaves floating on the top of the water as if suspended in mid air.

The Path: Mindful walking with a camera

There are many schools of thought on Contemplative/Mindful/Soulful/Photography. Contemplative Photography is a term I came across long after I was already practicing it. Some schools of thought come from a Buddhist tradition while others are from a more contemporary abstract approach. I am always a bit wary of schools and theories and while I have learned from many of these disciplines I have also developed my own sense of what photography means to me. You can too. Make your own path. This is very personal to each individual.

To help you to develop a mindful practice you also have the Year of Prompts and Contemplations for each season. At any stage throughout the year you can also pop into the Foxglove Lane blog for some more inspiration and support. Every week I muse on life and photography in a new contemplative photo post. AS part

of your practice try selecting appropriate writing or select poetry to compliment your images. This for me has always deepened the joy.

As you go along, please feel free to contact me if you need any support along this path. I always respond.

While the Year of Prompts may be broad enough to explore in any way you choose, you can also follow your curiosity on this one and make up your own prompts or walk in an openness to what is out there without any prompt at all.....NO RULES!!

One thing I recommend is to practice this alone. Being alone is entirely different to being lonely. So see your learning path as a personal space and allow yourself the luxury of solitude. There will be some more prompts on this later.



Setting out

1. ANY CAMERA can be used in this practice. You are going to focus more on YOU than on the camera. It's good to know and understand the basics. If you are new to photography or have a more advanced camera, this can mean putting the camera into Automatic mode until you are freed up to explore manual settings.
2. Make this a personal project. Make it about YOU. Follow the prompts until you find yourself making your own plans and opening up space for your own interests. The only advice here is make time for a photowalk each week for one year, each day for a month or take a daily photowalk as you feel like it. How you do it is up to you.
3. While there are many rules and guidelines about what makes a great image for the purposes of this practice you are going to follow your own INSTINCTS. You are not going to focus on results but you are going to explore becoming more in the moment with your observations and visual responses. It's about being present in the moment with your whole being.
4. "One eye sees the other feels" said Paul Klee. NOTICE and record your observations in a journal or notebook. Notice what you are drawn to visually. Notice where the emotion is. Sometimes I find I don't even take the shot, especially if the scene is something I would rather be totally present in. Notice when this happens. Observe everything.
5. Spend TIME with your practice, observing, noticing, recording, photographing, curating. I have found that a small piece of everyday time, even if it's just 10 minutes will keep the practice on track. Remember you are developing and exploring this practice over a full year and so there is lots of TIME.



A found hen blackbird was placed on an old gardening book and superimposed with a layer of texture. I developed this into a project called Mother.

6. What you will need

- Any camera
- Phone/Computer/Laptop if you want to save and edit
- Journal or notebook
- At least 10-30 minutes each day/week for the practice
- At least 10-30 minutes a day/week for study

"There is no measuring in time, no year matters, and ten years are nothing. Being an artist means, not reckoning and counting, but ripening like the tree which does not force its sap and stands confident in the storms of spring without fear that after them may come no summer."

~ Rainer Maria Rilke



SECTION 2: 10 steps to Photography with heart ♥



“One eye sees, the other feels.”

— Paul Klee

Seeing and Being: Photography with heart!

Photography with heart, is a way of seeing the world through feeling eyes. The small details, the ordinary and the everyday; the thoughtful side of life. It's about "knowing the simple wisdom of what's all around you and playing that" as Clare born fiddler Martin Hayes says.

What's all around me, is this gentle landscape of rolling hills, lakes, forest, farmland and the Copper Coastline stretching to the west towards the Comeragh Mountains. I might long for gritty urban street photography but this is where I live and work....

What's all around YOU? Wherever you are right now is the perfect place to begin. SEE your world through soulful eyes through the practice of contemplative photography, just start today!



1. Begin

Although I first began as a small child by playing with rose petals and garden snails, I have re-started on my creative path many times throughout my life. First as an art student, a graphic designer, a teacher, a community artist, and a support worker and now as a digital photographer of the heart and a writer and blogger.

