

Stripped to My Core

By

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XXV

The date is April 16, 2016 and I have just finished a session that has had a profound effect on me. The hair on the back of my neck and down my arms is still tingling. This most recent session, in our most current project, would open my eyes to a new lighting style, raising my visual awareness and changing the way I interpret my own body awareness. For this reason, the decision to share this body of work with you seems so perfect and effortless. As I put pen to paper for the first time ever, I surrendered to the process as did my photographic subjects that allowed themselves to be at their most vulnerable. Once again, in what seems like a long list of life's experiences, I have been stripped to my core.

The universe has positioned people and events in my path to help me fulfill a higher objective. My belief that my life's efforts are only a small part of the overall picture is now part of the motivation that inspires my work. I now understand that by keeping an open mind, my intentions will be raised to a higher level of purpose. Photography is all of that and more for me, and all of those little hints that the universe calls upon me to consider are part of my own awareness. The more I open my eyes and heart, the more I will see, and the more that will be revealed to me. This is the reason I was born and wake up every morning giving thanks, hoping to make the world a better place with my talents as a photographic artist.

Photography has always been my life's purpose. Nothing fulfills my soul like photographing people. Even so, I rarely use my camera if I am not photographing a client session. I have tried many times to join my friends and colleagues when they get up at the crack of dawn to photograph a sunrise, but it doesn't inspire me unless I am capturing the essence of a person. Part of my creative process includes winning the client's trust, getting the perfect capture, and selling a portrait. The financial reward is part the validation for my talents and hard work. I need that momentum, energy and expectations of a client's financial investment for me to produce for them. The fact that they are making this financial investment validates the trust they are putting in me and the satisfaction of my work. Every session, every project, must be profitable to my business in some way. My success depends on it, not just for me, but for my support team as well.

I have always been fascinated by the way I see other people, but have never really been happy with my own appearance. Based on conversations with my clients, I believe it is all too common to have difficulty looking at oneself in a photograph. I do not think that I'm attractive, and I have never had a portrait of myself that would make me say, "Wow! I really do look good!" My body awareness is one of resolution, not affirmation. However, my awareness and that way of thinking changed while creating my latest project. Believing that all of the life lessons that I have experienced up to this point have allowed me the creative outlet to manifest these portraits, truly inspires me. My love for lighting,

intertwined with my knowledge and experience, has helped me learn to properly light the human body, male or female, without hesitation or reservation.

I grew up in Verona, Virginia. Verona is a tiny one-stop-light bedroom community outside the metropolis of Staunton. My parents divorced when my sister and I were young. My mother worked three jobs just to make ends meet, but she always seemed to find a way to provide us with everything we asked for, even if she had to work a little more that week to pay for it. Our Friday night ritual involved grocery shopping in Staunton. My sister, Cindy and I would fight over who got to lick and assemble the books of S&H Green Stamps. It was these books of stamps that bought my first Kodak 110 with a flash cube extender. I had to have every accessory available for that fantastic slim matte black box that would open up the world for me, and strip me to my core at the same time. Soon thereafter, I began a long and wonderful journey in photography, involving any person that was willing to pose in front of my camera. Yes, I could not help myself, even back then. I still remember the first roll of film we dropped off at the drug store. I was so excited to see what I had created. Yes me, all by myself, without the help of anyone else. For the first time there would be no critique of my inefficiencies or lack of skills according to someone else's opinion. It was at this very moment that I declared that I would be a photographer for the rest of my life.

My first baseball coach told me that I lacked hand/eye coordination, and therefore, I should try something else. This was one of the first times I was stripped to my core. My dad was not around much, and when he was, he wasn't the most attentive and supportive to Cindy and me. I envied the "normal" father and son activities that were all around me, the ones that my dad never had enough time to participate in. His idea of bonding with my sister and I, involved taking us to the local Moose Lodge with a brown bagged fifth of Canadian Mist with a white sticker on the front, with the name Jimmy smeared in bold black letters. For my 18th birthday, dad surprised me with a membership to the Moose Lodge...not the kind of surprise I was expecting! My mother tried hard to make up for his short comings, she did everything she could to comfort me. I had, what I considered to be, a normal, happy childhood. My sister and I never felt that our family dynamic was much different than that of our friends or relatives. Although my father's hurtful words will forever strip me to my core.

