



# STILLNESS IN FOCUS

A Photographer's Guide to Curiosity, Creativity and Seeing More Clearly

Photography and Stories by Eric Dusenbery



Introducing a new book by Eric Dusenbery for 2025

## STILLNESS IN FOCUS

A PHOTOGRAPHER'S GUIDE TO CURIOSITY, CREATIVITY AND SEEING MORE CLEARLY

**What if taking photos could change the way you see the world — and yourself?**

In a culture of constant scrolling and quick snaps, this book invites you to slow down, look closer, and rediscover the joy of seeing.

Whether you're holding a camera for the first time or rekindling an old passion, *Stillness In Focus* blends practical curiosity, storytelling and photography tips with creative prompts and mindful reflections to help you find beauty in the everyday. It's not about getting the “perfect shot” — it's about becoming more present, more curious, and more connected to the world around you.

### **You'll learn how to:**

- Build curiosity and photography habits that sparks creativity.
- See like an artist (even if you don't feel like one).
- Use your camera as a tool for curiosity and personal growth.
- Find stories and meaning in the ordinary.

If you've ever longed to make images with more soul — and live a life with more wonder — this book is your starting point.

Please feel free to post this to your social media and/or email to podcasters, content creators, authors, etc.



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## Introduction

“These hands of mine have seen a lot of hard work,” Ormond Simmons said. “I don’t believe there’s a man in the state of Florida that’s worked any harder than I have.”

A rancher who once took care of 39,000 acres with 2,600 head of cattle, Simmons is a tough, old Florida cowman. My hand disappeared in his as we shook hands and settled into a couple of rocking chairs.

He then started telling stories.

I have visited numerous towns and driven on countless back roads to find people like Ormond Simmons with unique local stories that convey a sense of place.

I'm a person who is curious about life and satisfy that feeling by traveling far and wide and making photographs along the way. I like to dive beneath the surface to find what gives a place its distinctive character. I seek out stories and experiences to inspire, entertain and inform others.

Curiosity motivates me to explore. I find that stories are around us every day. We just have to keep looking for them with a curious attitude. I tend to explore what others don't — to travel off-the-beaten path — to photograph and tell stories and help readers understand a sense of place and gain a unique perspective.



This approach has been so invaluable to my career that I thought it might help others to ask questions, step out to new experiences and to see differently. And, the result is this book.

It is intentionally jargon-free. There are no industry buzzwords, complicated business formulas or a secret path to success — just photographs, essays, articles, stories and why the power of curiosity is such an important tool.

This book is also about choosing a thoughtful approach to photography. A section on composition, critical thinking, *learning to see* and how to develop different perspectives is included.

Two words define my career. *Be curious.*

Curiosity is wanting to know more about something. Not because you have to or you must, but you want to.

In my career as a professional photographer, curiosity has been the most important item I *carry* in my camera bags. Curiosity, along with creativity (or, call it *style*, *vision*, or *perspective*) is what defines me as a photographer. With camera digital technologies changing so rapidly and the increasing reliance on smartphones, something beyond equipment and technology is needed — curiosity is the answer.

And, it not just in photography but in all facets of our lives, curiosity is the key ingredient. Why do we travel to off-the beaten-path locations ? Because we're curious to know what's just around the corner. Why do we read books? We want to know more about something. Why do journalists interview both the famous and the ordinary? They are curious about their story and what brought them to where they are today.

Curiosity can solve problems and open opportunities.

I'm also curious about finding the perfect fried grouper sandwich, Philly cheese steaks; excellent coffee; great books (To Kill a Mockingbird; Blue Highways; All Creatures Great and Small); and the occasional good cigar. And, I love getting away from the computer and the digital world by using film, darkroom and traditional photography.

### **A note about the photographs**

One of my favorite camera formats to use is the 4 x 5 large format film camera. I enjoy keeping the traditions of photography alive and working in a darkroom. It's an experience and I like the tonal characteristics of resulting prints.

It's a format not a lot of photographers use and you can't take selfies with it. It is a slow deliberate process and a different kind of approach.

Many of the photographs in this book include 4 x 5 images and I have left the film borders to be visible. All cropping was completed in the camera.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Curiosity Navigator**

By the third rung of the primitive ladder, I was already having doubts.

The salt sting of sweat reached my eye as I balanced a tripod in one hand and reached for the next rung with the other. My backpack—heavy with a 4x5 large-format camera, lenses, film holders, and all the analog tools of my trade—dug deep into my shoulders. My thighs throbbed. This was no ordinary hike. But then again, curiosity rarely leads you down the easy path.

I had traveled 1,900 miles from Florida to the Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Park in Colorado. While most tourists flock to Mesa Verde, I wondered if there was a more meaningful, less-trafficked place to photograph the ancient cliff dwellings of the Ancestral Puebloans. That simple question—*what if there's another way?*—was the spark.