There comes a time when all the excuses are tired. At least that's what happened to me. I kept reading about creativity but it wasn't until I fully committed to a practice as a core part of my day, that everything changed. Partly I realised through my Dad's final months that life is too short to hold back on what you love. Essentially I picked up the camera again, and learned all the damn stuff I was so out of date with.....over time! And so on a boring wet Sunday in 2011 I posted a photo of a wild foxglove online. In this one move I had become a photoblogger and would just keep putting one foot in front of the other

Maybe you too want to develop your digital photography or maybe you want to further explore the contemplative side of photography which you already practice? The first step, as always, is to begin just where you are and then to keep going!

Practice tips: What is it YOU want to put into the frame? Nature, street, landscape, people? Where are you now? Observe that chair, that window, the coffee you are drinking.



2. Practice

Something very different begins to happen when you start to practice photography every day. As you develop more skills and slow down your intellectual processes, creativity begins to flow in a new way. The repetitive practice of looking and capturing images deepens your confidence and ease replaces fear. Repetitive practice, even those same walks in the same place, will enhance confidence as you become more comfortable and present. You will begin to notice that when you are out and about with your camera, time stands still and your heart lightens.

Small things you wouldn't normally notice begin to feature. You might find yourself like me, standing still for an age waiting for some light to bounce or hoping for a robin to sing. Walking those same routes will focus your eye more intently, you won't miss much. Out of the ordinary and the everyday, something more reveals itself. I like to think of it as an increasing awareness of aliveness. So make this contemplative photographic practice a regular space in your life. Repetition and practice is how we learn.

Practice tips: Take the same 20 minute photo walk every day for a week. What are your 10 favourite subjects to photograph and why? Get even closer. Focus on small details. One gate. One berry. One face.



3. Be in the moment

Over time you will experience something totally engaging and meditative about photography. The act of framing and looking requires a 100% commitment from eye, hand and heart. Sometimes it's about snapping, other times it's about planning a particular result. But the most special times will be when you are alone with the camera, when between you, the subject and the light some alchemy happens.

This is the essence of photography with heart. Being in the moment, really looking and observing. Think about it as an exploratory work in progress and like a lot of Irish philosophies there's plenty of "whatever you are havin yourself" in it.....so be cool, there are no rights or wrongs....only presence. Seeing what's in front of you from many angles and observing it, just for itself.....

Practice tips: Notice where you are most comfortable and what you are drawn to in your surroundings. Notice when time stands still. Which photographic images you are taking reflect this most?



4. Let the camera do the talking

People often express their joy in the flow of music. Getting lost in it. Following the story of the notes. Feeling the emotions. In many ways photography practice is like this too. Each day has moods and stories. Photography captures personality and detail. Light, shade and colour also evoke emotions and feelings.

In the moment we can start to sense more of what is going on, what the sights and sounds are, what is underlying. In the moment, without anxiety we will hear ourselves breathe and can be open to what is around us.

Our eyes need to be relaxed too. Letting go of the many shoulds and shouldn'ts, releasing the pressure of artistic aesthetics and perfection, not trying too hard to see. It can help to de-personalise the situation at first and let the camera do the talking. What does the lens love? What shapes, textures, colours look like fun? Where is the subject of the image? What is the camera longing to get closer to?

Cameras vary and have their own preferences and personality. My iPhone loves the sky. My DSLR looks for detail. A simple point and shoot camera is perfect for the urban street. So feel free to experiment and get to know what you and your camera love.....

Practice tips: Play with your camera while relaxing, maybe just lying on your bed. Experiment with the camera settings and possibilities. PLAY don't bother about the results here.....



5. Learn to be alone

Sometimes aloneness is confused with loneliness. I know both and find that loneliness creates a heartache while solitude feels more like a salve to the soul. In some way loneliness and solitude are opposite states of being. In any visual practice solitude is key. Cutting out noise and taking yourself deeper into that world is a crucial starting point. It doesn't really matter where you do this. It doesn't matter either what results you get. The practice is to see and be.

Learning to be alone is some of it. As soon as I am with another, my attention is on them and I am especially programmed in this (you may not

be.) At a certain stage in the creative process, being truly alone frees up attention and allows you to focus on your process.

Paradoxically you will soon find you are not so alone at all. What's around you will start to sing and dance with you. You will notice the mysterious intensity in stillness. I find this more in some places than others. It's like there are different levels of vibration and you can sense this immediately.

