For a brief time, my classmates and I have come together from around the country for a common goal. Had it not been for our love of photography, we never would have met. As our time together draws to an end, I wanted to take this opportunity to document who they were and their stories as photographers. My hope is that you can sense each personality, as expressed through both a photo shoot and an interview. Throughout these pages, are different photographic approaches, showing who each person is physically and blending that with the written element of who they are internally; giving you an opportunity to understand these people: inside and out.
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I love to create things that inspire and affect other people.
I am finishing my last year of college at Cal Poly. This is the third college I have been to, and while I have enjoyed the journey, it has been a long one, and I am anxious to start a new one.

Why did you choose photography?
Growing up I was always a creative kid. I got into photography unintentionally, as I always loved to shoot photos with my dad’s old Nikon film camera. My first semester in college, I decided to take a photography class, and shortly after decided to major in it.

What got you into photography? What was that journey like for you?
The support of my parents was really the main thing that allowed me to pursue photography. It was, and is a risk. There seems to be a huge chance of struggle and hardship when attempting to have a successful career in the creative industry. These past few years as my passion for photography and creative ventures has grown, my parents, friends, and extended family have all been incredibly supportive and encouraging that I go after what I love and not settle for anything less. This has made my journey an exciting one. There are already things I have accomplished that I am very proud of and I know I can not continue on this path without their support.

Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again?
This is an interesting question... without a doubt I would choose to pursue a direction in the creative field. I am not sure if I would have done it through Cal Poly, or even photography for that matter. I love being able to express myself creatively, and I choose to do so through photographs, but also in many other ways. I think a lot about what it would have looked like to be a graphic designer. All in all, I am thankful for the way things have panned out. I do not regret the way things have happened. So I guess that is a good thing.

How long have you been a photographer?
I got a Polaroid camera for my 12th birthday. I took my first photo class six years ago. I shot my first wedding five years ago. Its been a process for me. Sometimes I see what some of the amazing photographers out there are doing, and I feel like I am still not a photographer.

How did you come to choose Cal Poly as the school you wanted to attend?
I went to a community college first and I knew I wanted to be some sort of art major at a Cal State school. When it came time to transfer, Cal Poly was on the top of the list for a few reasons. One of them was the department seemed very appealing. Most other state schools did not seem to have an art program as extensive as Poly's.

What motivated you to choose it?
Another huge reason I moved up here was because I have family that lives close. Being near them has been a great experience and has really allowed me to get plugged into the community.

Were there any unexpected challenges?
I sort of went into the transferring process without really knowing what to expect. I took one day at a time. One frustration was I found out pretty quick that it would take me three years to get my degree, not two like I had originally thought. I was a little bummed about that because I had done everything I could to meet all the lower division requirements.

What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?
I am really inspired by nature and aesthetic beauty. I love to capture moments in time, unassuming situations. I love to create things that inspire and affect other people.

Do you have a memorable school or personal assignment? Why was it memorable?
I loved putting together the book project for one of Eric's classes. I loved the freedom to express myself through my photos and present them in a way I was proud of.

What do you feel is the most challenging thing about being a photographer?
The competition! I love what I do, and it seemed like for a while it was unique and artistic. I was followed and sought after by friends, family and acquaintances, and while people still appreciate my talent, with the increasing popularity of digital SLRs, I do not feel as unique anymore. In a positive way though, it does challenge me to re-think my methods and forces me to be better at what I love.
Having been at Cal Poly for a few years, what have you learned about yourself during that time in regards to growing as a person on your own and as a photographer?

This is a tough question... I have learned that if I want something accomplished I have to set my mind to it and get it done. People respond to art and photography and I want to use my talent in a way that affects, helps and includes others, not just myself.

Would you choose it again?

I'm not sure.

What has your experience in the Art Department/Photo Department been like?

An interesting one. If I am being completely honest, it has been frustrating. I have worked on my own for about as long as I have been in school doing freelance photography for a graphic design firm, shooting weddings and portraits, working in a film and processing lab, and most recently being the assistant to a professional photographer. All that to say, it is hard for me to be motivated in the program because I feel like a lot of what I am doing in the classes is not practical to a job outside of school. Cal Poly is a good catalyst to get things moving, but I also feel the program could be doing more about integrating students with the community and professionals who make their living doing what they love.

Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?

I do, but not because of Cal Poly. I have learned more in my job as an assistant to a photographer than I ever have at school.

Has your experience at Cal Poly encouraged or discouraged your desire to be a photographer?

It has not swayed me either way. I think if I did not pursue photographic ventures on my own, the program at Cal Poly would discourage me.

Where do you see yourself going after graduation? What are your plans and did you have those plans when you first came to Cal Poly?

I have a job with a photographer lined up when I graduate. From there I feel like the sky is the limit. I want to pursue jobs all around the county, ones I feel like I could never get, and see what happens. I have big plans to live a life that I enjoy doing what I love, and settling is not an option.

A photographer who inspires you.

Only one?! I am gonna list a few :)... Rebecca Thuss, Trever Hoehne, Cameron Ingalls, Tim Walker, Jeremy Cowart, Gentyl & Hyers.

A website and/or blog you visit often?

Design Sponge, ffffound, oh joy!, oncewed, martha stewart, anthropologie

If not a photographer, what would you have been?

Hmmm anything in the creative field... I don't know if I will even be a photographer. I love doing crafts and design. I don't know how or if that will play out in my life, but you never know!
Something you’re saving up for?
I really struggle with wanting the newest and best photo equipment. Recently I read a book about how the best camera in the world is the one you own. It has really motivated me to appreciate what I have and make the most of it. As a result, I feel like my photos are better than ever.

Something that is overrated.
Vignettes!! There is a place for them, but they are used waaaaaaayyyy too much.

What is your greatest fear?
Not being able to do what I love and having to settle in order to make a living.

What talent would you most like to have?
I would love to be able to paint! I try sometimes, but I am really bad at it.