Photographing people became my reason for existence and nothing made me happier. To this day, I get goose bumps when I "get *the* shot". I actually have a physical reaction to photographing, and it is amazing! Years later, it was my cousin David, also very interested in photography, who exposed me to my first DSLR. He was a month older than me and we were inseparable. His parents owned a gas station in Staunton, which afforded them a very comfortable life with all the pleasures and treasures that go with having money. We would spend hours looking through the Sears catalog, drooling over the new fully-loaded Chinon camera bodies, lenses and the Vivitar 285 flash. We set up a makeshift darkroom in their spare bathroom, complete with developing trays and a safelight, which is where we hid a TokeMaster bong under the cabinet in a paper safe labeled, "photographic paper, do not open". We would spend hours in there waiting for the smell of "Fixer" to dissipate, developing our futures and making big plans for when we became famous rock band photographers and dreaming of having the opportunity to photograph an album cover for the likes of Styx, Little Feat or Kansas. Those were the days!

A summer of carrying concrete in five gallon buckets, over a hill, for my dad's fence company earned me \$300, which was enough money to buy my very own DSLR, a Vivitar 220SL from Glen's Fair Price store in Harrisonburg. My grandmother, who loved to drive fast and run red lights, was more than happy to take me so I could make the purchase. It's no wonder we nicknamed her lead foot Mary. I still have that camera today.

I booked my first wedding at the age of fifteen, convincing my best friend Vince to act as my chauffeur and second shooter (yes, a second shooter in 1980!). I had him park around the corner so that the bride and

groom would not know that I was not old enough to drive a car. I guess my long, winged-back, parted in the middle bangs hid my innocence well.

By my first year in high school, I was the primary yearbook photographer, leaving class whenever I wanted, to cover a “pressing” assignment. After graduation, with a whopping \$1500 for college, I found a small photography school on the side of a mountain in White Sulphur Springs, WV, that fit my budget. The school was run by Marshall Booker, a small, frail man who had operated a successful studio in the Greenbrier Hotel with his business partner, Nancy Raspberry. After a three-hour interview, I knew this was the place for me. Unfortunately, Marshall passed away before classes began. Life had stripped him to his core and now chain-smoking, 5-foot tall Nancy would become my first mentor. Our group of 12 students had “textbook” studies each morning. Every afternoon, we would conquer an assignment that involved photographing, film processing, proofing, selling, retouching, printing then delivering the photographs to the client. We did this for four months. This work would prepare us for almost any type of paying job in photography we could imagine.

My first real job came just two days after I completed the four month course. I was hired by Hubert Gentry, who was a bastard, but he was incredibly talented and solely responsible for the technical skills I now master. One of my jobs was to run the front projector systems that were built into 40 foot trailers pulled by dual wheeled trucks. We would use those mobile studios to photograph schools. We were on the cutting edge of technology for that time period. I was immediately drawn to technology (this addiction would show up again much later with our first digital camera purchase at a whopping \$25,000 in 1998 and most recently with the onset of drones.) Six years later, making only \$5.25 per hour and \$75 per wedding, I needed more, and there was no real future in the Shenandoah Valley, so I interviewed with Hubert’s biggest arch nemesis, Laney Caston, in Richmond, Virginia. This new job doubled my salary and offered more promise for a fantastic future in photography. I packed my bags and moved east. Laney taught me how to really make money selling portraits, however he worked me into the ground. I had had enough! Stripped to my core yet again. Daniel Butler, my closest photographer friend and co-worker, gave me exactly one year to open my own studio or he would “kick my ass!”. On March 1, 1995, I opened my own studio with my crazy idea of branding Richmond’s first garden studio. With my permed mullet, banded collar silk shirts, gold nugget earring and matching pinky ring, I began to set the world on fire.

The business took off like wildfire with the help of my third and fourth mentors, Stewart and Susan Powers. Without their help and guidance, it would have not been possible to charge \$125 per 8x10. At this time, there was no other option, because I only had \$1500 to my name and two mortgages due in 30 days. Failure was not a possibility! Their greatest gift to me was the advice to only enter paid client work in competition, and all at the cost of paying forward the knowledge they gave to me to newer, younger photographers. This is the reason I began to present programs to professional photography associations and earn my Photographic Craftsman degree. The Powers then introduced me to mentor number five, Hanson Fong. I was enamored with his flow posing and analytical views of creating well composed and well-lit images.

In less than one year I was overwhelmed with the success of the studio and I needed help - a lot of help. Enter Mary Fisk-Taylor, a client from Caston’s Studio, who I had photographed in her wedding gown, at The Jefferson Hotel. She now had her precious three month old daughter, Alex, and shared with me that she had been trying to find me because she had “the most amazing experience” with her bridal portrait session, and really loved the way she looked for the first time ever in a picture. She told her mom, Debbie, that I would be photographing her children someday, and that day had come.