At this point many of you will be able to recognise your own prayerful practice or idea of God in the spiritual connection you might feel in a place? As a fuzzy agnostic who feels much more connected to the vast unknowns, this practice is a kind of soulful "human" experience for me. Either way there is a special alchemy in it and maybe a new way for all of us to connect to mystery no matter what our beliefs are.

Giving yourself fully to any given moment is an integral part of our human experience with or without a camera. But with a camera this attentive solitude becomes an enriching creative practice deepening the moment and then capturing it forever.

Practice tips: Take yourself to a new location. Treat yourself and the camera to some new views of the world. Vary your eye level up or down, get closer to your subject, notice the vibrations.....just you and the world!



6. Follow the light

Being in the moment happens in simple ways. Start observing light and how it falls at different times of the day and throughout the seasons. How it comes from the east in the mornings and the west in the evenings. The longer shadows of winter, the way it turns to gold in Autumn and how the low grey light creates a neutral template for photographing the colours of our landscapes. Light is everything. Instead of looking at objects look at how the light falls on or around them.

Notice what kind of light brings YOU more into the moment. Perhaps it's in a special place? Maybe it's watching your children play in the sand in the evening? Visual "being in the moment" varies from person to person. A visual

moment may have certain elements of stillness or movement. A visual moment has

something the eye loves. Small details, expansive spaces. Maybe noticing complexity and simplicity? What the eye loves, the camera loves, and the camera loves playing with light.

Practice tips: Take photographs of your living space every hour for a day. Light a candle and play with the flame. Experience warm and cool light. Instead of looking for a subject, make light the subject.



7. Play

When people experience altered states of meditation practice they sometimes describe feelings of weightlessness, vivid waking dreams and a loss of ego. They can feel connected to the world and every living being and find a new consciousness of "present mindedness." Focusing on everyday tasks, even on the simple act of breathing induces some of these states too. It seems to be the same in photography. The task of focusing and learning to see the light in it's many manifestations increases blood flow to the brain and refreshes our mental processes.

My top tip is not to overthink this and to allow your own presence and breath to bring you into the flow. Instead of "trying" just let go and play a little more.....When you watch children in flow states it is always through pleasure, joy, fun and play.....

Practice tips: Selfies, foot photos and all the usual cliches can be great fun. Play with all the visual compositions you love! The soul loves the small stuff....



8. Don't get too hung up on results

Setting out with the camera it's best not to get too hung up on results. It's better to relax and stay with what is happening instead of stressing out about technical details and ruining your moment! My strategy is to shoot as much as I feel like. (True Zen masters probably can be satisfied with one imperfect shot, and that's another interesting exercise. But if you are after improving and building confidence then follow your own heart on this one.) With practice all of this comes naturally anyway. The camera becomes an extension of your eye, hand and heart.

The emotion of the moment is all around. There's a feeling that creeps up the back of my neck when I am really in the flow with a subject or with the light. Sometimes the images that result are not "good enough" but somehow they are infused with such soulfulness from that moment, that I will always love them anyway! I have found that with certain images other people are also then attuned to the emotion in it. Learn from everything you do, experiment, study and get to know your camera.

Practice tips: Photograph what isn't there as well as what is. What does the wind look like? How is morning different from evening? Photograph a blurry mist or a trembling hand.



9. Leave judgement until later

Judging “quality” is an issue that we all struggle with. There are also many aesthetic rules of photography which are also good to understand, but all rules are there to be broken aren't they?