Name one musician you would like to take a portrait of?
Zooey Deschanel

If you could have lunch with anyone who is famous who would it be?
Tina Fey

Where you’ll find me on a Friday night at 9 p.m.?
With friends probably at my house or theirs... I’m pretty low key

Your favorite film (movie) of all time.
Royal Tenenbaums

First thing you would do if you won the lottery?
Start some sort of creative program for kids.

Which five words would your friends use to describe you?
Creative, unemotional, intentional, happy, and thankful.

What would you like to be doing in 5 years from now?
I’m not quite sure. I just want to be doing something I love. As I have stated before, the idea of settling is a scary one.

In regards to your journey as a photographer up to this point, is there anything you’d like to say that I haven’t asked you about already? A little rant? A story? Anything?
I am excited because this is the beginning of my journey. I know there is so much in store for me and I can’t wait to see what happens down the line.

And the last question, if you had one wish…
As cliché and stupid as it sounds, I might save the wish for a rainy day. Right now I am happy with where my life is and what God is doing in it. I was created to be a creative person and as long as I trust God with what He has given me, and not try to do it on my own, I know I will be where I am supposed to be.
You have to be creative
My name is Cassandra Fern Bright from Las Vegas, Nevada. I was a competitive swimmer for 10 years, my favorite color is yellow, I think bean and cheese burritos are bomb.com, I have a younger sister named Samantha and a puppy named Scout. I laugh a lot, and I think laughing is the best cure for anything.

**Why did you choose photography?**
I chose photography because plain and simple; it makes me happy. It’s the rice to my beans…. Plus art is awesome and math and science sucks.

**What got you into photography? What was that journey like for you?**
My mom has always been really creative and into art…. she used to teach glassblowing classes and she has her own quilting company, so art has always been in my life since I was a baby. I started getting into photography when I was in high school. One day I was going through my grandpa’s boxes of stuff he left for us when he passed away. I found his old camera, developing stuff and pictures he had taken of my family and developed it. From there, I knew photography was my thing.

**Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again?**
Absolutely. When I was in high school deciding where I wanted to go to college and wanted to do, I just thought about the things in my life that made me feel fulfilled, complete and happy. And at that point it was photography and swimming. I knew I would never be an Olympic swimmer and I did not want to try to be one. In high school swimming was my life. Literally, I spent more time at that pool than I did at school and swimming was all I knew. I was just starting to get into photography in high school, but it had to take a back seat to swimming. When I was deciding what I wanted to do and study in college, I knew this would be the time to give photography the drivers seat.

**How long have you been a photographer?**
I started really getting into photography and actually shooting around my junior year in high school, so off and on for 6 years now.

**How did you come to choose Cal Poly as the school you wanted to attend? What motivated you to choose it?**
In Nevada we have two schools, UNLV and UNR. I did not want to stay in Nevada. I moved to Las Vegas when I was 10 and when I graduated I was ready to move on and explore somewhere else. All the schools I applied to were out of state, ranging from Cal Poly to Oregon State to an Art school in Savannah, Georgia. I came to San Luis Obispo to visit the school and fell in love with the town, environment, campus and people. From doing research on schools I knew Cal Poly was a prestigious school and so it was a great fit.

**Were you excited about Cal Poly?**
Excited to move away from home? Oh for sure, I love my family to death but when I graduated high school I was ready to spread my wings and bounce. I just wanted to go explore. I was ready to start a new chapter in my life and Cal Poly was it.

**What was school and life like for you once you arrived here?**
It was definitely a wake up call. High school was easy for me. I struggled like any other normal kid in high school with government and calculus but overall life was pretty easy. Coming to college was amazing and exciting but it was a wake up call and it was a hard adjustment. I missed my family more than I thought. In high school, living under my parents, I forgot about everything they did for me so when I got here it was a shock and reality check.

**Were there any unexpected challenges?**
I was aware that high school was not going to be like college. I knew it was going to be harder and more time consuming so I was ready for that. It was the little things like cleaning up after myself, remembering to take out the trash on Wednesday night or watching my bank account and the money I didn’t have.

**What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?**
Everything. I’m pretty spontaneous when it comes to getting ideas. One day I could be riding my bike and something I see just triggers an idea and sometimes it takes more research. One of my favorite things to do is go to Barnes and Noble, get a tea, and sit and look through a magazine. It keeps me up to date on what’s new and I usually find cool new photographers to creep on.

**Do you have a memorable school or personal assignment? Why was it memorable?**
When swimming was a major thing in my life, I would bring my camera to a lot of meets. At this one meet, I shot a picture of this girl and her little brother together in the warm-up pool talking. I didn’t think twice about the image, just shot it really quick and went on with my day. When I was developing the role I, for some reason, really liked the picture and printed it. That day my photo teacher gave the class a flyer advertising a photo contest. After school I sent my picture into the contest just for fun, not really thinking twice about it. A few weeks later my teacher came up to me saying that I won the contest with a prize of $500. At first, I thought she was joking but then I got my invitation for the dinner that was being held for this contest… so I won $500.
**What do you feel is the most challenging thing about being a photographer?**

Probably the creative side and always trying to come up with new ways to make something intriguing. Anybody can learn to use a camera but you have to be creative and willing to take chances and fail; and be willing to get back up and try again. I go through dry spells where I'm not inspired and I don't have any creative ideas but I just have to push through it and know that it's just a phase.

**Having been at Cal Poly for a few years, what have you learned about yourself during that time in regards to growing as a person on your own and as a photographer?**

I have learned pretty much what everybody learns when they get older and start taking on more; responsibility and time management. Just trying to find a balance.

**Would you choose it again?**

Sure thang.

**What has your experience in the Art Department/Photo Department been like?**

My experience with the art department has been awesome. I have met some pretty amazing, beautiful and talented individuals that share the same dreams as myself. They have inspired and helped me to grow.

**Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?**

I definitely think I am capable to start my own business after I graduate. Starting your own business does not look easy and there are probably a lot of things that you just need to experience on your own, but I think Cal Poly gave me the fundamentals I need to get started if that's what I wish to do when I graduate.

**Has your experience at Cal Poly encouraged or discouraged your desire to be a photographer?**

Both. I can't say that my whole time at Cal Poly was inspiring and encouraging; that's just unrealistic. There were some definite discouraging and stressful times. Times where I felt unmotivated and confused. All in all, I think Cal Poly has motivated me to explore photography and has created a desire to get me into the industry after graduation.

