
SELF-HEALING THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

Quick Guide
Written by Kevin Landwer-Johan



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We all need healing from time to time, whether it's from an illness, a broken bone, or a broken heart, or even from a disappointment or anxiety.

Photography is never going to mend a broken bone or cure a virus, but the creative process of photography can bring relief from stress, pain, heartbreak, and other negative experiences we need healing from.

This is a photography publication, and I am not a doctor, so in this guide I'll not be delving into medical realms. However, I would like to share from my experience how photography can stimulate personal healing.

 **Recommended Reading:** Want to learn how to make your photos stand out from everyone else's? Grab a copy of Photzy's [Effective Storytelling](#) premium guide.



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

YOUR CAMERA IS A BRIDGE

Many people live fast-paced and somewhat chaotic lives. Work, study, and social commitments can all compound to induce stress. Often this stress is mild. Left unchecked, though, it becomes more complicated and can result in health deterioration.

I realized when I was in my 20s that I carried my stress in my neck and shoulders. Muscles in these areas would become tight and painful as I found myself feeling stressed. This caused physical pain.

Since a cycling accident when I was a teenager, I have also suffered recurring acute pain.

As a young man, I was also painfully shy and often very anxious, especially when I was around other people I didn't know.

Along the way, I have learned my camera is a bridge over these streams of pain. When I am mindful of how it can help, it transports me to a better place. It helps release the stress and distract from the pain. This brings me peace and healing.

 **Key Lesson:** Think of your camera as a bridge. When you're taking photos, be mindful of connecting with your camera and with what you are photographing. Giving these things your full attention is very therapeutic.



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

MAKE GOOD ART

A camera can be a tool used merely to grab a moment to remember or to document a menu in a restaurant or a screengrab of a web page – purely functionally. A camera is also a powerful tool for creating art when you use it well.

So many people today grab snapshots with their phone cameras. They seek pleasure by uploading photos to social media, thinking the more photos they upload and 'likes' they receive, the better photographers they are. This is not usually good art. Nor does it have any healing potential. Often, it's quite the opposite.

Your camera can become a bridge to self-healing when you are mindfully creative with it. When you engage in photography as a creative process first and foremost for yourself, the camera becomes a bridge that transports us away from stress and pain to bring healing.

The creative process of photography, whatever you choose to point your camera at, is freeing. Making good art as an expression of who we are is liberating.



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

If I'm feeling particularly stressed, I know picking up my camera and taking some photos is one of the best ways to find relief. These days I'm not often stressed, but that does not stop me from enjoying photography.

When I'm in physical pain, picking up my camera and concentrating on photography can be challenging. But when I focus on photography, my attention is no longer on the pain. The side effects of this experience (a bunch of new photos) are far more pleasurable than any pharmaceutical pain relief medication. I have learned to be careful and aware that my photography activity does not aggravate my injury and worsen the pain!

 **Key Lesson:** As we engage in the creativity of photography, our minds, bodies, and spirits are all focused in the moment. This is when the best photos are made.



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

TAKING THE STRESS OUT OF PHOTOGRAPHY

What if picking up a camera is stressful? Many new photographers or occasional photographers experience that working with their camera causes stress rather than relieves it.

The answer to finding freedom from this stress is easy. Study and practice.

I've recently bought a new camera. It's not a Nikon which is the brand I've been using for decades. It's a Lumix. Learning to use this little powerhouse of technology is difficult. But, after some time with the manual in one hand and the camera in the other, I've figured out all the important stuff. Now I can get on and enjoy using it.

If you don't understand how to manage the settings on your camera, you will not find it liberating to use. It will be confusing, and the results will not match your expectations.



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

Take your time to learn the essential controls. Then practice. Every day. With frequent practice and continued learning, you'll master your camera. From then on you can use it easily and with freedom.

Engaging in a long-term project is another excellent way to remove the stress from photography. Decide on what you want to photograph, what you love, and photograph it over a long period of time.

Each time you pick up your camera you'll not be wondering what to photograph. Instead, your creative attention will be on making better photos of your topic than you did the day before.



Key Lesson: When you understand your camera and can use it with confidence, photography becomes so much more pleasurable. Knowing what you want to photograph each time you pick up your camera stimulates your creative potential.