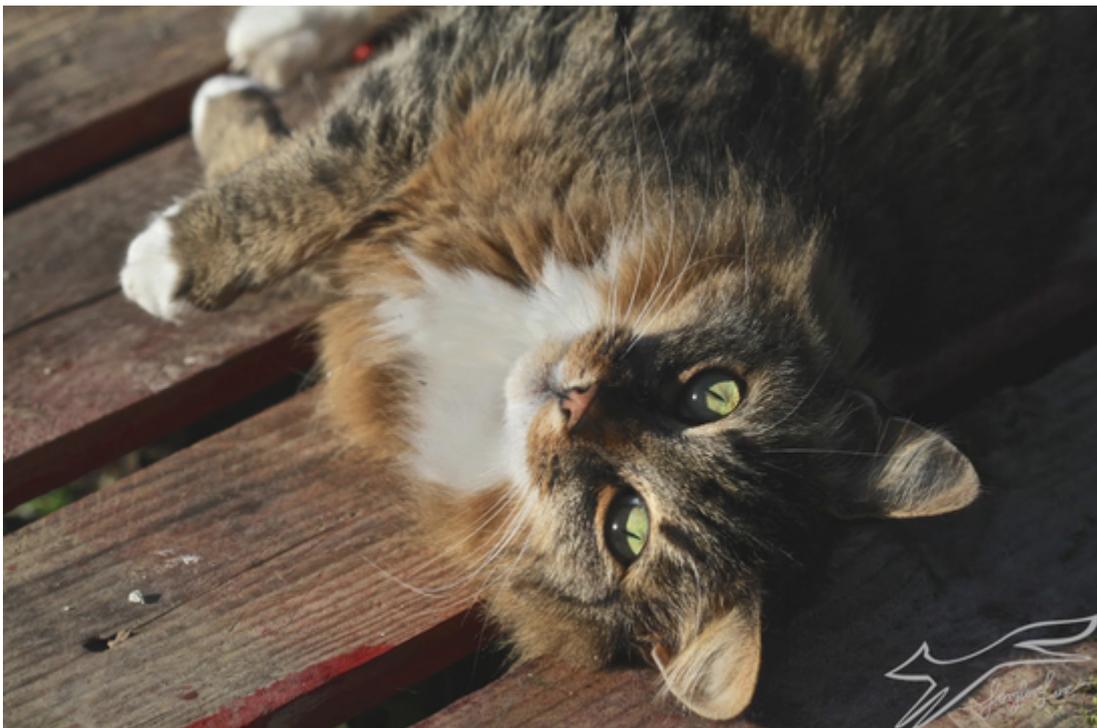
Instead of checking each shot, upload your photos after the session. Then go back and take more time to judge. First for incomplete images.....out of focus, wonky composition, delete plenty at this stage (unless you love them then let them flourish!) Then go back over them all again and select the ones you are most drawn to. Then go back and give the rest of them another going over. I probably delete 80% of what I shoot, selecting and backing up about 5%.

Other photographers are good at deleting as they go. One of my guidelines for a contemplative approach is not to waste time on this. Switching from

feeling to judging is not useful when you are in a contemplative space. Make sure you have lots of free disc and plenty of battery. You are hanging out, being in the moment, following your curiosity and getting into the pleasure of it all.....

But as you learn more you can experiment with processing and editing, all kinds of stuff!!

Practice tips: Break the rules of good composition. Mix random items and colours together. Explore the abstract through texture and pattern. (If you want to explore the photography rules [visit this video by Valerie Jardin](#))



10. Keep learning and find mentors

The hardest part of finding your own voice or style in photography is probably in accepting who you are. It's all part of the ongoing process, of self knowledge, letting what ever IS to be enough, being present to that. The gift of practice is that over time you will learn to be present more and more. You will become a lapsed perfectionist!!

There are lots of amazing photographers and bloggers out there to learn from. But to inspire your practice I have listed some who express some of the essence of soulful, heartfelt and contemplative approaches and who write about it too.

- [Marcie Scudder-daily practices in mediation and mindfulness](#)
- [Bateaux de papier-a diary for Elsa](#)
- [Joanna Paterson-intimate landscape photography](#)
- [Diane Varner : Daily Walks](#)
- [Kim Manley Ort-Contemplative living through photography](#)
- [Seeing fresh-the practice of contemplative photography](#)
- [The camera points both ways](#)

Here are some other posts from the Foxglove Lane blog

- [Studying light](#)
- [Contemplative photography; aliveness](#)
- [Street photography approaches](#)
- [Contemplative photography; the golden hour](#)
- [Portals](#)
- [A mysterious relationship; photography and nature](#)
- [Reluctant to leave winter behind; grief](#)



SECTION 3:

A year of Photography by heart ♥



Photo note: A frosty morning on Foxglove Lane. Low grey winter light, excellent for detail and structure.