**Where do you see yourself going after graduation? What are your plans and did you have those plans when you first came to Cal Poly?**

I was 18 when I first came to Poly. I had no idea what the heck I was doing or where I saw myself after I left. When I graduate I will be 23, and I will have a better understanding of where I see myself after I graduate, but I'm still young and confused and there are still so many opportunities and avenues I want to explore. I would love to travel and just explore while I'm young and not tied down with too much responsibility.

**A photographer who inspires you.**

Peggie Sirota

**If not a photographer, what would you have been?**

Probably a physical therapist or something in medicine. I hate some parts of science, so that's why I did not pursue that but I think the body is a fascinating machine. Everybody should know how their body works...... it's the only one you got.

**I would love to have you talk about what particular things you love to photograph.**

I'm pretty extroverted so it would make sense that I like being around and shooting people. My favorite types of photo shoots involve music and emotional images that reveal a
little something about the subject. I love images that are whimsical, playful, and heartfelt. Images that capture unique gestures and emotions.

**Something you’re saving up for?**
A new computer and a surfboard.

**What is your greatest fear?**
Mosquito eaters and getting stuck with a 9-5 desk job.

**What talent would you most like to have?**
Missy Elliot's back up dancer.

**Name one musician you would like to take a portrait of.**
Feist

Where you’ll find me on a Friday night at 9 p.m.?
Probably enjoying the company of some of my closest friends. A lot of laughing and maybe some dancing. Those things usually occur regularly on a Friday night.

**Your favorite film (movie) of all time.**
The Newsies

**First thing you would do if you won the lottery?**
Start paying back my student loans ...I know, super exciting, right?

**What would you like to be doing in 5 years from now?**
Well, I would be 27 so hopefully financially independent, working a fulfilling job that I love. Possibly married.

**And the last question, if you had one wish...**
I wish that my future will be bright, and full of love and happiness.
There's a lot at stake and I still feel like I have a lot to prove.
I'm a pretty complicated person with too many interests. I'm kind of a health nut, yoga, active, concert going, fun loving, eclectic individual. I love listening to music, going to the beach, playing games, watching movies, and appreciate great conversation. I guess taking photos is alright too.

**Why did you choose photography?**

I was an excellent student and always pictured myself being very scholarly, and then suddenly realized that my photographic eye couldn’t be ignored. I wanted to go to school for something I loved doing. I could have done the engineering route, but I wouldn’t be happy.

**What got you into photography? What was that journey like for you?**

My Dad was really into photography when he was in college and always encouraged me to capture my memories. Starting in middle school I had an APS camera and would spend my allowance getting my film developed. Then I would make elaborate collages of my friends. I don’t remember thinking about photography artistically until early high school. I took part in a couple of shows and started making photo greeting cards for family and friends. Even then, I just thought of it as a hobby I was good at that I wanted to share. I wasn’t thinking about a photo career. My journey was led by my desire to share memories with family and friends, and then the praise I received fed my desire to work with it more seriously.

**Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again for you?**

This is a tough question for me. Had I not gone to school for art, I probably would not pursue a photo career, but part of me thinks I had more fun as an ignorant photo hobbyist. No matter what I end up doing after graduation, I can’t regret my decision to major in photography. Critiques could be brutal but they thickened my skin. I learned how to be critical (which is a blessing and a curse) of my own work as well as others.

**What was school and life like for you once you arrived here?**

My academic transition was smooth, since I was used to a full IB (International Baccalaureate) class schedule in high school. But life in general was full of challenges between my hard-partying dorm floor, my unpredictable roommate, and the constant chore of remembering peoples’ names, and trying to make new friendships last. There were a lot of fake friendships in my dorm tower that seemed so strange and sad to me. I was determined to only spend time on creating strong loyal friendships instead of fast convenient ones.

**Were there any unexpected challenges?**

Everyday I wasn't very happy as a freshmen. I had a long limbo period where neither Santa Cruz, my hometown, or San Luis Obispo felt like home.

**How long have you been a photographer?**

8 years in theory, but “photographer” 5 years.

**How did you come to choose Cal Poly as the school you wanted to attend? What motivated you to choose it?**

I didn’t want to go to an art school because I wanted a well-rounded education. Cal Poly is a quality school that also had a photo program, which the UCs I originally wanted to go to didn’t have. The beautiful location helped my decision as well.

**Were you excited about Cal Poly? Excited to move away from home?**

I was very ready to move out. I was excited to start fresh, meet new people, and experience a new place. I am thankful for how living on my own has improved the relationship I have with my parents. I am also proud of the person I have become since I've moved here. I'm not sure if I would have had the same growth if I stayed home. It would have been too comfortable—not enough opportunity to change and participate in new things.

**What does school and life was like for you once you arrived here?**

My academic transition was smooth, since I was used to a full IB (International Baccalaureate) class schedule in high school. But life in general was full of challenges between my hard-partying dorm floor, my unpredictable roommate, and the constant chore of remembering peoples’ names, and trying to make new friendships last. There were a lot of fake friendships in my dorm tower that seemed so strange and sad to me. I was determined to only spend time on creating strong loyal friendships instead of fast convenient ones.

**Were there any unexpected challenges?**

Everyday I wasn’t very happy as a freshmen. I had a long limbo period where neither Santa Cruz, my hometown, or San Luis Obispo felt like home.

**What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?**

Music, other people's work [any artists or peers, not only photographers], the “truth is stranger than fiction” aspect of life, people watching, nooks and crannies, magazines, the internet and books.

**Do you have a memorable school or personal assignment? Why was it memorable?**

Tilts and Swings in the first quarter of Large Format Photography—I redid it 4 times. It tested my devotion in the sense that I suffered to get a stupid building straight, which was unnecessary and expensive, but I wasn’t going to give up.

