

Story

By Shelly Perry

Each time we click the shutter button the split second before us is frozen in time. That is part of the magic of photography, being able to hold on to a visual representation of a precise moment in time.

In stock photography, we typically don't think of things in these terms. We think more along the lines of clean, simple, clutter-free... sparse, even. Our shots are often staged and planned down to the smallest details.

While all that is fine and good, it's easy to become technicians of our equipment rather than photographers on the hunt for that next magical moment.

For this month's Challenge you may choose to stage your shot, or you may choose to go searching and see what magic moments come your way. Either approach will work for this month's theme: Story.

Photos can be powerful storytellers. They can move us to extremes of laughter or tears. They can create an emotional reaction and even inspire us to take action. While you may think every photo has a story (and I really wouldn't argue against that) there are those rare photos where the story just pops out at you and makes a lasting impression.

Those are the kinds of photos we want to see this month. Interesting stories! Here are three of my own shots that speak to this theme:



Notice how each of the images has a very different mood or feeling because of the story they are telling.

You can go in any direction you want subject-wise. Make us laugh or cry, help us understand something through your photo, share a magic moment that the rest of us missed. These don't have to be elaborate — stories are happening around us all the time, every day. With a little patience, anyone can create something to fit this theme — even in your own home, town, or city.

While it depends upon your particular subject, some of the places you

might see these types of shots in use could include:

- ✦ Blogs, websites, brochures, advertisements.
- ✦ Lifestyle media of all types.
- ✦ Health and wellness related media.
- ✦ Family life media.
- ✦ Animal themed media.
- ✦ Travel focused media.
- ✦ Newspapers, magazines, flyers, and newsletters.
- ✦ Editorial pieces.

“Story” as Stock Images

As a theme, this one is really wide open to interpretation and execution. You may walk out your door and see a story unfolding, or you may know of this sweet old man who lives on the corner and spends his days whittling on his front porch — he could make an interesting story.

Think about people you know or know of with some interesting characteristic or hobby you could photograph. Think about what makes your town or city special and see if you can't find a way to photograph that.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- ✦ **Think Story:** The who, what, where, when, why. Convey the meaning with your photo.
- ✦ **Be Creative:** Think of unique or iconic aspects of your city or town and the people involved with those things.
- ✦ **Establish a Mood:** Create the feeling you want your shot to convey.
- ✦ **Be Unique:** Try to make the shot as unique as possible; it will help yours stand out from the rest.
- ✦ **Include People:** Any time you can include people in your shots you increase their saleability. Not all shots require people, but it's good to keep in mind.

The best way to understand the idea of creating story is to look at some examples. Here are a few great stock images that tell a story to get you started.

This first shot above is a good example of our modern-day life with technology. Two people, each with a phone, sitting in a car and somewhat interacting with each other but mostly interacting with technology — this seems to be THE story I see around me all the time these days.

Here we have a love story. Probably the most photographed story there is. What I like about this one is that even though it's probably a photo shoot, the subjects aren't looking at the camera. It's about the couple and their relationship, and it really shows in a story sort of way.

A dog's life story. This one comes across so well, in part because of the angle the photographer took. Getting down low at eye level with the dog increases that sense of seeing the world through a dog's eyes. If this same shot were on a solid background it would not have the same effect at all. The background in this case helps bring the story to life by providing context.



I don't know for certain this was shot in Southern California, but that's the story this photo to the right conjures: California living. I like this one for story because of the interaction(s) and the immediate sense of place.

Childhood summer story. This one feels retro and timeless at the same time. Those carefree, happy days of childhood, swimming in the lake with your best friend or sibling. It conjures up memories of days gone by as well as hopes and dreams for our children or grandchildren... it's both nostalgic and contemporary, not an easy thing to accomplish in a photo.



A story of metamorphosis. This shot does not need much explanation; we have all the elements of this beauty's change from a caterpillar to a butterfly (well, except the caterpillar). This is a simple, straightforward, and self-explaining story, but a story nonetheless. It also has a lot of symbolic meaning, which could make it perfect for stock photography.

Story of a working mom. There are so many people working remotely or doing their own entrepreneurial thing that scenes like this



one are more common all the time. A mom getting work done with a baby on her lap or like this, while the child is napping. These are the stories of our lives and if you can capture them in a compelling way, they can be dynamite for stock.

