



Life's Burdens, Bamiyan, on the outskirts of Kabul, Afghanistan. August 2010.

Jeremy Rata

Renaissance Man

"I am a professional photographer. I came rather late to the game having been one of the country's foremost hoteliers for the previous 35 years. The network I built up during that time helped me make a success of it (But when the U.K. government announced a full lockdown in March 2020 my life, along with pretty much everyone else's, came to a crashing halt. I knew I had to do something, but I didn't think it would be restoring film cameras.

But first let me tell you how I got here. Back in the early 1970s, to some the heyday of film photography, my uncle, an accomplished photographer in his own right owned a Camera shop in the centre of London called York Cameras. Many of the top photographers of the time like Bailey, Duffy, Lichfield & Snowden visited at one time or another. The stories were hilarious, and I was captivated by it all. He developed and printed all his stuff in the basement cellar at my grandfather's huge house in Totteridge and I can still remember the smell of developer and fixer. My love of all things film stems from those days and has never left me.

Not a birthday or Christmas went by without me receiving some kind of photography-related present from my uncle or parents and I became reasonably adept at it. My interest waned about the same time my interest in girls picked up and it became relegated to a hobby. Many years later my hotel career took off and being something of an opportunist I used my latent skills to do the brochure work for the hotels. All in film at the time.

In the early 2000s I adopted digital with a passion and my interest in photography was re-ignited. I managed to become an accredited Premier League & International Rugby Photographer all the while running the hotel company. Being entrepreneurial I seized on the opportunity and started doing the photography for my colleagues and competitors in the hotel industry to the point where I was able to set up a partnership with a photographer friend and started up Hospitality Photographic specialising in the hotel and restaurant business. The income from this lucrative side line was what allowed me to spend thousands on camera equipment.

In 2010, a wealthy customer and friend at the hotel estate I was running at the time asked me to provide images for a book about Afghanistan, necessitating a three week trip circumnavigating the country. It was life changing in so many ways, not least because an image from that assignment was selected to be displayed in the National Portrait Gallery for three months as part of the 2011 Taylor Wessing Portrait Prize. The following year, after a follow up trip to India one of my images was once again selected to be displayed in the National Portrait Gallery. Many subsequent trips around the world to places like Chile and Argentina, Ethiopia, Hong Kong, Cambodia, Bangladesh and India followed, many images both film and digital were filed.

In 2015 I took early retirement from the hotel business to concentrate on photography with clients from around the world. All good and life was fun until the virus made its devastating impact on these shores.

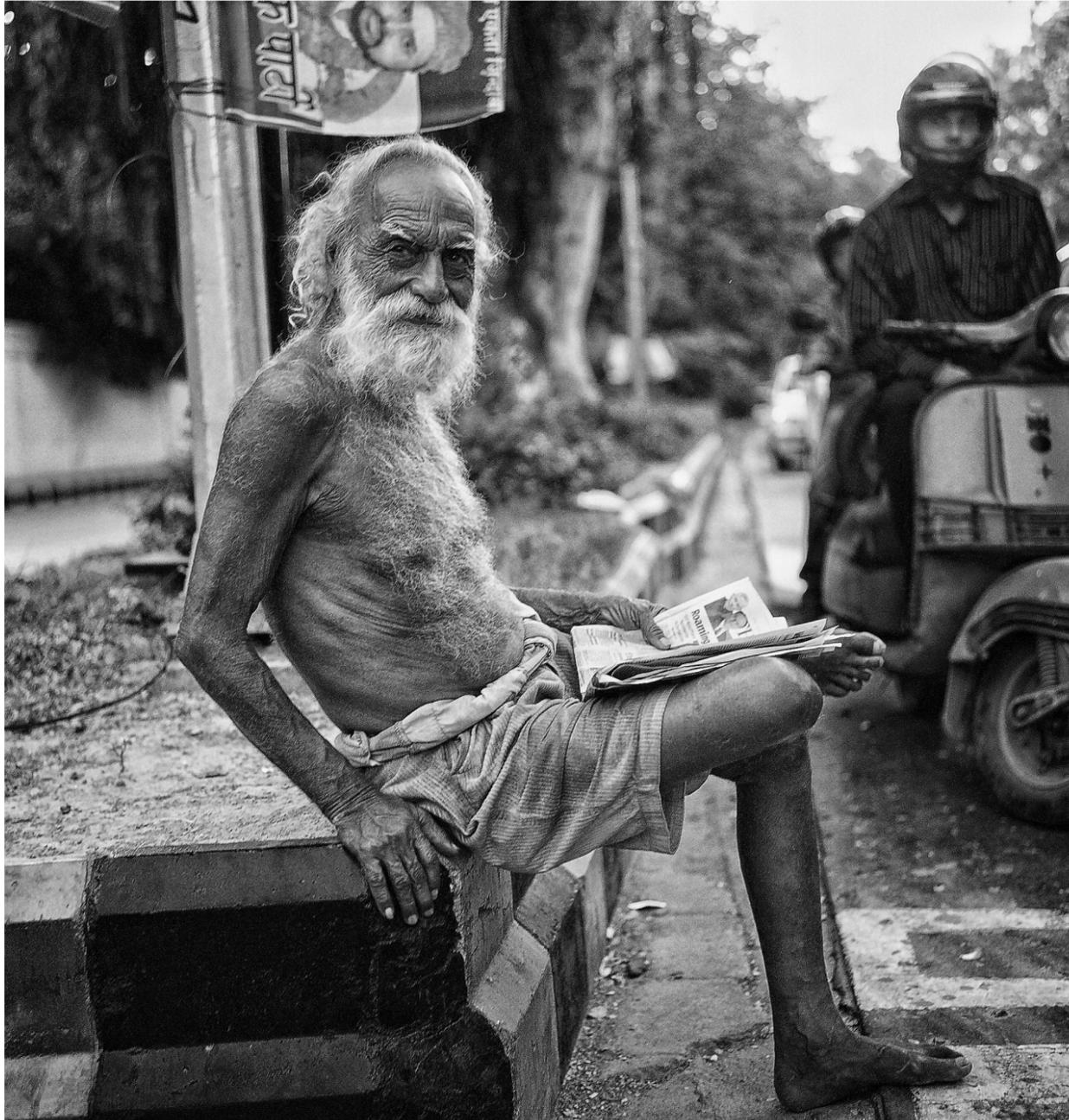
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The Horse Man of Afghanistan. August 2010. A gas trader on the Bazar Road, Bamiyan. I saw him heading down the middle of the road oblivious to anything just intent on getting his job done. I ran to get into position and waited till he passed me and pressed the shutter.