**What do you feel is the most challenging thing about being a photographer?**

Convincing people that you’re the best and staying confident on the job. There have been times when I just needed some time to think and problem solve while on a photo job, but you can’t let off that you’re unsure about what you’re doing. I have to exude confidence so the client doesn’t worry. Remaining relaxed is also a needed skill that I haven’t quite mastered. Things go wrong and don’t work a lot and usually the solution can be simple if I stay calm (hypothetically).

**Having been at Cal Poly for a few years, what have you learned about yourself during that time in regards to growing as a person on your own and as a photographer?**

I am more mature and independent than I thought. I meet people of all ages that surprise me in regards to their attitudes, ungratefulness, and lack of responsibility. I chose early on to take control of my life, both in terms of my education and well-being. I have grown into a strong, organized person and manage to avoid most of the drama that may occur around me. I generally work to solve problems that arise, rather than start
them. As a photographer I hoped to be more self-assured by the time I was a senior. I am pretty confident about everything else that I do, but I'm very self-conscious about my photography. I think I just have really high expectations and since I would like to make a career out of my ability to take photos, it's a huge deal. There's a lot at stake and I still feel like I have a lot to prove.

Would you choose it again?

Yes.

What has your experience in the Art Department/Photo Department been like?

There's this overwhelming desire to compete with your peers. It can't be ignored. We are all a big family, but there's this looming energy of everyone wanting to be the best. Along with this desire comes the consequence of losing, which I have felt the entire time being here. I can spend hours on a project and finally be satisfied with my work, but once a professor points out a flaw or “doesn't get it” I feel defeated. Who cares if I like my work if others don't get it? I want to show people things they wouldn't notice otherwise. I strive for that level of communication, and it's an ongoing journey.

Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?

I'm nervous about starting my own business. I'd rather be part of a company. I would love to work for a cause that helps people, or at least an innovative company that is economically aware.

Has your experience at Cal Poly encouraged or discouraged your desire to be a photographer?

Everyday this changes. One day I feel really energized and confident about being a photographer, and then I learn something new about the business that deters me. Maybe I'm afraid of the competition, but most of all I think it's stuff that I don't have to deal with as a student that real photographers do, like the whole business aspect of it.

What are your plans and did you have those plans when you first came to Cal Poly?

My plans change everyday. I see myself in the Bay Area, preferably in San Francisco or San Jose. I hope to land an internship or photo assistant job and volunteer at an art museum. When I first came to Cal Poly I planned on going straight to grad school in San Francisco, Los Angeles, or Chicago and studying art history. Now I'm ready for a break and want to have job experience first.

A photographer who inspires you.

Would it be way too cliche to say Annie Leibovitz? Jim Marshall, Peggy Sirota, Christopher Griffith, Brian Smith, Robert Trachtenberg.

A website and/or blog you visit often?

www.joemcnally.com/blog/
www.blog.alexxhenry.com/
www.pastemagazine.com/blogs/
If not a photographer, what would you have been?
A writer.

I would love to have you talk about what particular things you love to photograph.
The unexpected, candid moments [artistically], nature. I enjoy abstracting reality via macro photography. I like capturing motion in surreal ways and catching people in a moment that sums up their entire being in one image—usually when you least expect it.

Something you’re saving up for?
Canon EOS-5D Mark II. Dream Big. I also save money for fun stuff like concerts and outings.

Something that is overrated.
Pessimism.

What is your greatest fear?
Being alone, not lonely, but completely alone—forever.

What talent would you most like to have?
To play amazing acoustic guitar without hours of practice...

Name one musician you would like to take a portrait of?
One? You’re killing me.

If you could have lunch with anyone who is famous who would it be?
Can they be dead? I recently read Life With Picasso, and he was a very interesting man. His brain must have just been on overdrive constantly. So many intense intellectual ideas—it’d be neat to get to experience him in person.

Where you’ll find me on a Friday night at 9 p.m.?
Hanging out with my roommates, at a friend’s house, watching a movie, eating, playing a game, or at a house party with close friends.

Your favorite film (movie) of all time.

First thing you would do if you won the lottery?
Look into buying a house. Save the rest of the money, live on the interest, and eventually open a cafe and gallery.

Which five words would your friends use to describe you?
Busy, Positive, Creative, Eclectic, Cultured.

What would you like to be doing in 5 years from now?
Taking editorial photos of musicians, concerts, and locals, and working in a gallery/volunteering at an art museum.

And the last question, if you had one wish...
I’d wish everyone could just be happy at least the majority of the time. I find myself unhappy more often than I should be; but sometimes it’s difficult to feel joy when those around you are lost in sorrow.
I like to have a deeper meaning to my photographs.
I was born in Ventura, California. Most of my family is from a small suburb of Ventura County called Fillmore. My family has always been on the conservative Christian side in their views, with a couple of exceptions of course. I would say that I, for the most part, fall into that same category. I grew up in the church. My mom works at the church back home and I worked at the same church on the maintenance staff for ten years myself. I do not know much about my dad since my parents got divorced when I was six, but I have had many elder influences in my life that have made me the eclectic person that I am. I would not say that I am amazingly knowledgeable in any subject, but rather I have dipped my toes in many oceans. I have always lived an active lifestyle. I love hiking, biking, doing anything and everything in and on the ocean, competing in any sport being played around me, and general adventure seeking. I love traveling and have decided, despite the lack of traveling in my childhood, to travel the world, whether using my own money or raising money. I did a solo European backpacking trip in 2007 and this past summer of 2009 I traveled to Thailand and Burma to document the work of a missionary. Both excursions have further opened my eyes and have brought awareness and understanding into my life. This is kind of all over the place, sorry. It was kind of a stream of consciousness.

Why did you choose photography?
I have always loved art, I just never knew what aspect of it I wanted to lean towards. Then, at my local junior college, Ventura College, I decided to take photography for fun after getting my own point and shoot. I fell in love with the art, kept taking more and more classes, and finally decided to make it my major. After examining the purposes of photography and seeing how powerful it can be, I saw that I could make a difference through the expression of my photography. I was sold.

What got you into photography? What was that journey like for you?
There have definitely been ups and downs, with self-doubt in skill level, and of course one always has classes that you just have to trudge through. When the slumps of photography present themselves I just remember that everyone starts where I am at and photography takes practice and time and eventually I will make a difference.

Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again?
I would definitely choose photography again. It takes me to places I would never have been able to go. I love photography; so why not do something I love for a living?

How long have you been a photographer?
I have been doing photography for 4 years. I don't know when I started calling myself a photographer.

How did you come to choose Cal Poly as the school you wanted to attend? What motivated you to choose it?
I chose Cal Poly because I loved the area and the school when I visited my brother, who was attending. I love the outdoors and all other "art" schools are in big cities, which I do not like. So, mainly the area brought me here.

Were you excited about Cal Poly? Excited to move away from home?
I was excited. Life was starting to end up in a rut and I needed some change.

What was school and life like for you once you arrived here?
Life was a bit freer than at home, but not as free as I expected. I was expecting to make friends with people as adventurous as I am, but that was not the case. You hear stories about college life and all the crazy things people do, but I seemed to be the crazy one. Getting people to use my self-made 150 foot slip-n-slide in the rain with me was even more of a challenge than I thought.

Were there any unexpected challenges?
The biggest challenge was realizing that the administration staff at Cal Poly, despite their job titles, were unwilling to help in the least. I have spent both years here trying to figure out if I am on track and what classes I need to take and there has been little to no help. Other than that, college is college.

What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?
Inspiration comes from daily observation. I am constantly aware of my surroundings and creativity can spark from any situation. I usually lean toward the side of psychoanalysis and telling stories according to thoughts provoked by analyzing people, why things occur in their lives, and how they act to given life situations. Ultimately creativity sparks from anything and everything.

Do you have a memorable school or personal assignment? Why was it memorable?
For one of my classes in my community college I had to have an exhibition. Many people showed up and my teacher raved that it was the best show he had been to in 15 years. That show is pretty memorable.

What do you feel is the most challenging thing about being a photographer?
The most challenging thing is trying to get paid for what you want to do. People do not want to pay for the work you do since it is just photography. It is hard to sell myself to take pictures.
Having been at Cal Poly for a few years, what have you learned about yourself during that time in regards to growing as a person on your own and as a photographer?

I have only been here for a little over a year.

Would you choose it again?

No, the photography department is not very good here.

What has your experience in the Art Department/Photo Department been like?

I would rather not say.

Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?

I don’t believe that I would feel prepared to go out and start my career, no matter what school I attended. On the one hand, I really want to get out and start doing my career. On the other hand, I don’t know how to get paid for my work. So, in this aspect I do not feel prepared, but I know things will work out with time.

Has your experience at Cal Poly encouraged or discouraged your desire to be a photographer?

I would not say that Cal Poly has directly influenced me one way or the other. My experiences, while in attendance at Cal Poly, have been influential. Things such as traveling to Burma and Thailand and doing some documentary photography there and assisting a local photographer have been influential on my path.

Where do you see yourself going after graduation? What are your plans and did you have those plans when you first came to Cal Poly?

I still have the same plans as when I started attending Cal Poly, although they are now more refined. I still plan on traveling the world documenting missionary work to bring awareness to them as humanitarians doing God’s work in love.

A photographer who inspires you.

James Nachtwey, Phil Borges, and Marcus Bleasdale all inspire me.

A website and/or blog you visit often?

viiphoto.com

If not a photographer, what would you have been?

I have done maintenance and would probably continue with that if I didn’t find photography.

I would love to have you talk about what particular things you love to photograph.

My goal is to photograph the work of missionaries as I mentioned before. To sum it up, I like to photograph humanitarian efforts or anything with a greater purpose. I like to have a deeper meaning to my photographs. Landscapes are okay, but I prefer having more of a profound purpose to my work.

Something you’re saving up for?

Not really saving up for it yet, but I would love a Canon 5D Mark II. Also, future trips would appreciate funding.
Something that is overrated.
Kickers or edge lights are overused in photographs and are getting to be a standard that lacks creativity.

What is your greatest fear?
I fear the business side of photography and selling myself to others.

What talent would you most like to have?
I would love to have better business skills.

Name one musician you would like to take a portrait of?
Aaron Weiss. He is in my favorite band, mewithoutYou, and his personality is very eccentric and fun.

If you could have lunch with anyone who is famous who would it be?
Chris Martin of Coldplay. I would love to hear his stories and I often wonder about his lyrics and the meanings behind them. I would also love to have lunch with James Nachtwey and talk about his endeavors and adventures photographing the top news stories in the world.

Where you’ll find me on a Friday night at 9 p.m.?
Watching a movie, writing a song, having a beer and a conversation, or climbing a mountain.

Your favorite film (movie) of all time.
Wayne's World

First thing you would do if you won the lottery?
I would photograph great humanitarian efforts more fervently because I wouldn't have to worry about the finances to make it happen. If it happened tomorrow, I would go back to Burma to further photograph the Karen situation, which I plan on doing anyway.

Which five words would your friends use to describe you?
Observant, particular, hardworking, a listener, wise

What would you like to be doing in 5 years from now?
Just as I mentioned before, documenting missionary work.

And the last question, if you had one wish...
I wish to find someone with the same goal as me to carry out my life missions with the same passion.

Why?
This would make my work 10 times more enjoyable on top of the joy I already have doing it.
Photography was more respected before digital.
My name is Gregory J. Smith. My favorite thing to learn about is photography. I love the technical side as well as the artistic realm of photography.

Why did you choose photography?
I have always been obsessed with the quality of images, even before I ever learned how to use a camera. I think that National Geographic helped spark that affinity for quality.

What got you into photography? What was that journey like for you?
I started out college wanting to do graphic design. I noticed right away that the best designed pieces also contained extraordinary photography. So for my 22nd birthday, I spent all of my money on a new digital camera, a Canon Rebel Xt. I knew right away that I would become a photographer, but I knew it would be in my life permanently.

Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again?
Making a living out of photography is becoming harder and harder. If you have the drive to improve and the eye for quality, I think it is possible. So yes, I would absolutely do it again.

How long have you been a photographer?
I have only been using a camera for about 3 years now. Would I call myself a photographer? Not yet. I still have much to learn.