A Year of Prompts: How to use it

Sometimes people ask where does inspiration come from? For each of us the answer is different. I have shared a lot about where my inspiration comes from and in that vein I have created a year of weekly prompts which have a seasonal focus. Where you are the seasons could be upside down but simply re-order the prompts if that's an issue.

1. Start by reading the seasonal contemplation and write one of your own from your own perspective.
2. Decide a length of time to explore your season with a camera and a journal, a day, a week, a year. For example you could make it a daily project selecting one image at the end of each week.
3. You could use the prompts as the basis of an Instagram project posting a photo a day and adding a relevant hashtag.
4. Develop a few prompts of your own. Or to write in your journal a bit about your creative journey and what you have learned about how to be and see. This helps to find where our real interests lie, rural, urban, landscape, flowers and plants, children, faces, street, architecture, trees, interiors, light, shade.

I have included some of my own journal entries which became blogposts as a template for how I have made photography a way of inspiring my writing and vice versa.

Winter: CONTEMPLATION



Winter reveals what's underneath; a rusty gate usually overwhelmed by briars, the cattle shed at the ruined cottage normally hidden by trees. Tantalising glimpses into what is out of reach during the leafier seasons.

In rural Ireland myself and the neighbours sky watch and throw our wishes for light into every short encounter. From "there's a stretch in the evenings" to "as long as it's bright" we are guilty of the most repetitive weather conversations that can be had. Consciousness of the sky and the light may be different in an urban setting; the cheeriness of shop windows, the candles in cafes.

Instead of longing for light through the winter months we can also wallow in darkness, the cosiness of a lit fire, the intense sunsets at this time of year.

After the winter solstice at the end of December, the earth has already started to turn in the right direction, from up here on the hill tonight I sense the tilt. Everything in motion, hurtling towards our future at 1670 kilometres per hour. We are surely on an amazing adventure!

Each small step in winter will reveal something new in the familiar. For me it will be in the same few fields, the frosty lane snaking into the distance, the waterlogged forest path where everything is breaking down again. What will it be for you? Where will you point your camera? What will you see?



WINTER
PHOTO PROMPTS

DECEMBER	JANUARY	FEBRUARY
Chill	Moist	Morning
Darkening	Drink	Silhouette
Cosy	Red	Face
Feast	Shadow	Pattern
Bonus: Hibernate	Bonus: Begin	Bonus: Play

SPRING: CONTEMPLATION



Your sacred space is where you can find yourself again and again. Joseph Campbell

Spring comes early here in Ireland. Delicate and lemony leaves fill the hedgerows. Soon, foxgloves will be flowering again on the lane.

The privilege I feel turning into my sixth decade is overwhelming. Early losses meant that I may have lived a little tentatively, now my grip on life has become ferocious. Along the way I may have felt unsure, but now my feet step strongly along the path. Like a suffragette for all the women in my life who have missed the chance to grow old, I am beginning to deeply appreciate my own heart beating like a young thing!

Alone time is precious. Quiet moments sitting at the desk with a cup of coffee or meandering in the small fields amongst the signs of Spring. Day dreaming whenever there is an opportunity, staring at the lake or photographing the small birds outside the window.

I would never, ever tire of practicing this kind of "finding yourself again".

The work space is still a bit of a moveable feast but I am drawing on a life time of "letting go" experience when things don't turn out as expected. As the eldest of 4 girls, not a stitch of clothing was ever off limits to any of them and my Barbie doll was covered in blue biro tattoos and a badly drawn moustache. As a result I travel lightly enough through life.....

But I do get very attached to Mother Earth, the *Wild Mother and to the fabric of the places I spend time in. Small groves of trees and certain banks of flowers will comfort me in ways I can't fathom. I seek out the quiet and untrampled on the one hand and the ancient on the other. Sacred spaces, places with soul.

Soon I am soothed and at home. Gnarled lichens developing on Blackthorn trees, tangled spider villages on the Gorse bushes, early morning dew turning to fat drops on every leaf. And yes, as Campbell says, I find myself and all the good stuff about being here in these small mysteries.

Where do you find your sacred space?