Patiently Waiting, New Delhi. February 2011. General Hospitals in Delhi are busy places 24hrs a day with much activity surrounding them. On a side street near the Deen Dayal Hospital I encountered this opportunistic man. It was his neatness that struck me.



The morning papers, Kolkata. October 2011. Traffic in Kolkata is pretty random at the best of times. This very relaxed old man chose to sit on the corner of an insanely busy junction and read his paper as the traffic passed him by only inches away.



Old Colonel's never die, New Delhi. February 2011. Very late at night I was heading back to my hotel in a Tuk Tuk when I noticed this scene. I asked the driver to reverse back. The Colonel saw me with my camera, sat down and waited. It was a surreal moment steeped in good humour.



Bombed out lorries, Herat, Afghanistan. September 2010.



The King's Palace, Kabul, Afghanistan. September 2010.



England v Ireland, Twickenham. February 2010.



Man City v Liverpool, Etihad Stadium. October 2008

"In May 2020 I sat staring at the Government's SEISS grant application knowing that I had to put this money to good use if it was going to mean anything. At the same time I became distracted by, of all things, a Rollei 35 article in some magazine. And that's when it hit me. I had loads of film cameras and I had become aware that film photography, like vinyl records, was going through a renaissance. I thought right, I am going to start up a film camera restoration business and I am going to use this money to start it up.

I bought a Rollei 35 off eBay thinking I would clean it up and sell it on. This was sold as 'in good but untested' condition and was, like so many things off eBay, a disaster of a camera with many faults, the shutter speeds didn't work properly and were sticky at best, the meter didn't work, the film transport mechanism was faulty, and it did not look as shiny as in the images that sold it so well to me. All was not lost though as I shoot a lot of film on a Rolleiflex TLRs and the guy who services them for me told me when I was relaying my catastrophe that he was trained in servicing them at the Rollei Factory in Germany. I sent it to him, and it came back as good as new. I was up and running. As 2020 came to a close I created www.film-furbish.com specialising in exclusively film cameras in particular Rollei 35s, Rolleiflex TLRs and Nikon and Olympus SLRs with over 100 cameras and so far, it has been a great success. I have had a lot of help from partners like the film retailer Analogue Wonderland (www.analoguewonderland.co.uk) and ,the highly respected blogger Hamish Gill at www.35mmc.com.

I am currently working on designing special cameras with custom paint jobs in partnership with an artisanal paint finisher and have created special camera and lens kits featuring the top of the range Nikon film cameras the F2AS and F3 with the 50mm f1.2 and the 35mm f1.4 AIS lenses. All using cameras that I currently own. I only buy the best I can afford so the vast majority of the cameras I sell are in absolutely excellent condition. My aim is to grow this business into something really noteworthy and class leading.





As for lockdown? Well, it's coming to an end now and I am kind of sad. A late entry into the world of retail has been a Godsend to me and has inspired me to explore new fields. I have always been able to combine my love of business with my love of things that interest me like football, rugby, travel and film cameras. Who knows what will inspire me the next time I find myself perched at my kitchen table in despair wondering where things are heading, but I do have a deep fondness for classic cars and own an E-type fhc 4.2, a 1966 Jaguar 3.8 Mk 2, an Alpha Romeo 1978 Spider and a 1966 Daimler 2 1/2 litre V8 and have just sold a beautiful MGA Coupe, so who knows what might happen?