What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?
Honestly, watching TV is a really good way to be inspired by imagery. The people that make the lighting on TV sets already have such a good handle on what lighting should look like. We as photographers should learn as much as we can from them.

Normally I will have an idea about a complicated shoot, and it will take me more time to figure out what I want it to look like than to actually do the shoot.

Greg
What has your experience in the Art Department/Photo Department been like?

I have found that the photo department really pushes us to be commercial photographers that get all the technical aspects of our photos right. What they lack is really pushing the emotional content in our photos. I feel that it would do the students good to have some assignments that are not so concerned about the technical qualities of the photos but really try to push the meaning and content of them.

Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?

I do not plan on starting my own business as a photographer. I really want to work for a magazine and do editorial work. Of course I’m not prepared! It is a bit scary preparing our final portfolios and trying to get a job.

Has your experience at Cal Poly encouraged or discouraged your desire to be a photographer?

My experience at Cal Poly has only encouraged me to want to be a photographer. The professors are willing to tell us anything they have learned about photography. Many of them have a lot of experience trying to make photography work as a career. A lot of the class lecture time is spent talking about successful photographers and why they have had so much success. I remember one class was dedicated to an old student that now does architectural photography and has become one of the most successful in the world. We looked at a bunch of his photos and analyzed why he is so much better than other photographers in the same area of expertise. This class session really encouraged us to think of what we do best as photographers and to try to work on our strengths. I think hearing about this architectural photographer’s success really encouraged us to want to have enormous success in the industry and become masters of our own style.

Where do you see yourself going after graduation? What are your plans and did you have those plans when you first came to Cal Poly?

I’m thinking that moving out of SLO is my first move. I love it here, but the commercial photography market is very tiny here, and I want to go bigger. I want to try and make it on the international level. My plans are constantly changing, as well as my majors. I do not know what I will actually do when the time comes.

A photographer who inspires you.

Annie Leibovitz is a photographer that inspires me. She is bigger than life, and if I became 10% as good a photographer as her, I would consider myself a success.

A website and/or blog you visit often?

Strobist.com is an essential website for any up and coming photography student. I constantly tell everyone about it, but they don’t seem to ever visit the site. Learning about your craft is more than half the battle at becoming great.

If not a photographer, what would you have been?

I am really interested in space. I think that I would have entered Aerospace engineering if photography hadn’t captured me first.
I would love to have you talk about what particular things you love to photograph.

PEOPLE! Who doesn’t like seeing a different side of people? My main interest in photography is using artificial lighting to create dramatic photographs. I love putting people in beautiful places and making them pop out for all to see.

Something you’re saving up for?
A Canon 85mm f/1.4L lens. This lens costs almost as much as my camera body, but it is quite beautiful, and the portraits that come from this lens are astounding.

Something that is overrated.
Thinking that gear will make you create better photographs.

What is your greatest fear?
Losing my sight. I am a visual person, and losing my sight would just about end my life as I know it.

What talent would you most like to have?
To be an absolute master of Photoshop.

Name one musician you would like to take a portrait of?
John Mayer. His music is beautiful. I am jealous of his raw guitar talent. I think he a comical person as well. It would be a fun photo shoot with Mr. Mayer.

If you could have lunch with anyone who is famous who would it be?
Barack Obama. I want to know who he really is. Is he really going to change as much as I hope he will?

Where you’ll find me on a Friday night at 9 p.m.?
Either with my roommates, just being ridiculous, or with my lady watching a movie.

Your favorite film (movie) of all time.
Pulp Fiction.

First thing you would do if you won the lottery?
Smile.

Which five words would your friends use to describe you?

What would you like to be doing in 5 years from now?
Shooting photos everyday and having a post-production team take care of the rest.

In regards to your journey as a photographer up to this point, is there anything you’d like to say that I haven’t asked you about already? A little rant? A story? Anything?
Photography is important. Only time will tell which photos are the most important. One can only hope for immortality from a photo. If you know one thing; know your craft, and know it better than anybody else.
I couldn't picture myself doing anything else.
Janell

Why did you choose photography?

Ever since I was a kid I was very enthusiastic about art, drawing, painting, etc. I loved to build, create and take time to make the finishing touches on whatever I was creating. As I got older, I continued to stay in the realm of the arts; drawing, painting, tole painting, sculpting little figures and normally giving them to my parents and friends as gifts. My attention was diverted to playing instruments in the teenage years of my life, but as soon as I started taking art classes at the local community college while I was still in high school, I found my love for photography. Photography came into my life at a time where I was getting bored with just drawing something I saw. I still enjoy drawing but it wasn’t as fast a solution as photography was for me. On my 16th birthday, my mom purchased a Canon Rebel SLR film camera for me to explore my new interests in the world of art behind a camera. That was the best birthday to this day. Not only did I get my braces off after 3 long years but I also obtained my driver’s license and I found out what I truly wanted to do with my life from then on out.

What got you into photography? What was that journey like for you?

Photography was introduced into my life at a perfect age. I was in love with the arts and I had a passion for it that stayed throughout my childhood. The journey to photography was an unintentional one because I simply had a liking for art. I never thought that photography would be the career I wanted for the rest of my life. As soon as I started pursuing photography I saw that I was succeeding in it and wanted to learn more and more. The journey was bumpy in patches, due to getting comments from a photo professor who wasn’t creative enough to succeed in photography. I was thoroughly discouraged, but after a couple of weeks of feeling sorry for myself I decided that I wanted to prove him wrong. From then on out I was at the top of my class. I persisted on getting feedback not only from my professor on my photographs but from my peers as well. I was constantly in the darkroom with my 35mm and 4x5 film developing, printing, viewing and improving what I had created. I enjoyed the darkroom. I was in my own little world with the orange colored safe lights, wet chemicals and my soon-to-be finished pieces of art. Digital photography came at good time in my jr. college experience. I was finally getting what I felt was a great understanding of the in’s-n-out’s of photography and then the new-age of digital photography showed its face. My confidence level went down as soon as I sat in front of a computer because I loved being in the darkroom. I enjoyed getting my hands wet and smelling the chemicals when I was living my daily life. Now that had all changed. I still developed my film but it wasn’t the same. I started scanning in my film and working on Apple computers for the first time, which opened up a new world. The world of digital photography was taking over and I was greatly intimidated. I was again discouraged, but the difference this time was that I was more confident that I could pull it off. I plugged away, learning my way around a MAC computer, picking up a lot of new methods on how to work with digital photos with the help of professors, peers, and simply by trial and error. I was determined to succeed and like it since everything was heading down that road.

Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again?

Yes, I would. And again and again and again I would choose photography. I couldn’t picture (no pun intended) myself doing anything else. I love photography and can say that I would take the same path that I was on; to receive my BFA degree from Cal Poly in 2009 and now search for work in this horribly jobless time in our economy.

How long have you been a photographer?

Professionally? Not very long at all. I started shooting when I was 16 for my Mom who was in charge of fundraisers for “The Veterans Memorial Committee”. I was at every function all the way up until both memorials in the Yuba City and Marysville area were completed.

How did you come to choose Cal Poly as the school you wanted to attend? What motivated you to choose it?

When I was attending Yuba Community College, the photography department went on a field trip to San Francisco and we visited a studio while we were there for the weekend. SandBox Studio was created by three photographers and one was from Cal Poly. We were all getting the grand tour of the studio and I instantly fell in love with SandBox. Julie Russi, who was the Studio Manager at the time, informed us that they bring in an intern every summer. I got a hold of Julie right when I got home to see about the internship. Julie and I connected and hit it off well, but the position was given to a Cal Poly student already. I was disappointed but Julie told me that she liked me very much and wanted to help me out, so she said that I could come in for a week to get the feel of the place. I loved every minute of my time working on the sets and helping out the photographers who were all so professional. I met a good amount of people that graduated from Cal Poly and I decided then that I would look into the school. I heard about several other possible choices while I was working at SandBox that week, but the opinions they gave me of those schools were more negative then positive. My mind was set, Cal Poly here I come.

Were you excited about Cal Poly? Excited to move away from home?

I was very excited to finally attend Cal Poly. I was so happy to pursue my love of photography at the school that I chose. It was definitely a rewarding feeling to be accepted to one of the hardest schools to get into. Learning more and trying to be better at photography made transferring to another school so easy. I looked forward to moving to a new place and experiencing a new way to live without the parents and siblings. Going to Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, where it is absolutely beautiful year round, was a blessing.
What was school and life like for you once you arrived here?

My living situation for my first year at Poly was definitely an experience. I moved into a six bedroom house that used to be a frat house. I was the only girl with five guys. What was so great about this situation was that one of my roommates was also an Art and Design student. Living with an A&D student helped me get the hang of the department system and he also introduced me to a bunch of his friends. Instant good times.

Were there any unexpected challenges?

The difficulties that I had when first starting Poly was that I had to also work. There wasn’t a choice in that matter so I had to figure out how to organize work, classes, and taking care of my dog right from the start. That in itself was a challenge but it wasn’t an unexpected challenge. I had responsibilities to take care of and I managed every one because I had to; no questions asked. I wanted to continue my college education after my Associates Degree so I had to accept what came along with that decision and I would do it the same exact way.

What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?

When professors tell the students to research and look at photographs from the type of photography you want to do, I actually was listening to them. I looked at other photographers’ work and wanted to either imitate the photograph I saw or try something similar to that idea. It’s not always easy for me to be creative. I brainstorm and think about my options and try to decide what would be the best way to present my photography. Once an idea comes to my head, I get excited and work on it for a long time, preparing, organizing and setting up what I had intended to photograph.

What do you feel is the most challenging thing about being a photographer?

Every career choice has its drawbacks, challenges and letdowns but as long as you know you’re going to persevere to get to that point in your career that you’ve set out to achieve, then you’re set. I would have to say that with anything, taking the first step is the hardest; whether it be one assignment that was just given, a photography job that you don’t know how to price for your client or making that first phone call to get a job as a photographer. My challenge to this day is taking that first step no matter what it is. I have a tendency to think about every outcome, whether good or bad, and I try to figure out the best way to go about my situation at the time. Sometimes contemplating your first move is a good thing, but when the mind is moving and you aren’t, that’s when it becomes a problem. With this challenge that I’ve experienced time and time again, I do have to say that it gets a little easier because I’ve learned how to encourage myself to move and take that first step. I am NOT saying that I have conquered this challenge but I have learned how to minimize the amount of time I contemplate on something. It’s a start.

Having been at Cal Poly for a few years, what have you learned about yourself during that time in regards to growing as a person on your own and as a photographer?

From start to finish I believe I have grown to relax a little more. I take all of my projects seriously and I put all my effort into everything I do, so when I do get a few moments of free time, I would never relax and have fun. I always found something that I could be
doing or I'd try to start a project that was coming up. Once my final year came around I decided that I needed more "me time", which I finally gave myself.

What has your experience in the Art Department/Photo Department been like?

Like anything, there are ups and downs. The Art Department definitely was a roller coaster ride. When you think you like it, you dislike it, when you think you hate it, you love it. When I started hearing negative connotations about the Art Department, I had to make a decision on whether I was going to be miserable for my three years attending Poly or make the best of the situations that were thrown at me because I am paying to go here. I have to say that once I made the choice to work hard at what I'd been given, I was okay.

Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?

Ha! No! I am finished with my education at Cal Poly, but in this day-n-age it would be a miracle to start a business right after school. Some people might be able to start a business right after they graduate and I commend them. If the economy was better I would feel more confident at getting work, but since there aren't a lot of people who currently need photography it would be harder to start a new business in it.

Has your experience at Cal Poly encouraged or discouraged your desire to be a photographer?

I have been encouraged for the reason being that I have met photo alumni and the majority of them have been successful in what they do. The Cal Poly motto, "Learn by Doing", has stayed strong in my psyche throughout my three years there. I learned from each course class that I took, along with interning each summer between school years. I believe Cal Poly has encouraged me in moving forward and working harder in becoming the photographer I desire to be.