That's how I found myself here, climbing through ancient lands preserved by the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, led by a Native guide into sacred terrain, my camera gear strapped to my back, my curiosity guiding every step.



## Following the Wonder Trail

Before leaving Florida, I'd researched the journey of 19th-century photographer William Henry Jackson, who hauled his equipment by mule to photograph Mesa Verde. What if I honored that spirit and used my own large-format camera to connect to that history—not for nostalgia's sake, but to slow down and *see* more deeply?

That “what if” became the first step of the journey.

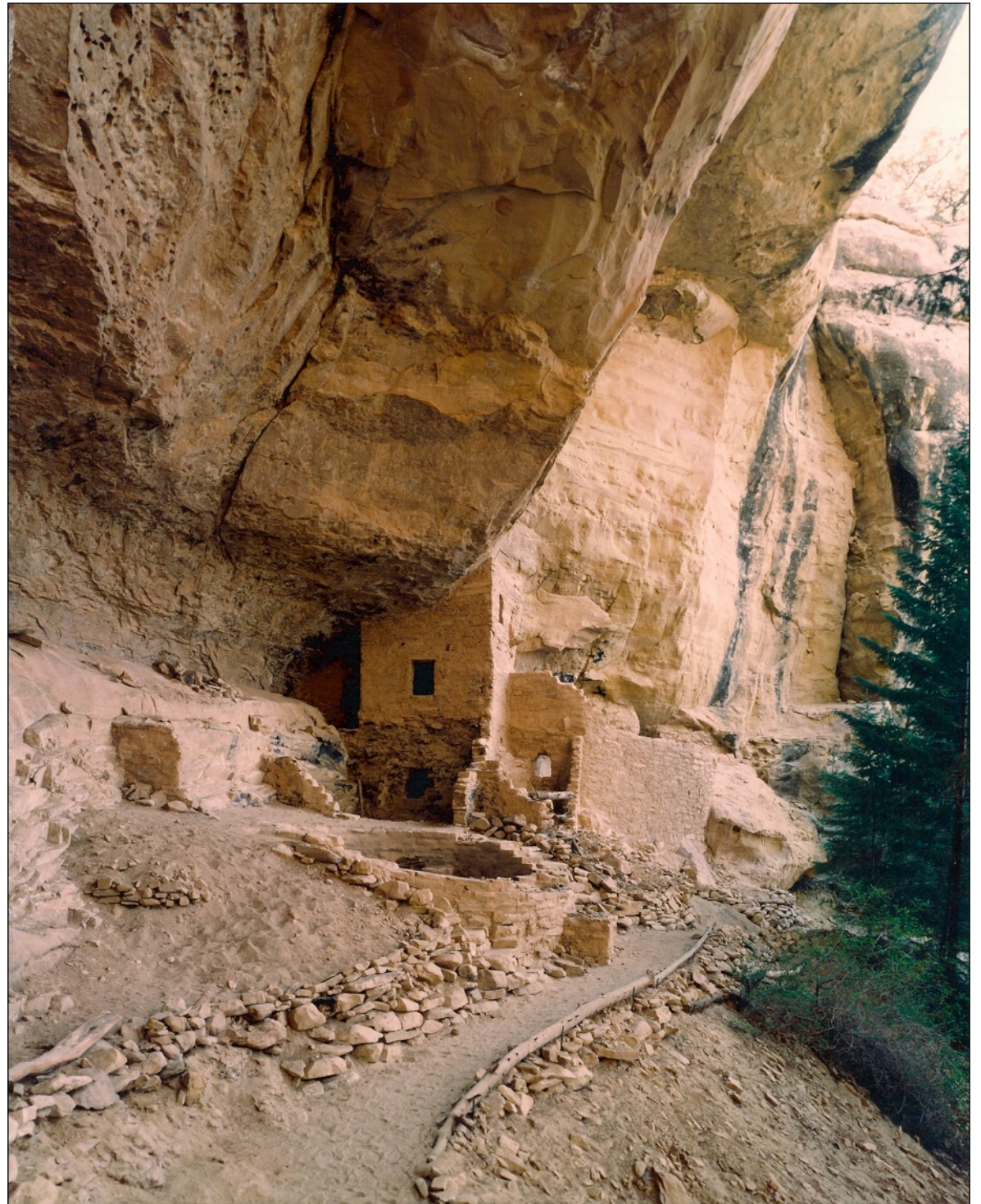
Curiosity isn't just a trait—it's a practice. It makes you ask:

- *What am I not seeing?*
- *Is there a better question I could be asking?*
- *What if I left the popular path entirely?*

It's not just about finding unusual places. It's about showing up differently.

## Photographic Intuition, Built from Questions

By the time I reached Tree House, one of the cliff



dwelling built into the steep canyon wall, I was exhausted—but focused. The breeze whistled through the trees. The silence was complete.

