

MJR: Hey.

Matt Eich: Hey, man.

MJR: Let's get this started. So what're you doing in D.C. right now?

ME: I'm from Virginia but been living in Ohio for the past four years but I'm in D.C. now interning at [National] Geographic. Started in June.

MJR: There's another photographer who I think did the internship. Casey Templeton?

ME: Yeah I know Casey.

MJR: So what drew you to photography?

ME: It was kind of a direct path for me, just always seemed like the thing I was going to end up doing. But I think it really ties back to my childhood. I remember my grandmother going through Alzheimer's and kind of how she was losing her memory and everything that made her who she was. So I started taking pictures around that time, documenting my life obsessively as a child. I was kind of hoping to preserve memories, in a way, if that makes any sense. I think it spun off of that, realizing this potential to communicate something, not just preserve. Something greater than that.

MJR: When you're in the moment and you're doing a story, what are you trying to draw from that? I understand what you said about photographs as documentation and how they can communicate ideas, but what aspects trigger you to make a picture in the first place?

ME: I guess it depends on each picture in each story. Everything requires a different approach and hopefully will give you a different outcome. The work I sent you, the stuff from rural Ohio, it's kind of driven by this desire to understand the people that live in the area that surrounds my school. And I felt like when I got in, a lot of the students were in this bubble and weren't really aware of the lives of these people who lived on the fringes of the community. And I felt like these people should be seen and heard, so that was the driving force behind going out there and exploring those areas.

MJR: And what area is this in Ohio?

ME: Southeastern, so it's about an hour and half south of Columbus. It's kind of close to the West Virginia border.

MJR: I'm looking at the pictures and they're great photographs, but what really strikes me is how intimate they are. Not necessarily with how close you are, but with a level of honesty. What can emerging photographer's who are reading and looking at this, take away from this?

ME: Just find something you feel passionate about that you can really sink your teeth into.

MJR: But more in terms of method. Looking at these pictures, one would wonder how you did it.

ME: I guess just be honest with yourself and honest with your subjects. I mean, I really don't feel like I understood what I was getting into when I started taking pictures there. The longer I spent with the people the better I understood their situation and how I might have misread things at first. I started integrating into their daily life and understanding what keeps them ticking, but I don't fully understand that by any stretch.

MJR: It's not just about them being our subjects. It's more than that.

ME: You can't as an outsider really fully understand what drives people but your understanding gets to be more pure over a period of time if you keep working on things. It's give and take. Every-time someone opens up to me photographically, I feel like I've had to open up with them beforehand. A lot of it's talking one-on-one and making sure that they're aware what your attentions are and they're comfortable with you being there.

MJR: It comes through in the final work. As a Ohio student, how did they receive you?

ME: In certain communities there's a level of distrust. If any outsider, especially people from university, come around, they (the locals) have this perception of these yuppie college kids coming in and not giving back to the community, just taking from it. And it's thoroughly valid, but you've got to get around that stigma of being a college student. If you're from Chancy versus Gloucester, it really makes a difference in the way people view you in that area. Being from nowhere near there and then wandering into the middle of town is a little difficult sometimes. But you meet one person and hit it off with them, it can spider web from there.

MJR: I was checking out your website and you're represented by Aurora Select. What made you want to go with them and what do you see for yourself down the path?

ME: [laughs] Yeah, I don't know, man. I'm taking it one step at a time at this point. I really like some of the folks at Aurora. David Laidler is the rep with Select and he's a solid guy all around. He's really sharp and he's been very helpful when it comes to pushing me and figure out where to go from here. It's a working agency so it's not really the place where I'll be doing a lot of projects, I don't think, and getting those pitched and sold. I'll be doing that on my own. It's assignment work which pays the bills, which is kind of my main concern.

MJR: Your MediaStorm presentation deals a lot with personal issues for you. Let's discuss how being a young photographer and a young father affects your work. I've spoken with photographers at length about this. I spoke with Stanley [Greene] about this very topic and not to knock Stanley--because he's a great guy--but he was pretty much telling me that he didn't think relationships would work in terms of documentary and conflict photography. What's your take on it?

ME: Yeah, they are definitely intertwined, man. There's no other way about it. Honestly, I feel like photography is great and I'm head over heels in love with [it]. When it's all said and done and you're dead and gone, I guess it depends on how you want your life to look in hindsight. I really want to be there for my family. Everything changes and evolves and grows over time, but in this period I feel like I really be there and be supportive of my wife, help her finish up school. She's been really supportive helping me get through school. We've been away from each other during the internship. It's definitely not easy.

MJR: Does your sensitivity to photographing people feed from your family life?

ME: I think being a father informs the way that I see other things. I see parents interact with their kids better. Certain work will tug at my heart strings now in a different way than it used to. I'm still really wanting to find a way to integrate meaningful work into this family life and see if I can make it all work. Time will tell how that all works out.

MJR: Sorry for launching such a heavy question on you for the first interview. I'm seeing a lot of different threads to this career, to the life of a photojournalist. And you've kind of

put yourself out there, with the MediaStorm, where it became part of your story, a part of your life.

ME: No problem, it's a good question.

MJR: What's your take on our industry. You did mention your work and family life are intertwined. Considering that things are in flux, is it a worry of yours? And is it something you're taking into account or something you hope to move past and succeed in the current market?

ME: [laughs] I don't know, man. I really can't say.

MJR: [laughs] That's the perfect answer actually.

ME: And that's the million dollar question! I think the tendency is for us all to first be doom and gloom, myself included at times. As much as we have these tendencies, there's a lot of opportunities out there if people are aware of them and looking for them. I really think I'm going to keep my head down and try to produce some work and then hope we all end up on the other side of this. I mean, my guess is that it's pretty grim right now, but I think it's going to work itself out over time.

MJR: Where do you see yourself fitting into all that? Multimedia? Is it going into video?

ME: I've done a little bit of multimedia stuff, but that's not really where my passion is. I'm really just all about making pictures. I'll just fit in where I can and see.

MJR: Let's move on to something more interesting. What inspires you?

ME: Music influences me to a large degree. It's kind of the root of my interest in anything artistic; it gave me a foundation to work from and an appreciation for a lot of photography's characteristics.

MJR: And in terms of photography?

ME: My influences are constantly shifting, depending on what I'm looking at. The ones that I can consistently go back to and be inspired by are folks like Eugene Richard or Alec Soth. When I moved to D.C. this summer, I brought two photobooks with me; "*Winterreise*" by Luc Delahaye and "*The Silence*" by Gilles Peress. Today I was just looking at Philip Toledano's series on his father, which was deeply beautiful.

MJR: What have been your experiences at Geographic so far?

ME: Even though I'm right in the thick of it now, I'd have to say that I'm still trying to figure out the ropes at National Geographic. It is worlds different than any other internship experience I've had and I'm trying my best to soak up as much as I can while here. I'm hopping on a plane to India in a couple hours, so I might have a small story or two to tell afterwards.

MJR: Sounds good, man.

ME: The India trip is part two of an experimental web project I'm doing for Geographic. It should be live by the end of August.

MJR: Good luck.

ME: Thanks for the opportunity to put the work out there. Take care and keep in touch.