*Women who run with wolves by Clarissa Pinkola Estes

SPRING: PHOTO PROMPTS

MARCH	APRIL	MAY
Green	Fresh	Sun
Party	Blossom	Animal
Seed	Smile	Flower
Dig	Guide	Door
Bonus: Promise	Bonus: Nourish	Bonus: Trust

SUMMER: CONTEMPLATION



Well it wasn't a summer of sunny swims or shady meadow picnics. But in our typical Irish summer there were golden days in spite of that.

That's the thing about looking back, we somehow manage to find the sun in it. Like the day the little girl in pink wellies flew her kite on Tramore Beach, the day the neighbours' geese made a run for me, or the perishing Sunday I saw my elders swimming happily during howling gales in Garrarus.

The way the local girls exercise their ponies and manage to chat about Justin Bieber at the same time. Paddy's delight when he finds something lovely for me to photograph. The screams coming from the disembodied legs at the amusements "down around."

Those cloudy grey skies and the very occasionally visible western sunset which would have me running up to the highest point on the hill. The way that little pools of dreamy coloured rain settle in Hydrangea flowers.

Perhaps one of my favourite sights this summer was of the French couple snacking on the [Copper Coast](#) bench at Annestown beach. Wrapped up warm, a nice bottle of wine, a pint of Guinness and a selection of cheeses, all while staring into space and an onshore breeze.....A great example of what we would call "getting the best from the day." Here's to a few more weeks of the typical Irish summer!

I checked the sea temperature today. Not much more than 13/14 degrees centigrade anywhere in Ireland. This year the cold sea water was harder to bear.

By the time we arrive in Kerry our friends are already a couple of weeks into the rhythm of twice daily swims. They glow from endorphins, icy water and warm wine. Dingle is their annual pilgrimage, and a sanctuary away from everything.

As a brief respite from the awful summer, the sun appears. It calms the icy water and the waves in Coumenoule are a bit less terrifying. I tingle all over from a fair few dunkings and summer holiday happiness.

On the way back I listen to [John O'Donohue talking to Krista Tippett](#) in a re-released interview from 2007. While I always found John hard to read, his lilting voice confirms so much tonight.....

"Well, I think it makes a huge difference when you wake in the morning and come out of your house. Whether you believe you are walking into dead geographical location, which is used to get to a destination, or whether you are emerging out into a landscape that is just as much, if not more, alive as you but in a totally different form.

And if you go towards it with an open heart and a real watchful reverence, that you will be absolutely amazed at what it will reveal to you. And I think that that was one of the recognitions of the Celtic imagination: that landscape wasn't just matter, but that it was actually alive.

What amazes me about landscape, landscape recalls you into a mindful mode of stillness, solitude, and silence where you can truly receive time."

John O' Donohue



SUMMER: PHOTO PROMPTS

JUNE	JULY	AUGUST
Water	Circle	Bloom
Colour	Pink	Orange
Flight	Friendship	Tribe
Street	Full	Fun
Bonus: Flow	Bonus: Stumble	Bonus: Share

AUTUMN: CONTEMPLATIONS



You are on your knees in a lavender patch, following the music of bees. In the distance a harvester is droning, and the evening sun highlights wings and petals.

You are obsessing about the need for a soft bed and a warm hearth as the autumn sets in; for a safe place to pause, for a warm welcome. And you can't imagine leaving all this, leaving your own home and setting out on foot, to walk for miles to who knows where?

