

Photographer, Marko Geber

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[Josie Gealer Ng]: Hey Marko, so now that I've given you a little introduction I guess the best place to start would be the beginning. How do you think your childhood and upbringing influenced your career choice? Did you want to be a photographer as a kid?

[Marko Geber]: Photography didn't cross my mind at all as a child, like ninety-nine percent of my friends growing up in Serbia, my dream was to become a professional football player. Although looking back my childhood influenced me in other ways that are relevant in my work as a photographer today. For example, my father was a Soldier and so we moved around to different cities a lot when I was growing up. I was always the new kid and so I had to learn how to talk to people and make new friends in really short amounts of time. These early experiences of meeting different characters and learning to be in new environments definitely shaped me in how I work with people today.

[JG]: I think that makes a lot of sense and your ability to adapt and put people at ease seems to be integral to the way you work. The next thing I wanted to bring up is the now positively retro (in internet years) - MySpace, as I know this played its part in a pretty big life change for you. My own personal experience of Myspace brings back not so fond memories of uploading cringe inducing photos & the rejection of not making my crushes "top friends" list. However, some pretty good things did come out of MySpace at the time - such as Lily Allen, the Arctic Monkeys and, of course, your modeling career - can you talk a little bit about that?

[MG]: Yes, it's funny in today's social media driven world to think back to Myspace, but I guess this was the first platform that gave people the opportunity to create an online "profile" where you didn't need money and influence to make outward connections and with that came new opportunities. It was a lucky break that a casting agent happened to come across some of my pictures on Myspace as modeling had never crossed my mind. I was twenty and my life mainly centered around hanging out with my brothers. My younger brother used to upload some photos of us to Myspace, just silly stuff really, like us at the gym or playing football. I was supposed to be going to University to study History but decided to give modeling a try and it turned out to be the right decision as it really took my life in another direction and led to my first experience of being on photo shoots.

[JG]: When did you pick up a camera and start taking photographs yourself?

[MG]: I learned pretty quickly that it wasn't the modeling I enjoyed, but all the opportunities that arose with it, mainly the chance to travel and meet new people.

It was during this time I got very excited about photography. Working as a model, I had the opportunity to work with some very successful photographers who had varying techniques and styles and that was really interesting for me. I would say I was a very annoying model at the time, I was always asking photography questions and would take any opportunity to see how things worked.

When I was living and working in Shanghai, I saved enough money to buy my first camera. On set one day I asked a very successful photographer for advice on what camera I should buy, he was nice enough to take me to a camera shop after the shoot and helped me buy the right equipment to start out with.

I then started taking candid photos of my girlfriend (now wife and also a model) in Shanghai, as well as friends and other models we lived with. I was very ambitious taking as many pictures as I could between modeling jobs, although just starting out in photography I was determined to soak up as much advice as possible and I was constantly trying to improve.

[JG]: How did you get from there to where you are now? Was it a smooth transition from model to photographer?

[MG]: Not at all! My girlfriend and I were in our early twenties and our dream at the time was to save enough money from modeling so we could travel the world together, however that plan quickly changed as we found out we were unexpectedly expecting a baby.

[JG]: I can see how that may have changed things up a little ...

[MG]: Yes, so with a baby on the way we moved from China back to Serbia. I was looking for ways to build a career, you can make decent money from modeling, but I always knew it would only be a short-term thing – looks fade! By chance I had modeled for a photographer in Serbia who licensed his creative images through Getty. I asked him to take a look at some of my photographs and he suggested I try to upload them to Getty. I remember him teasing me at the time saying "with those images you'll probably make some change for Diapers" ... luckily in time it turned out to be much more advantageous than that!

[JG]: It sounds like a challenging time at quite young age?

[MG]: It was challenging but also very fun and I always dream big. I loved making pictures and discussing photography. When I was starting out there was a forum where you could share work with other photographers and get feedback, it was a great resource. However, after a while I realised I needed to stop listening to other people's opinions and concentrate on the type of work I wanted to make. By 2015 I felt confident enough to change my aesthetic and move towards a much more authentic style of imagery, concentrating on real communities and street casting. It was then that my work became much

more successful, and I was able to work solely as a photographer.

[JG]: I think your ability to shoot aspirational photographs that also feel very real is one of the elements that makes your work really stand out. How do you connect with your models to get such beautiful candid moments?

[MG]: For me, real moments aren't just real because you cast "real people" and have a "real location". Those authentic moments come from genuine connection on set and that requires the ability to make people feel relaxed in front of the lens, often in a short amount of time. I often see photographers become very fixated on the technical aspects of photography, but it is just as important to learn how to build connections with people and make people feel comfortable around you. This was a valuable lesson being on the other side of the camera taught me when I was modeling, if the photographer isn't confident or doesn't try to connect with the model, this has the adverse effect of projecting these feelings onto the person in front of the lens, and inevitably you will lose the emotion within the shoot.