Shattered story. This one is very different from the others in that it is obviously highly staged and in that way a little less “lifestyle” or authentic than the rest, but the message and story here are very powerful and compelling. And a shot like this could be used in a wide variety of ways relating especially to mental health and the complexities of our lives.

A stock-worthy “Story” photo should have these qualities:

Tell a Story!

This one is obvious, I hope. Your shot should be more than just a pretty picture; there should be something happening or a situation that has something going on, something that “speaks” to us, if you will.



Incorporate Good Lighting

These types of shots can run the spectrum; however, most will typically be natural light as you find it in the situation. Remember the moments are fleeting, so watch for good natural light (such as sunset) and be ready.

Have Good Composition

If you stage these shots, you have time to set things up, rearrange, clear clutter... basically look edge to edge, corner to corner, get in what you want in and out what you want out. You can use your tripod if you want to — whatever you need to do to get the best composition possible. If you are shooting on the go, the same generally applies. You may not have the time to be as meticulous, but you should still be aware of what is in or out of your shot and also the placement of your dominant subject.



Be Theme Worthy

For this one we are not just looking for pretty shots with perfect composition, we are looking for shots that tell us something, move us, inform us, give us a glimpse into a person or situation that brings greater understanding.

Be Compelling

Draw us into the story. Start to tell the narrative and have the viewer's mind fill in the gaps.



Where to Find Good “Story” Shots

For this Challenge, you can likely find acceptable subject matter pretty much anywhere — at home, in the yard, in your community, as you travel, out in nature... the possibilities are wide open. If you are doing these shots in your home you can take all the time you need to set them up, wait for the perfect light, or create the perfect light.

Take your time, plan it out, and then enjoy the process while executing it. If using natural lighting, pay close attention to the time of day, weather conditions, and so on. Try to get nice diffused or indirect daylight. There are stories going on all around us every day, so no matter where you are or where you live you should be able to find a good story to shoot.

Shooting Tips

How to get good lighting:

As I mentioned above, some of these shots will be indoors, so pay close attention to the lighting around you, as the lighting itself will play a big role in the mood and tone of your shot and can in some cases affect the story.

Think about where you can find or create the best lighting for your subject in your location. For example, if you’re using window light, what time of day is going to be best to shoot your subject?

If you need to add lighting, be sure to diffuse and/or bounce your flash if possible to avoid harsh on-camera light.

Use your tripod if you need longer exposure times or just want to get your camera all set up and ready. If you are heading outside keep in mind you



typically want to stay away from direct harsh sunlight. If it's cloudy where you are then even midday could provide flattering light for your shot. Lighting really depends on subject and location, and it's a critical component to your shots.

Work the shot:

As always, work the shot. This is one Challenge where you could shoot a whole series of photos. Just be sure to try a variety of shots to get the best one possible. Try to stretch yourself, even if the shot doesn't work, by

shooting it in lots of different ways until you exhaust the possibilities. That's the way you will learn what works and what doesn't.

Playing, which is what I encourage you to do, keeps it fun and keeps you open to learning, growing, and experiencing those synchronistic AH-HA moments. If you go out hunting with no idea what you are going to find, then I encourage you to look for an interesting location and work the shot by working the area or setting up and waiting for different things to happen.



Keywording Tips for “Story”

All your shots should include the who (if there is one), what, where, when, and why as keywords. The actions and the overall mood or feeling are all important descriptors as well as a few concept or idea words. For instance, all of your shots for this Challenge should be able to use “story” or “editorial” as a concept keyword. As always, don’t include things that aren’t there or are not specifically expressed.

The trick with keywords for any shot is to be clear and detailed about all the things that matter in the shot in a way that other people who are looking for it can find it without being overreaching and including details that simply don’t matter at all.

Let’s look at the “dog’s life story” shot one more time. Here is how I would keyword it:

adorable	cute	home	nobody	sad
alone	dog	indoors	pedigree	sit
animal	doggy	interior	pet	scene
basset	domestic	kitchen	portrait	stairs
basset hound	ears	lifestyle	pup	young
canine	friend	loneliness	puppy	
color	hound	looking	purebred	



Remember, keywording is not an exact science. There are always words that could be added, changed, or taken away; just try to be as clear as possible with the details you see.

I hope you enjoy this Challenge. I look forward to seeing all your great stories!!