I unpacked my gear while my guide, sensing this would take a while, quietly sat down nearby.

There's a moment before each photograph—especially with a 4x5 camera—when everything slows. I walk the scene. I listen. I imagine. I ask the land, *What story lives here?* A kiva ruin in the foreground caught my attention, and I began the deliberate, often contorted process of composing on the ground glass.

Upside-down and reversed, the image forces you to abandon assumptions and look closer. You stop chasing the “right” photo and start asking the “real” questions. *What is the feeling here? What does this light reveal that words can't?*

I made two exposures. But more importantly, I made a connection—with the place, the moment, and the quiet echo of history.

## **Stepping Out of Line**

In our highly curated world of algorithms and viral locations, many photographers line up to recreate the same images over and over. It's efficient, it's trending—and it's forgettable.

Curiosity is what sets you apart. It invites you to *step out of line*. It dares you to *look again*.

It's not just about discovering a new place—it's about discovering a new *way* of seeing.

Whether you're a photographer, a storyteller, or someone simply looking to live more fully, curiosity is the compass. It's what leads journalists to powerful stories, scientists to breakthrough discoveries, and artists to their most honest work.

## **A Life Guided by Wonder**

As children, our first impulse is to ask “why?” Somewhere along the way, we’re taught to stop. But the best work I’ve ever done—and the richest moments of my life—began with a question I couldn’t stop asking.

Curiosity doesn’t just improve your photography. It enriches your life. It slows you down, opens your eyes, and turns even the most ordinary moments into opportunities for discovery.

My guide may have thought the whole setup was a bit absurd—me squinting under a dark cloth, awkwardly balancing film holders and light meters—but what I was doing was listening. Looking. Asking.

Following wonder.

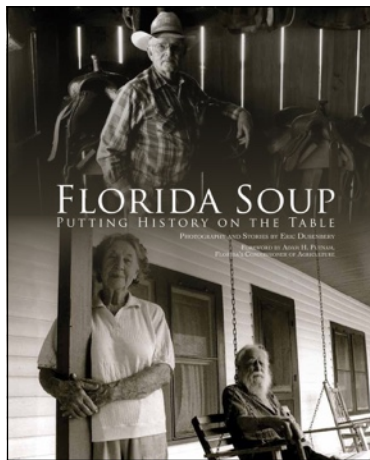
And in that quiet canyon, with ancient stones watching, it was enough.



## ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER / AUTHOR

Eric Dusenbery (B.A. Cinema & Photography, Southern Illinois University), is a photographer, an award-winning journalist, author/photographer of two books and the recipient of several grants and sponsorships to produce documentary projects that tell stories to preserve the human spirit and to educate and promote an appreciation for the rich cultural identity of the United States. He frequently uses the traditions of the large format film camera for documentary and commissioned projects that harken back to the Farm Security Administration photographers of the mid-20th century. His photography has been widely exhibited and his work has appeared in numerous national publications. Research and documentary interests include: rural and small town cultural studies; Industrial diversity; ethnography; historic architecture; large-format environmental portraiture; human interest; analog photography.

Previous books include:

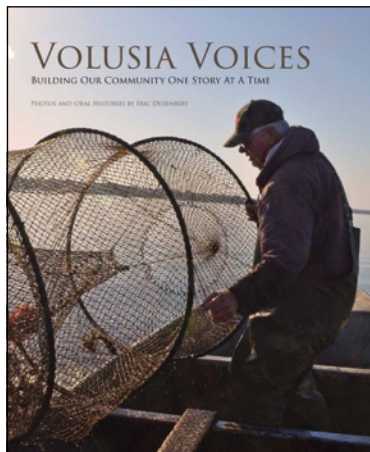


### **Florida Soup: Putting History On the Table**

(ISBN 978-0-615-81236-6) Foreword by Adam Putnam, Florida Commissioner of Agriculture. Three-year travel, research and production (history, lifestyle, industrial diversity, foodways, ethnography) for book offering a compelling look at historic cooking habits, food production and recipes that define the family and community in rural and small-town Florida.

"Our state has such a rich history. For 500 years, cultures ranging from Cracker to Hispanic to Minorcan and more have spiced up our melting pot. And a big part of that is our food. Food is not just sustenance here; it's a way of life. Florida Soup is for the native and newcomer alike. Eric Dusenbery speaks to those of us who love a good story, long for slower clocks and fold memories into meals like so much butter and flour."

Adam Putnam, Florida's Commissioner of Agriculture in the Foreword to the book, Florida Soup: Putting History On the Table



### **Volusia Voices: Building Our Community One Story At A Time**

(ISBN: 978-0-692-57841-4) A two-year documentary project to collect the stories that portray everyday Volusia County residents through photography and first-person narratives. Volusia Voices explored the county to seek Volusians who are extraordinary — though they may not know it — and show the rich diversity and character of this area.