Treating everybody you work with respect and kindness is also very important, and your reputation will precede you. I noticed early on that the models I lived with would always talk about how they felt on a shoot rather than the actual images. Checking in with people goes a long way – do they feel comfortable in the outfit, do they want a break, are they thirsty, small questions but important for encompassing someone's feelings.

I also shoot very quickly, I generally book models for four hours but will always be wrapped by two hours. If you shoot for too long, I think people lose that energy which lights up an image. To sum it up I believe it all needs to be a collaborative process between the photographer, the team and the models.

[JG]: Speaking of collaborative processes, you are quite prolific in creating a vast amount of productions a year, how do you manage to keep on top of everything?

[MG]: It is very much a family business and I couldn't do this job without them. My wife is very involved within the creative side as well as modeling within the shoots, and my children appear in my shoots too. My mother helps with childcare and my now retired father takes care of the admin. Both my brothers are also very involved in everything from shooting, assisting, production and uploading. We are very close, and I love working with them. Sometimes if I'm having a bad day on set my brother always has a way to make me laugh and visa versa.

Of course, we also work with other people and I have a fantastic team. I would say I'm fastidious about the people I work with as we are such a close-knit team, when we bring someone into the business, we really see them as a member of the family. I always choose to work with someone based on how we connect on a personal level rather than looking for the person with the most experience.

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[JG]: As mentioned above, you photograph your own family and children as well as other real families, what is their perspective on seeing their images out in the world?

[MG]: I have been photographing my family and children for a long time, and so they are very accustomed to seeing themselves in different adverts within different counties. As they have got older and started school, they have definitely become prouder when their friends spot their images. They are keen to show other kids how to pose or teach them how to take a picture.

They are also immersed in all of the creative aspects of shoot production such as set design, styling as well as meeting many new people of all ages. For them that involvement is fun, educational as well as confidence boosting. My nine-year-old daughter has insisted that soon she will be the only stylist I need to work with, she absolutely loves fashion and making clothes. Last week I noticed my bedsheet had disappeared and soon found that she had cut it up and made it into a dress. I couldn't be cross though, as what she had created was rather good!

[JG]: Would you like your children to follow your footsteps and work in the creative Industry?

[MG]: I was very fortunate that my own parents really supported me in everything I wanted to do. I worked my way through many different aspirations and failures and they always had my back. This gave me the space to fail, learn and grow. Having my family as a backup was so important in giving me confidence to take chances and push myself into new experiences. This is what I also want for my own children – I don't mind what they do, I just want them to have the opportunities to try out all of what life has to offer.

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

[MG]: It's been a fun journey so far but of course there have been many challenges, especially in the beginning when you are trying to make work but don't have many connections. You often can't work with the stylists, producers or models you would like too. On the technical side you spend a lot of time trying to work things out and making a lot of mistakes! I remember changing the white balance on my camera after a long shoot and accidentally re formatting the whole card, that was a bad day ...

I have a lot of fun experimenting and have gained a lot of satisfaction when I've found a way through varying obstacles. As you build your photography portfolio it becomes easier to meet more people and gain more experience.

Another challenge is that I've never finished a shoot and been completely happy with it. I always see something I would have changed afterwards or an opportunity I felt I missed, but I guess this just means

I'm learning and improving.

[JG]: Where do you get your inspiration from?

[MG]: I love working with people who also love their job, I find it very motivating, whether that's other photographers, stylists, designers or art directors like you. I think it's a wonderful thing to be able to love what you do. I look at a huge amount of photography, all different disciplines from commercial work to fine art. I also watch a lot of movies – I continuously drive my wife mad as I'm always hitting the pause button to take a screenshot whenever I see a moment where I love the light or the colours within a frame, it can often take me a while to finish a movie!

In addition to this I have many conversations with other photographers about inspirations and techniques. All these elements combined inspire me and lift me up as a photographer.

[JG]: If movies are also research, what's your go-to for relaxation?

[MG]: I guess the small things really, family trips, playing with my kids ... and I do like a whiskey (or three) with my brothers after a long shoot. I also love shopping, I've yet to meet someone who can out shop me, If I go shopping – that's it I'm gone for the day.

[JG:] Is there a recent shoot that stands out for you above the rest?

[MG]: My father has an ex-army friend who owns a small airport in Serbia, and it was on my bucket list to do a shoot there. Last year we borrowed a plane and did a Sky Diving concept with senior models over sixty years old. The actual shoot was challenging as it was a super-hot day and hard work for the models, so we had to shoot really fast. It was difficult but the pictures were really fun and different from some of my other shoots.

[JG]: What would you like to do next?

[MG]: I have a couple of personal projects I want to work on to give myself some time to experiment. When the world is in a better situation, I plan to do more traveling with my family. Both me and my wife love London so that is definitely on the list. New York too, we love to travel and find new people to meet and work with.

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

[MG]: My advice would be don't be afraid to make mistakes, as you learn from mistakes and these make you a better photographer.

My other piece of advice would be to find your own inspiration. Often, I think photographers are too influenced by what other photographers are working on. If you put motivation into creating your own ideas and vision, you'll often be much more satisfied with the work you create.