MAKE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY EXPERIENCE AN IMMERSIVE ONE

It's so easy to lose track of time when I am taking photos. When I'm totally focused on getting the best pictures I can, nothing else matters at that moment.

So much therapy is about living in the moment. Being in the here and now. Not dwelling on the worries of the past or letting anxiety about the future consume your thoughts. As you engage with photography, you have an awesome opportunity to embrace the present moment.

One of the main reasons for this is related to what makes the difference between a good photo and a not-so-good one. The decisive moment – that fraction of a second when your shutter is open, and your camera's sensor captures an image. If your mind is not fully there, you'll miss that moment.

Concentrating on being creatively productive brings great joy, no matter what you create. If it doesn't, try doing it differently. Or try some other form of creative expression.

The more focused you are on your photography, the less attention you'll have for those things in life that are bringing you down.

This is your choice. You are free to mull over your work struggles or how badly you think that date went

last night. You can worry about that upcoming test or telling someone some news they may not want to hear. Or you can instead pick up your camera and dive into creating some photos. The stress will diminish the more you let yourself be immersed in your photography.

Make photography a meditation. Whether you're in a field alone with your camera photographing landscapes, or you're surrounded by people on the subway or in a crowded market, concentrate on creating, and distractions will disappear.



Key Lesson: Making a conscious choice to immerse yourself in photography every day is up to you. At first, it may be very challenging. But as you press on and make it a regular part of your life, you'll find that you spend more and more time at it. You'll also notice the development of your technical skills and creative expression. Both contribute to self-healing.



Recommended Reading: Want to learn how to make your photos stand out from everyone else's? Grab a copy of Photzy's Effective Storytelling premium guide.



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan



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TAKE PHOTOS JUST FOR YOU

Don't feel pressured to create a successful social media account to show off your images. This can have a negative effect on using photography for self-healing. The need for 'likes' and mass recognition has become quite toxic.

I'm sure it's great to have a huge following and loads of clicks, but often this is very shallow and has nothing much to do with how many people truly appreciate your creative expression.

Decide to be careful how and where you share your photos. I know many people, especially young people, who suffer anxiety when they share their photos on social media. This negative effect is unnecessary and certainly not conducive to self-healing.

I'm not telling you not to share your photos. Rather, I'm encouraging you to consider how to do so that the results will be positive.

When you are content with the photos you are taking, this is enough. Share something different on your social media accounts. Let your personal photography be for your own enjoyment and healing.



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

CONCLUSION

I love having my camera in my hands and my mind focused on what I am doing. I make a point of it because I know the more I concentrate, the more I'll enjoy what I am doing, no matter what else might be going on in my life at the time.

Learning how to manage my new camera will take a little time and effort. It will be worth it because I know it will bring the same joy that using my Nikon does. Right now, it's immersive in a slightly different way than I am used to, and that's healthy too because I am focused and learning.

Whatever you like to take photos of, and however you like to use the camera you have, take your time. The more you can give your full attention to capturing the decisive moment, the greater liberty and healing you can experience.

As you take time to learn and to practice photography, I truly hope that it brings you freedom and healing as it has done for me.



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

Self-Check Quiz:

- 1) Think of your camera as a _____.
- 2) What two things are important for you to connect with when you are taking photos?
- 3) What can a camera be a powerful tool for creating?
- 4) When are the best photos made?
- 5) How can you overcome the stress of using a camera (if this is stressful for you)?
- 6) Why is engaging in a long-term photography project helpful?
- 7) Why is embracing the present moment so important for photography and self-healing?
- 8) Can sharing your photos on social media have a negative impact on your emotional well-being?



Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (*and FREE!*) photography resources:



3 Free Photography Cheat Sheets

Grab 3 free photography cheat sheets that will help you understand the basics.