After four sessions photographing Alex, with delivery time that was not even close to acceptable, Mary offered to help out part-time. I remember the first time I put my big foot in my mouth, telling her that I would “teach her how we answer the phone properly”. Anyone that knows

Mary knows that she is never at a loss for words, but somehow she managed to not say a word and just observed everything for the first several months. I remember overhearing her first interaction with a client on the telephone – following that interaction, I offered Mary half of the business. I knew that with her amazing business skills and my photography skills, we would be great together. It was a match made in heaven and hell, all in one. With my family history of never admitting mistakes or acknowledging anyone else's opinions, I could be somewhat of a challenge. I am certain that she didn't realize what she had signed on for, but thank goodness she is still hanging in there with me. She is my biggest fan, strongest critic, best friend and always has my best interest at heart. I truly love her. She helps me be all that I can be. It has been one hell of a journey over the past 22 years and I would not trade a minute of our time together. We are day-married. Yes, she has a real husband, he really does exist. Mary is very important to me. I would not be the person or photographer I am today without her.

I am extremely thankful for all of the wonderful people that I have met in my more than 25 years as a PPA member, who have shared their knowledge and insight with me. Image competitions have made me the photographer I am today and the ever-evolving photographer that I continue to develop into. From Randy McNeilly, with his wisdom and thoughtfulness in regards to judging, to the business practices I have learned from Ann Monteith, and to those too many to name, who are so special to me. I am so thankful that I can call all of them my friends.

Although creating classic portraiture and oil paintings for our clients is my favorite part of any day, we all need some kind of personal project to feed our souls. Photographing the female body inspires me. It was a subscription to Playboy on my 18th birthday that hooked me on lighting the human body. I couldn't wait for the next issue so that I could take a sharpie to the centerfold and try to diagram what light was used to accent each and every curve of the girl-next-door. It is nothing for me to use 10, 15 or 20 lights in a set to achieve the desired mood. For these types of images I'm an available light photographer. I will use every light available.

My biggest thrill was attending a seminar in Las Vegas, hosted by my favorite Playboy and celebrity photographer, Arney Freytag. After the lecture part of his presentation, I pulled up a chair as close to him as I could and quickly announced that I have visually stalked him for over 30 years, and I had a long list of questions that he needed answer for me. I threw all sorts of questions at him all at once, hoping for some magical formula he used based on the leg-to-torso ratio or some fancy light modifier or gel combination he used on all of his models that gave him that "oh so recognizable style and finesse" to his images. He explained that, as a child, he would sit on the floor beside his mother's easel as she painted with light onto her stretched canvas panels to create the mood she intended, and the reason he lights a woman the way he does is because it *feels good to him* visually. I was dumbfounded and speechless. He literally should have dropped the microphone right then and there on the floor because I immediately left the building, headed to the pool cabanas and ordered bottle service. From that moment on, I decided to light the women I photographed *my way*, not his way, not anyone else's way. I finally found what I was looking for and I had it all along! But I had to strip it all back to my core to see it clearly.

I have selected my latest project created for our local LGBT theatre for my portfolio. Our studio was asked to sponsor a play, by a wonderful lesbian couple, that we had the honor of photographing their wedding. It was Richmond's first published gay wedding, five years ago. Julie is on the board of the theatre and when she read the play entitled "Body Awareness," she immediately thought of us. She showed me the cover of the playbook that had a very small thumbnail that looked like the ridge of a mountain but in actuality it was the side hip of a woman in black and white. I suggested that we photograph their patrons and display the images inside the theatre since the play was about a photographer traveling the United States photographing nudes of women for an exhibit. In the story, one of the wives wanted to be photographed, but the other thought it was degrading to women. The story investigates the insecurities, fascinations and allure of being photographed nude, stripping to the core the stigma of society and the way we look at ourselves. I suggested

that we also use the images to raise money for the theatre and bring public awareness to the theatre and this play. In true form for me, the project had to make money to truly inspire me.

Interestingly, I was able to convince all of the actors and actresses to allow me to photograph them, except one. Ironically she played the role of the wife wanting to be photographed. The resulting sessions were created in a five-week period, sprinkled amongst sessions already scheduled. I witnessed the same insecurities that I had about my own body with the individuals and couples I photographed, which took me on journey I did not expect. I had the realization that everybody, regardless of the flaws of time and no matter what age, shape, size, color, skin texture or gender, could be edge-lit and posed with the same lighting style to accentuate a hip or torso outline, butt or breast, and look flawless, sometimes for the first time ever. For many, this was this was the first time in their lives that they felt sexy and beautiful to someone they love. These are emotions I experience frequently with clothed subjects, but these were without clothing to hide what we usually do not like about ourselves. My newly created lighting style is ageless, size-less, colorless and race-less. It was an awareness of love through the eyes of someone who loves you, and more importantly, love for one's self through body awareness. For the first time ever, I literally had the exact same reaction to my own body awareness.

