

Photographer, Catherine Falls

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[Josie Gealer-Ng]: Hey Catherine – first of all I should check in and see how you’re doing during this very strange time in the world. Could you talk a little bit about how the pandemic has changed the way in which you work and how do you stay motivated?

[Catherine Falls]: Yes, it’s been strange! As you can see my three children are at home whilst the schools are shut so homeschooling has been keeping me very busy, plus we just moved to a new house so there’s that too!

In terms of work it has really affected me as most of my commercial shoots call me away from Ireland, either to places like London that’s only a hop, skip and a jump across the water or further afield – so in that way not being able to travel, as well as the result that there’s not as many shoots being commissioned, has been tricky to navigate.

I did get away at some points last year, but obviously with the pandemic we are working on very reduced sets and being responsible with social distancing and wearing masks the entire time and so it’s that little bit harder to connect in the ways you usually would. There are shoots in the works at the moment but of course we are all waiting to see what happens when the vaccines roll out – it’s all up in the air.

In terms of staying motivated I always make sure my cameras are fully charged and nearby, so when not home-schooling I have been working on diversifying the work for my Getty Images portfolio as much as possible, I try to add something daily. To be honest I love being a photographer and so I’m very motivated as I love to stay busy. When I sit down to dinner in the evening it’s important to me that I feel like I have achieved something that day within my own practice – whether that’s big or small.

[JG]: I can definitely sense that about you – you always come across as super positive and motivated. Have you always had that drive? What did you want to be when you were growing up?

[CF]: When I was a child, I was very creative and loved photography from a very young age – which was fortunate as I was absolutely terrible at subjects such as maths or science.

My dad let me use his cameras to experiment, and I had so much fun messing around with his equipment, taking pictures of pretty much everything.

He also allowed me to use his video cameras – like the big old BBC over the shoulder one with the VCR tape in the side. I spent years of my childhood with that great big thing on my shoulder looking through the viewfinder, but oh I just loved it! So, from a young age I was certain I wanted to be a photographer or director. There are some very embarrassing films of me directing my younger siblings in homemade movies.

[JG]: I also had a younger sister who had the 'joy' of being directed by me as a child. Were your younger siblings happy to be the subjects of your films?

[CF]: To begin with they were happy to have a starring role, however they would soon become fed up as I would become impatient if they didn't give me the performance I demanded! To remedy these issues, I decided to make binding contracts which I made them sign stating they couldn't drop out mid film - as that is what they would often do. Unfortunately, my parents would never make them uphold their end of the contract ...

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[JG]: What was your next initial step into photography?

[CF]: I studied photography at Queens University in Belfast. I did some traveling after university and ended up in Delaware where I got a job in a photographic emporium taking novelty photos of people in costumes - like Civil War uniforms or flappers. That was my first photography job. It was great, I met some real characters.

I then worked in fashion working in a photography studio for a fashion brand. However, I decided to take time out when I had my babies, which in one way did put a stopper in my photography career but in another way gave me time and freedom to spend with my kids and I started to find new inspiration within my photography capturing and enjoying everyday moments with them. I then gained a fantastic agent who could see the commercial aesthetic within my personal work and so I moved into commercial work from there.

[JG]: As well as the models and families you cast for your shoots, you also often photograph your own family and are talented at capturing moments of imagination and play that feel unguarded and full of narrative - storytelling is key to our customer base. How do you manage to capture these moments so authentically?

[CF]: Sometimes it's not planned at all, for example my daughter might be sitting there engrossed in play draped in some really beautiful morning light and I'll grab the camera, so the images happen very organically. Other times I will put more thought into the shoot and plan an activity like painting or crafts. I'm also very inspired by the light, like today for example is a beautiful winter day with that crisp sunlight shining through the windows. It's days like today I'll look through my garage for props, grab my rustic table, aprons and crafts and do something specifically with my Getty Images portfolio in mind. I also am a bit of a magpie, always looking out for interesting and imaginative props in local stores or thrift shops that would be great for a shoot.

[JG]: As mentioned, you try to photograph almost daily - where do you find your inspiration from?

[CF]: When it comes to inspiration, I think I find it everywhere. I get a lot of inspiration from my kids - the adorable little beings that they are! Children are very naturally creative with a sense of freedom in their ideas and imagination and that is very inspiring for me. As mentioned, I'm very energised by different types of natural light so when you put those two together, that's when the magic happens for me. I would say I'll shoot anything I find interesting really, sometimes those things can be very simple. I love to find ways of photographing something seemingly normative and make it beautiful.

[JG]: Your portfolio is quite new to Getty Images and has been successful - What is the value for you of syndicating your work as a photographer?

[CF]: I think that shooting for Getty Images teaches you how to capture those subtle beautiful moments or add imagination to everyday concepts, the more you practice that the more you can make your camera sing. I've found that shooting for Getty Images works well within my lifestyle and I've been able to utilise my passion and make success from it. It's provided me with a second income, which has been so welcomed as commercial jobs have inevitably declined during the pandemic.

With success comes drive. For example, with my work for Getty Images I have a real drive to increase my revenue month on month, and seeing your portfolio improve and the revenue increase is hugely rewarding.

It also balances well with my advertising work, as the concepts briefed by the creative team at Getty Images are forward thinking, and this keeps my portfolio fresh and enticing to clients when my agent is pitching me for jobs.

[JG]: What have been your biggest challenges along the way?

[CF]: My biggest challenge as mentioned has been taking time out of my career early on to have my babies. When you're freelance that is a big step as you don't have an income coming in. At that time my partner, an illustrator, decided to get a full-time job as a graphic designer for stability, but once my youngest was a bit older we both went freelance again. At the time it was very frightening to both be self-employed with three small children, but it was worth it. After a lot of hard work, we ended up in a place where we are both able to do what we love while raising a family and sharing childcare.

[JG]: What image of yours in our collection is your favorite?

[CF]: Oh, that's a difficult decision but I definitely have some favorites. One of my very favorites is an image of my daughter with building blocks that spell out scallywag.

[JG]: What are you looking forward to for the future?

[CF]: I'm looking forward to the pandemic ending and being able to travel for work again, that's the great thing about being a photographer - you can find yourself anywhere in the world.

[JG]: Lastly, what advice would you give emerging photographers?

[CF]: Without sounding like an advert for Getty Images I would say that syndicating your work is a really great place to look and has a lot of exciting prospects as a photographer. It gives you an opportunity to sell your work and gain understanding of the commercial world of photography and how it works, which is invaluable if you want to go down the commercial photographer route. Lastly, if photography is your passion just keep shooting and practicing!