

# Photography Is Not Work

DC, *no place I'd rather be*. Washington is one vibrant city, and so much of this vibrancy goes on outside the halls of government. Since college, I've been doing my best to capture these sights and sounds and relay them with words and images. Growing up, I would spend hours with the photography books that always sat on the coffee table. Thumbing through an old Annie Leibowitz album, I was not only amazed at the images but the story behind the shots.

**Luke Christopher**  
PHOTOGRAPHY



"Hard at Work" - Photo: Luke Christopher (Image courtesy - Anchiyi Wei)



"Pointing the Way" - Rally in Manassas, Virginia, the night before the Presidential election (Photography © 2008 Luke Christopher)



"One Nation Under a Groove" - Musician George Clinton performs at the 2009 Heroes, Red, White, & Blue Inaugural Ball (Photography © 2009 Luke Christopher)

A subtle, candid moment with Bob Dylan as he watered his lawn; wild times backstage with Keith Moon and his harem; Whoopie Goldberg splashing in a bathtub full of milk — it got me thinking at a young age that there's more to photography than pushing a button. It's about getting *The Shot*. And *how you get it* can be just as interesting as the shot itself.

Photography has always been in my life, my father was a professional in South Africa and I

used to play in his studio. They divorced and my mother and I moved to London, and eventually wound up in D.C. In middle school here, I shot for the yearbook and took a couple of classes in high school, but it was until I began writing for my university's newspaper that I started carrying a camera regularly. I fumbled around in the darkroom, and focused on the text.

Right after school and interning at *National Geographic* I went to work for a video production

company, where I really learned about lighting, composition and editing. Then I moved on to *Discovery* to be an editor and learned that spending more than eight hours a day in a dark edit bay makes you want to be behind a lens. After stints of writing for AOL and *DC One* magazine, I became entertainment editor for *City Living Source*. I was once again a writer with a camera. I was covering a huge music conference with a Canon digital SLR borrowed from my

stepdad, a travel writer/photographer for The Washington Post. By blind luck I encountered a big star being videotaped at dinner by one of my friends; using the light from their video setup, I got such a perfect shot that I have been chasing ones like it ever since.

Music is my passion, and shooting a live concert with moving subjects, low light and no flash is a great way to learn the limits of your camera — and your sanity. Normally you're only allowed to shoot during the first three numbers, and you are bumping around a pit with all the other shooters. Getting permission to shoot the whole show, from on- and backstage: This is where the intangible skills of a photographer come into play, and where you can capture images that, if you're lucky, come close to the emotional impact of the performance itself. Another crucial skill is getting people to come out of their shells, and it takes a lot more than "Say cheese." You have to love people, all kinds of people. Whether it's at an intimate portrait or a lively event, you have to move fluidly and keep the subjects at ease; there's a rhythm to it. My mother was a professional ballerina in South Africa and London and a movement teacher who advocated living life as if it were a dance, tuning in to the ebb and flow of energy in time.

D.C. has so much going on that I'm barely at home. One night I can be shooting Washington's lounge music heroes, *Thievery Corporation*, or Grammy winning DJs *Deep Dish*, who sell out concerts all over the world but stay in D.C. because of its bustling, ever-growing nightlife scene. Of course, one cannot ignore the city's historic persona, and on this last election eve I went to shoot Barack Obama's final rally in Manassas, Virginia. His grandmother had passed away that day and the mood of the 90,000 people was electric but respectful of his loss. Afterward, in the mist, masses of us marched in quiet lockstep back to our cars.

Twenty-four hours later I was in the U Street neighborhood, where a sea of people of all colors and ages came out to celebrate in the most peaceful street party in history. After I took his picture, a man told me that this place was the "same spot I got my head bashed in 40 years ago" in a civil rights protest. There was no place I would have rather been, than right there, right then.

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Sophie Pyle, a star of the CW's "Blonde Charity Mafia" reality show, steals a kiss. (Photography © 2009 Luke Christopher)



"Not a Daily Moment" - John Oliver of the Jon Stewart Show, jokes with a limo driver (Photography © 2009 Luke Christopher)