For decades I've have been photographing nudes of some of the most perfect female bodies with clothing and props to support the mood and feeling I had visualized. What I didn't expect was that everybody, regardless of the flaws of time, can be photographed to look and feel beautiful, alluring and even sexy in the natural way the universe designed us. Stripped to our core. My tools were primarily edge lighting, posing and the years of experience that I brought to this moment in time. As each session progressed, I became more and more impressed with what I was able to create. It seemed as if physical dimensions and restrictions did not matter. I remember that I was so excited with the mood and feeling of the first session that I immediately had a vision and guide for the rest of the project. As each session presented me with a different set of "problems," the answers clearly revealed themselves.

This body of work represents where I currently am in my life and the challenges we all face as we get older. What I did not expect was the countless tears of joy expressed by each individual or couple as they viewed their unretouched images. It was as if no one had shown them how beautiful the human body was, and even more special, that the body was theirs. As I listened to the "oooohs" and "ahhhs" after each session, I realized that the universe was once again fulfilling my life's purpose and that I was doing what I was supposed to be doing, giving that acknowledgement of love to somebody else with my camera.

Love is love and it is the one thing we need to survive. Body awareness is something we all are sensitive to, no matter how old or young or big or small. We are all self-conscious about our bodies. This project brought out the awareness that everyone has the desire to look and feel beautiful, no matter what age, size, shape or gender.

My objective was to help my subjects, as well as others, to realize that in the hands of someone with a lifetime of experience capturing the human body in a beautiful light, magically changes forever how the people in our lives and the world see themselves.

Stripped to the core.....

Jamie Hayes



Biography

Jamie Hayes

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Jamie attributes the success of their studio, along with business partner Mary Fisk-Taylor, to their sound management and business skills combined with their love and passion for photography. His commitment to creating priceless portraits, wedding albums and commercial imagery has earned him an extremely loyal clientele as well as a sterling reputation in the state of Virginia. Their business savvy and creative marketing concepts have enabled them to establish an extremely profitable and fulfilling portrait and wedding gallery.

As a PPA Approved Business Instructor and PPA Approved Photographic Instructor, Jamie offers informative and motivational programs to working photographers. Jamie has participated in several state, regional, national and international conferences giving both full-day and weeklong classes. As an affiliate PPA juror he has the pleasure to judge several international print competitions throughout the US. He is a proud member of several professional photography organizations, including: Professional Photographers of America (PPA), Virginia Professional Photographers Association (VPPA), and The Society of XXV.

Jamie has been honored with many awards on both state and national levels. His achievements include the Kodak Gallery Elite Award of Excellence, numerous Kodak Gallery Awards of Excellence, PPA Loan collections, multiple ASP Regional Medallion Awards, SEPPA Distinguished Awards, Best Wedding Albums VPPA, Best of Category, Fuji Masterpiece Awards and the VPPA Photographer (Highest Print Case) several times as well as one of the Top Ten Photographers for the entire state of Virginia.

Jamie shares his simple lighting concept applying a down to earth and easy formula for lighting any subject indoors or outdoors.

Formal Education

1972-1979 Verona Elementary School. Verona, Virginia

1979-1983 Ft. Defiance High School. Ft. Defiance, Virginia

12 year perfect attendance

October 1983-January 1984 Woodland School of Photography. White Sulfur Springs, West Virginia

Experience

February 1984- February 1989 Gentry Photography, Harrisonburg, Virginia

February 1989-February 1995 Caston's Studio, Richmond, Virginia

February 1995-current Hayes & Fisk Photography, Richmond, Virginia

Accomplishments

Photographic Craftsmen Degree

Master of Photography Degree

Imaging Excellence Degree

Approved Photographic Instructor

Approved Business Instructor

Member of The Society of XXV

Scored a perfect 100 in SEPPA competition using film

4 for 4 in PPA Loan Collection (2 wedding albums and 2 prints using film)

Kodak Gallery Elite Award 1st place

16 Kodak Gallery Awards

14 Fuji Masterpiece Awards

4 VPPA Photographer of the Year Awards

4 ASP State Awards

2 ASP Regional Awards

2 Top 10 PPA Wedding Photographer of the Year Awards

PPA Charities Legacy Award

PPA Affiliate Juror

Certification Committee Member

Speaker Selection Committee Member

PPA Charities Dream Studio Giveaway Committee Member

PEC Committee Member

VPPA Print Salon Chair