

60-SECOND EXPOSURE

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Deanna Dikeman

In 1986 **Deanna Dikeman** began a project chronicling the everyday lives of her extended family. Her quiet, sentimental photographs celebrate ordinary moments while communicating universal truths about home, familiarity and American culture. Tracy Calder hears her story.

What role does photography play in your life?

Photography is a way for me to communicate my most fundamental thoughts about what it means to be human, to live our everyday lives, to love and experience loss, sorrow and joy.

Describe your style in three words.

Quiet, sentimental, honest.

What is your favourite photographic book?

Summer Nights by Robert Adams.

Tell us your favourite photographic quote.

'While there is perhaps a province in which the photograph can tell us nothing more than what we see with our own eyes, there is another in which it proves to

us how little our own eyes often permit us to see. And here again it is the photographer's sense of the familiar that provides the proof. For in that intimacy, even with the commonplace, will be discovered passages and openings denied to the outsider.

The intimate will be admitted to subtleties and complexities shut to the stranger. He will find the simple to be complicated, the miniature to be enormous, the insignificant decisive.

*Through familiarity the photographer will find not only the familiar but the strange, not only the ordinary but the rare; not only the mutual but the singular' – Dorothea Lange and Daniel Dixon in *Photographing the Familiar* (Aperture, 1952).*

What's the biggest risk you have taken as a photographer?
In the past I've risked a lot of

rejection. Most of the portfolio reviews and competitions I entered led to nothing. However, once in a while I got positive feedback, won an award or my work was affirmed. It was worth all the rejections to find curators, jurors and publishers who offered encouragement and helpful suggestions.

Tell us about a photographic opportunity you have missed.

You always regret the photo you didn't take or the one you would have taken if you hadn't left your camera at home.

Name one item (aside from a camera) that every photographer should own.

A library card – there's so much to discover and learn for free.

Who would you most like to collaborate with?

I would like to collaborate with a writer, especially one who is interested in the American Midwest. Alternatively, a writer who is interested in finding the specialness in the ordinary.

What is your worst photographic habit?

Digital cameras have made it so easy to take a photo that I sometimes forget to check the settings. Occasionally I end up with a photo that wasn't taken at the appropriate aperture, or was shot at the wrong shutter speed, or the ISO is not what it should have been. When I was shooting film, I was more thoughtful with my focusing and exposures.

Tell us one thing most people don't know about you.

I do amateur competitive ballroom dancing. My favourite dance is the waltz.

What would you say to your younger self?

Stop inhibiting yourself from taking photos. Shooting on film was expensive and I had to take time to process and print it, but perhaps I could have been a little freer in deciding what I could or should photograph.

What has been your most embarrassing moment as a photographer?

I will never forget the day I set up my 1:1 solution of D-76 with water by putting one part water with one part water. In other words, I forgot to add developer to the solution. My film came out clear. Lesson learned. I always sniffed the developer after that to make sure it smelled like D-76.

Who would join you in your ultimate camera club (dead or alive)?

Robert Adams, Judith Black, Lynn Geesaman, Emmet Gowin, Jacques-Henri Lartigue, Joanne Leonard, Wright Morris, Bill Owens, Stephen Shore and Frederick Sommer. And that's just for starters!

What single thing would improve your photography?

Getting rid of that inner critic who tells me an image isn't good enough.

The worst thing about being a professional photographer is...

Having your photographs used inappropriately and without permission on websites and social media.

Which Instagram/social media accounts inspire you?

Right now, I'm enjoying the Rijksmuseum Instagram account (@rijksmuseum) with its interesting and informative posts about its collection.

Which exhibition could you have spent a month in?

Wandering through the maze of galleries in Paris Photo in 2024 I found *Totem* (2023) by Lee Shulman and *The Anonymous Project* at Galerie Binome. It was irresistible.

I spent a long time peering



at the 1,798 original Kodachrome slides on both sides of a large light box. I discovered people and pets and houses and landscapes. With no way to know what really happened, you can invent stories and marvel at how photography can record our lives.

Which characteristics do you think you need to become a photographer?

I've always felt that a photographer should be balanced in right brain/left brain dominance. You need the right brain for creativity and curiosity. You need the left brain

for organisation and technical work with cameras, computers and darkroom chemistry.

What are you thinking about when you release the shutter?

Each time I press the shutter I feel optimistic. I'm always hoping I captured a gem of a photo.

Deanna Dikeman has photographed her Midwestern family and surroundings since 1985, when she left a corporate job to try a photography class. She received an Aaron Siskind Foundation Fellowship in 1996, the United States Artists Fellowship in 2008 and the Guggenheim Fellowship in Photography in 2023. Deanna has two photobooks published by Chose Commune: 'Leaving and Waving' and 'Relative Moments'. Images from 'Leaving and Waving' have been exhibited at festivals, museums and galleries in 13 countries.

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