

Where Stories Hide: A Photographer's Secret to Never Running Out of Things to Say

Sometime long ago, I was asked a question that genuinely made me stop and think. It came through in an email from a Daily Birder reader while I was filling in for Adam during his recovery after his horrific car accident. The question was simple but so layered. They asked, "What sparks your creativity to write about such diverse topics?"

At first, I laughed, not because the question was silly, but because if they only knew how much I had *not* been feeling creative. Truth be told, I was relieved when Adam was ready to reclaim the reins. He's the real deal, and I had started to feel like I was fumbling through the filing cabinet of my brain trying to find one last usable idea.

I was running low. Like, dry-dam-in-the-Karoo low.

But then, something shifted. I didn't go on some grand adventure or have a lightning bolt moment. It was much simpler than that. I was sitting at my desk after a long morning of studying, textbooks open, highlighters everywhere, brain fried, and I felt that familiar itch to escape for a bit. So, I grabbed one of our photo hard drives and started scrolling through old pictures. No agenda, just scrolling.

And that's when the magic happened.

One photo popped up, a slightly crooked image of a sunrise somewhere in Kruger, and I was instantly taken back to that exact morning. I could hear the distant whoop of hyenas, feel the early bite of winter air, remember the exact argument we'd had over whether to take the S100 or stick to the tar road. That image didn't just show me a sunrise, it reminded me of everything else around it. And just like that, I had a story. And then another. And another.

It was like I'd accidentally found a secret stash of creativity, one I'd been building for years without even realising it. All those photos I'd taken, whether good, bad, or blurry, weren't just pretty pictures. They were bottled-up memories. And each one had something to say.

You see, we often talk about photography as "capturing a moment in time." A frozen second that will live on long after the sun has set or the bird has flown. And that's all true. But what hit me was that those frozen moments can be thawed out again. They can be pulled from the archive and turned into full-blown stories, complete with emotion, context, and colour that no Instagram filter can replicate.

Whether it's an impala calf taking its first wobbly steps, or your dog rolling in something it definitely shouldn't have, there's a story behind every snap. A reason you picked up the camera. A mood you were in. A memory that, with the right nudge, comes tumbling back with all its messy, beautiful detail.

Most people scroll through their camera roll and move on. They think, "Oh, nice pic," and that's that. But if you stop for just a moment longer, you start to remember. Who you were with. What the weather was like. Whether that bird call in the background made you stop in your tracks. That photo of the sunset? Maybe it was taken on a day you didn't think you'd make it to camp in time. That perfectly timed shot of a lilac-breasted roller? Maybe it came after four hours of seeing absolutely nothing and wanting to call it quits.

Photos don't just hold light and pixels. They hold your stories.

And the best part? You don't need to be a professional photographer to have this secret superpower. You just need a photo. Any photo. From your phone, a camera, even a printed one from a dusty album on the shelf. It doesn't need to be award-winning. It just needs to mean something to you.

So now, whenever I feel stuck or uninspired, I know exactly what to do. I don't go looking for a big new idea. I just go back. I scroll, I pause, I remember. And before I know it, a sentence forms. Then a paragraph. Then a full-blown tale about something I didn't even realise I had stored away.

I suppose that's the beauty of being both a photographer and a storyteller. One hand holds the camera, the other holds the pen, and together they work a little magic.

So if you're ever feeling like there's nothing left to say, do yourself a favour: scroll. Scroll through your last bush trip, your most recent hike, that Sunday morning coffee on the stoep. Somewhere in there is a spark, and once it catches, you'll have more stories than you know what to do with.

Trust me, the moments you've captured are just waiting to be remembered.