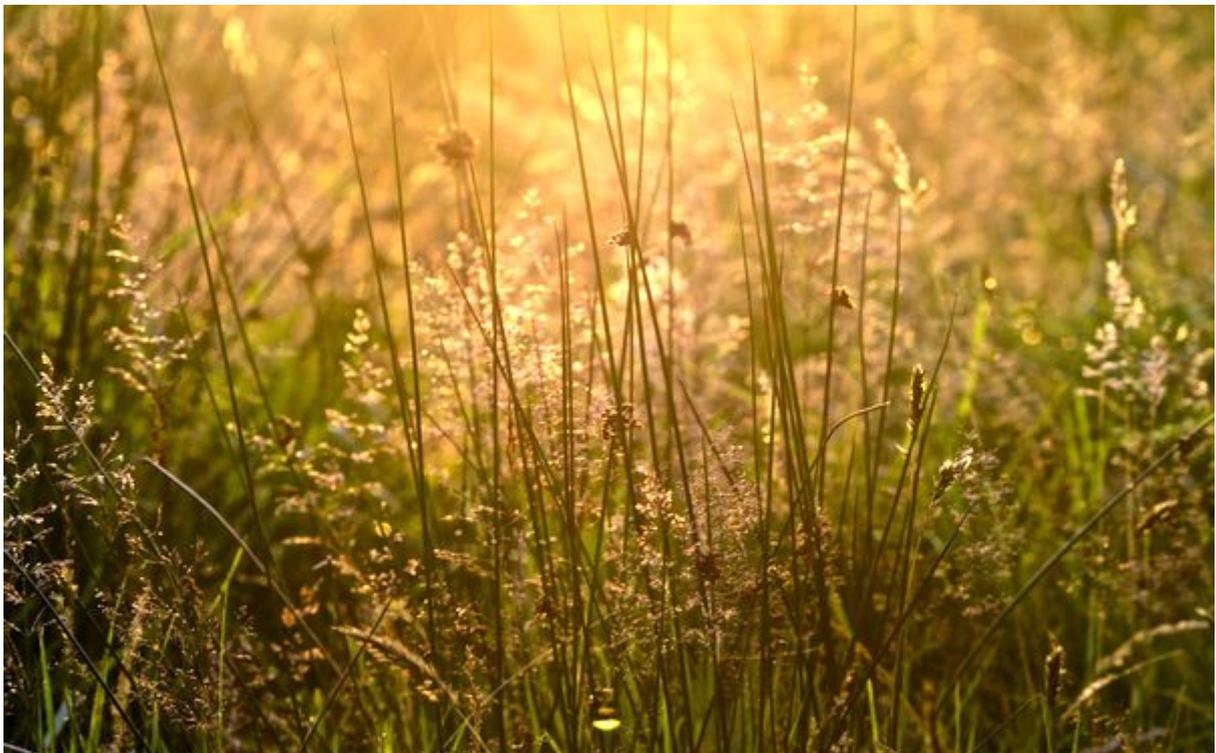
And you can barely grasp how thousands of them are walking through fields full of lavender and don't have even a moment to watch every last flicker of this season's sunsets, or to photograph bees in the evening light.

And you find that "\$50 will provide high thermal fleece blankets to help protect a family from the elements." And you can't help imagining those dark elements as the chill of a September breeze, rustles through the leaves.

Do you share a memory of lying under trees, watching the light flicker through the leaves? Did you throw yourself onto the grass and stare into the sky? Did you roll in leaves and kick them down the path on the way home from school, or half close your eyes to see faeries dancing between the branches and the sunlight?

Although Ireland should be covered in trees, outside urban areas the forests tend to be the monotonous evergreen pines planted all over Northern Europe. Sadly there is a lack of autumn glory in this part of the world, here autumn is over and winter has arrived.

But today under this rare group of copper beeches I revisited dreamy schoolgirl moments. Perhaps the world has enough photos of autumn leaves?



AUTUMN: PHOTO PROMPTS

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER
Sway	Bend	Sparse
Golden	Pie	Breakfast
Fruit	Soul	Flower
Plenty	Branch	Wood
Bonus: Harvest	Bonus: Reflect	Bonus: Deepen



SECTION 4: Photography with heart ♥



Further learning

Learning more about photography will add a layer of pleasure and deepen your practice. There are lots of free online resources for that and books of great interest to the practitioner.

The following links and books are precious resources.

Studying your favourite artists, musicians, poets, writers is as important as studying photographers.

See more by standing on the shoulders of giants!

