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## Preaching to the Choir: Sound Memory

By Paul Myers, Brooks Institute

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Photo by Paul Myers

Clickity clack,  
Clickity clack.

Blindfolded, she would lead me, giggling, down the streets I had known as a child. The salty air filling my lungs, her hand in mine, I could feel the burn of her smile in the darkness. Soft.

I only died a thousand times in the first five seconds with that blindfold on before letting go and dying with her, no matter what. Then the world came alive. Cypress trees like alien elephant legs... sea lions like foghorns... toes in the cool sand like, like we believed.

Clickity clack,  
Clickity clack.

Eerie. That is the feeling I am left with after photographing people I do not know, people who pay me to photograph their lives, the ones who hire me. Eerie. Not spooky, weird or strange; no, not menacing threatening or dishonest. Just, eerie.

It is most eerie in the photos of the people I barely know. Better to know someone intimately or not to know them at all. I mean, they want photographs of themselves and their families showing them as they are. Who wants to see themselves as they

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are? Still, they say they do.

My friends and family, my lovers and foes, they don't have a choice, I have intimate relationships with them and they are my photos.

But other people, most people when photographed and given the chance to look at their picture, they want an edited truth. They want a constructed truth of their life, of the lives of their family and community interacting in this set of circumstances within a certain set of acceptable emotional and physical responses. They are afraid of who they are. They do not want to be shown as something other than what they have imagined themselves to be since some self esteem building exercise at age 13 when they cut out images from magazines and made collages to show other people who they are. Intelligent, beautiful, hip, exotic. They want to feel the way they imagine themselves feeling. What is wrong with that?

Hey, hire someone who cares about how beautiful the bride is on her wedding day, someone who will show all the children laughing on the first day of school, someone who always show hope during a natural disaster. Yes, please, start with beauty and forget the truth; please, believe in the safety of the illusion. You do not want to see the interactions of yourself and your family and friends on any day, ever. You are right, photos are illustrations of your delusions. They only serve you to fill in the space around the hole in your heart. You are right, I am sorry I brought it up again.

Clickity clack,  
Clickity clack.

Funny that out of all the w's in journalism, why is what makes a story a story. The rest of the w's are incidental, they comprise the facts that make this story particular from other stories. Oh yeah, they justify the story all right. But why, why enables the audience to read between the lines and understand people's lives, especially the people involved in this particular set of circumstances.

Why invites the audience to take part in the story, to learn more about the story, to delve deeper into the story. For the visual journalist, the why of the story allows photos to function as photos rather than as illustrations. Why gives people context for their feelings, for their compassion, a focal point for their actions because of the story, because of why. Why is a ledge of understanding on which our hearts find firm footing as they feel through to the story. Why is at the core when we compose, when we expose, when we find the moment. Why brings us to bear on our subject, truth blossoming beauty. Why begs, why. Until... until it transforms into feeling and feeling transforms into action, maybe even compassion, and the miracle of photography is.

Clickity clack,  
Clickity clack.



**Photo by Paul Myers**

I miss giving thanks on the bridge.  
I miss the breeze.  
I miss the light we felt.

She could have been an Irish dancer.  
That would have destroyed me for sure.

Sound memory.

Clickity clack,  
clickity clack.

She was there in those shoes, walking next to me.

"Isn't this the best sound in the world?" she said.

I thought yes, that is the best sound.  
The sound of you walking down the hall to see me. Your presence reverberating  
through my soul. It is the sound of all I hoped for and all I dream of.

I knew what she meant, about the shoes, so I played dumb. I did not want to  
answer. All I said was something like, "Yeah, what brand of shoes are they?"  
Yeah, all I asked for was a caption.

Who cares about the what... the who... the when... the where....that is all irrelevant, it  
is the why, the why that burns at the core.  
Why feels.

Captions matter because they allow us to position our work as historical artifact, as  
something valuable, now and soon.

Understand why and tell a story.

Clickity clack,  
Clickity clack.

Once she told me about a guy she was seeing. He gave up playing the drums for her.  
She was really happy about this.  
What an idiot, I thought.

"Oh, that is wonderful," I said, smiling.

Clickity clack,  
Clickity clack.

Feeling through to the soul of the sound in to the soul,  
despite it all.

Why live, except to live?  
Why love, except to love?

Why see, except to see?

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*(Paul Myers is a faculty member of the Visual Journalism Program at Brooks Institute of Photography in Ventura, CA. Prior to his arrival at Brooks, Myers worked for a variety of publications including newspapers in Freeport, IL and Marysville, CA.)*

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