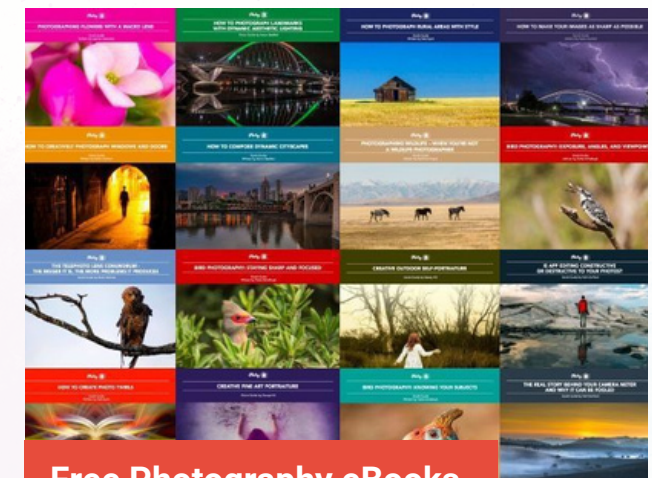
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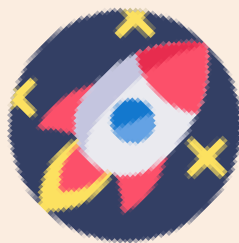
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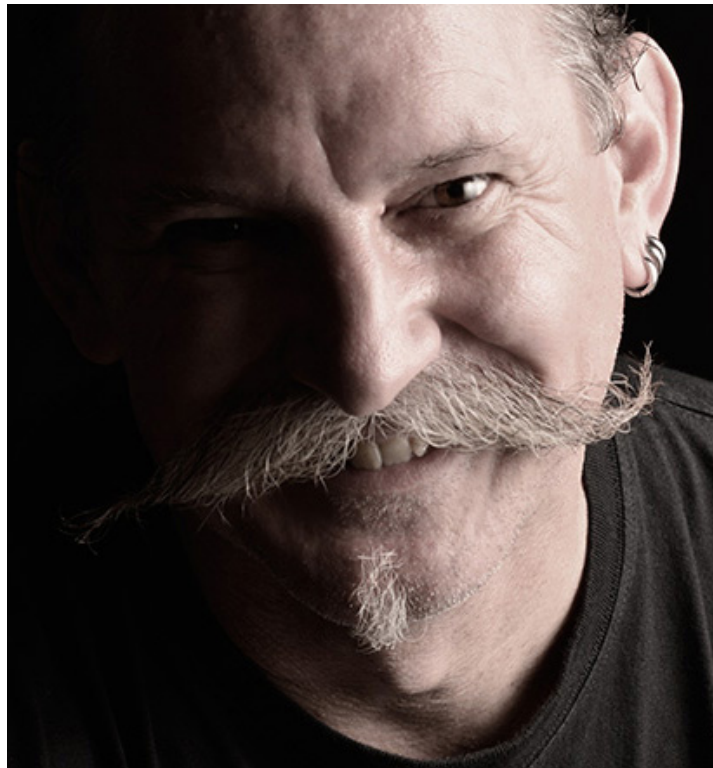
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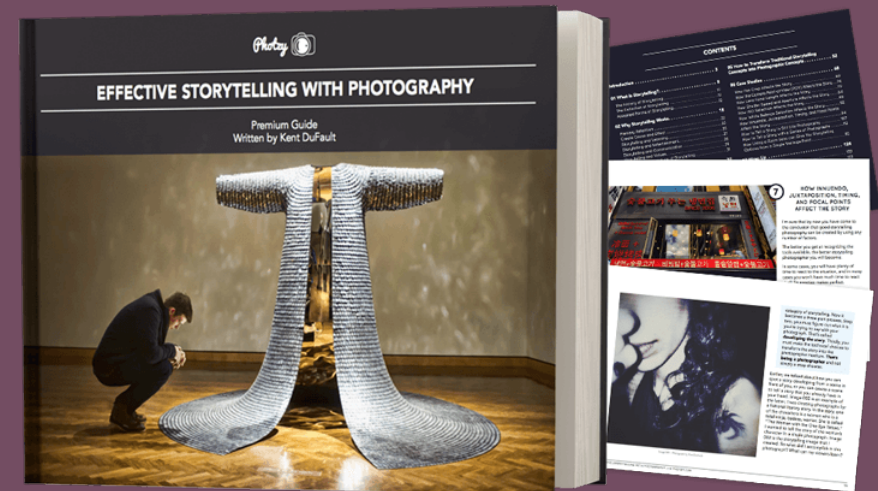
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kevin is a New Zealand professional photographer living in the north of Thailand since 2002. During his career he has worked in editorial, documentary, and commercial photography. He now also teaches photography workshops and writes books and articles. You can read his blog [here](#). He runs [photography workshops](#) based at his home in rural northern Thailand.

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