My top tips for improving your photography (a separate task from photographing contemplatively) are as follows

1. One of my photography teachers pointed this one out to me and it's so simple and yet makes all the difference! **Straighten your horizons.** This is not always easy to get right in camera but with any simple editing tool this will always be an option afterwards. If you are going to have a dynamic diagonal in you image then make it strong and not a kind of haphazard mistake!
2. **Make use of natural light.** I am almost exclusively and natural light photographer and so I watch the light for the very best conditions. Harsh sunlight is probably the hardest kind of light to deal with and in these situations I tend to search out dappled light or shade. However in Ireland light is mostly suffused and soft good for photographing smaller details. So watch for the early mornings and the evenings. Notice how the light is slanted, angled and usually warmer too. This is an ideal time for catching light and shade, enhanced landscapes and skies and atmospheric places.
3. **Practice stillness.** Sounds simple enough but in the everyday buzz it is essential to capturing what you see. Hold your camera in a relaxed but stable position, rest on a wall or table, use a tripod if you tend to be shaky. Also get a lens with a stabiliser feature if you need close up intimate photos. This will help with camera shake.
4. **Move yourself and your camera** to take advantage of variety in framing the shot. (It means getting down on your knees in the mud quite a lot!) Climb to a better vantage point. Look up, down, behind you. Check out the many ways of seeing something and experiment with closeness for more intimacy or distance for more spaciousness.

5. **Framing** is talked about quite a lot in photography training. Literally what you want to have in the frame of your lens/image. Of course this involves everything, the composition, the number of items in the shot the horizon position. If you are a beginner it is worth looking at a lot of work from experienced shooters. Analyse and explore what they have IN the shot and what is not.
6. Look for the **abstract elements** of what you are looking at. Is there pattern, repetition, symmetry, randomness? Any of these more abstract structure can be emphasised when you are aware of them.



Editing

I use a few editing tools which are wonderful and simple. First of all I am a MAC user so I have iPhoto and Aperture installed on my laptop. I never use Photoshop!! You can do everything you need to with these.

If you are using a camera on your phone then there are some great little apps which are a lot of fun to play with . I like Snapseed. I also have Afterlight, Stackables, Fusion Photo and Hyperlapse. Honestly I rarely ever use them. A lot of editing is not my style, but there are some small editing changes that I make on a regular basis.

Because I use an iPhone camera so often and Irish daylight is very soft and diffuse I often heighten my contrast or exposure right there on the phone settings. I also send images from my DSLR camera to my phone and give them the same easy peasy treatment.



There are some fantastic filters available to change the look of your images and this has been elevated to an art form by people like Susan Tuttle. Check them out.



Photo note:

Sharing the love ♥

Sharing is part of our nature and connecting with others of similar interests through social media has been a great support to my own development. At some point along the way I began to blog and have been doing that for 5 years now. For me writing and photography now go together.

Taking a photo a week for the whole year you will generate at least 52 opportunities to share your work. If you already use Facebook, Twitter or Instagram then you have a ready made opportunity to share.

Instagram for me holds the most opportunity for sharing and learning. There is something about completing the circle of making your own creative work and then sharing it with others. Using #hashtags that relate to your interests can help you to find out who to follow and who shares your passion and your interests.



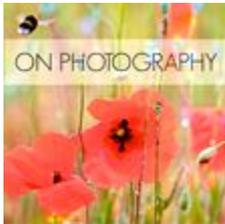
I photograph this ancient tree throughout the seasons. It is in a huge field in County Kilkenny. Through sharing on social media many people comment that they know this tree too! It displays so much strength and gravitas and we all share our love of it.

Every day I upload one photo to [Instagram](#) and this is also shared on my Twitter feed and on my Facebook Page through an app called IFFT. This allows an automated posting and it saves time and effort spent online. On Instagram you

will find so many artists and photographers to inspire your work. I recommend you take part!!

Don't get anxious or fall into the trap of "comparatis". If I've learned one thing in life it is that you are where you are, and you are who you are!! Stay on your own path.....this is all just for YOU!!

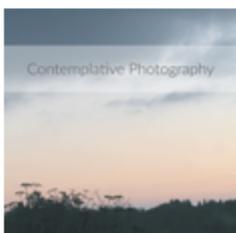
You will find a whole lot of other resources on photography as a creative practice here on my website, just click on any of these images to go there.



[On photography](#)



[On creativity](#)



[On contemplative photography](#)

Love after Love

The time will come
when, with elation,
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door,
in your own mirror,
and each will smile at the other's welcome
and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread.
Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

Derek Walcott

Hope you have enjoyed this Guide to Photography with heart ♥.
Yes! Feast on your life.....

I would love to hear from you if you have any insights I could add to
this little guide or any feedback on your own creative journey,

Much love Catherine