Where do you see yourself going after graduation? What are your plans and did you have those plans when you first came to Cal Poly?

Being that I am writing this as a Cal Poly graduate, I can say that I still can see where I want to go. Unfortunately, due to the times that we are in, I am definitely a struggling artist. I do have plans but nothing will happen until there is more work that allows businesses to hire photographers. I interned with a studio in San Francisco before I started Cal Poly, and that experience helped me decide that I wanted to work in a studio. I love Northern California, so making a decision that I would stay in the Bay area and work with product photography was an easy one. The problem laid in front of me now is getting back up to the city that I love when there is no work. My mind was made up before I went to Poly on where I wanted to go, and that decision is still true after graduation.

What is your greatest fear?

My greatest fear is not setting out to fulfill my dreams. My fear is being trapped by fear, which will keep anyone from doing what they love or what is right.

"We are not given a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love and self-discipline." 2 Timothy 1:7

Fear is what holds us all back from succeeding, but as long as we pursue what we are supposed to do or what we are made for fear will have no place in us.

What would you like to be doing in 5 years from now?

I would like to be in San Francisco working as a photographer. That might seem like a lofty goal for five years but the way things are going now with our economy, it would be a miracle. I believe that the next five years will probably be the hardest since I will be starting off from the bottom and working my way up to a photographer. Building up a repertoire and a name for yourself is challenging but it isn't impossible.

In regards to your journey as a photographer up to this point, is there anything you'd like to say that I haven't asked you about already? A little rant? A story? Anything?

Having the dream of becoming a photographer is an exciting thing, but what makes or breaks you is your drive and determination, or lack thereof.
I could go in any direction at this point.
I lived my entire life on Mercer Island, Washington, a small suburb on Lake Washington sandwiched ten minutes between Seattle and Bellevue. I have one younger sister who goes to Cal Poly who I consider one of my best friends, a Maltese-Poodle mix dog named Rugby, and a fantastic, supportive eclectic family. I like to think I’m the odd ball of our family - the only left-handed, blue eyed, blonde haired child and well, I think I’ve always been a handful. I started my journey as an artist the day I first picked up a pen, pencil, marker, or most likely crayon, and never looked back. My entire life I have been surrounded by art and encouraged to pursue my talents. Nothing about wanting to be an artist has ever been unacceptable in my family and because of that, I feel very, very lucky. I can still remember being told that we had to write the entire alphabet down all by ourselves in kindergarten and I sat there crying because I really couldn’t wrap my head around the letters yet. All I wanted to do was draw pictures. Art has been the one thing in my life besides sports that has kept me sane and confident. If I hadn’t had my photography classes in high school, and my swim team practices after school I don’t know what I would have done. The dark room was always my safe place where I would put on my iPod, and get down to business. Speaking of darkrooms, the last thing I want to say is that I believe in the fundamentals of learning from the bottom up. In our rapidly changing digital world, we forget where many of the things we know how to do come from. Dodging and Burning? Yeah, that’s not an option invented for Photoshop, that originated in the darkroom! It’s a shame that film is disappearing and I could debate this topic into the ground, but all I want to say is that beginning my photography career with film has been essential in creating the kind of photographer that I am now and I wouldn’t change that for anything.

**Why did you choose photography?**

I knew I wanted to study art in college, but not until I fell in love with Cal Poly and had the option to study photography did I know I wanted to choose it as something I’d be studying for Four (+) years. Photography has been the constant in my life that has kept me sane and confident with my skills, hopes and aspirations. I chose photography because it makes me happy!

**What got you into photography? What was that journey like for you?**

I began my photography career many years ago as an innocent elementary student when I was 14 years old, but of course my parents cameras long before then! In all of these areas and to continue learning!

**Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again?**

Knowing what I know now, I do think I would have chose photography as my concentration again, but tried to pair it with another skill like Graphic Communication or Graphic Design. Having proficient skills in Photoshop, InDesign and Illustrator along with good writing skills and basic knowledge of a camera will get you so far in the job market. I plan to improve my skills in all of these areas and to continue learning!

**How long have you been a photographer?**

Officially, since the first time I clicked the shutter on my dad’s old Minolta film camera when I was 14 years old, but of course I loved scouring over old family photo albums, and playing with my parents cameras long before then!

**How did you come to choose Cal Poly as the school you wanted to attend? What motivated you to choose it?**

Honestly, I didn’t think I would get in here. I was set on a small liberal arts college somewhere on the West Coast and when someone encouraged me to apply here I was skeptical. I filled out the application and accidentally chose my major as Graphic Communication instead of Art and Design at first. When I realized my mistake I freaked out and made a point to call the Admissions Department and change it. I guess that shows how much I wanted to study art! A few months later, after hours of scouring over my portfolio and sending it in, I received my acceptance. My mom and I flew to San Luis Obispo, and I toured the college, trying to imagine myself on campus. The second I entered the Art Dept, I realized it was my home. I toured the photo labs with Kurt, met with Sky and fell madly in love with the place! I immediately accepted when I got home and that boring liberal arts college I almost went to with half of my high school was in the past!

**Were you excited about Cal Poly? Excited to move away from home?**

Of course I was excited about Cal Poly! I had never been so sure of a decision in my entire life, and aside from Dead Week every quarter when I’m putting in all nighters at the 11th hour to finish my projects, I never regret my decision. The move from home for me was scary as it is for every freshman, but I embraced it as a natural part of growing up and dealt with the changes the best I could. Of course I had some rough patches along the road, but one of the main things that kept me sane through my first few quarters was doing what I loved, photography. Quiet hours in the black and white wet labs (back when I started, we had a photo lab in the Craft Center, and Engineering West so I spent a lot of time in there working on projects), listening to music, and getting into that focused zone helped me forget about my stresses and centered me.

**What was school and life like for you once you arrived here?**

I’ve always loved learning, but never in the structure of school, so coming to college was exciting at first because I had so much more freedom than I had had before. I, of course, struggled in the subjects that were hard for me, like math and science and I enjoyed the new things I was learning in my art and a few of my english classes, but all in all school was hard at first! To be honest, it took me a few years to figure out how to manage my time the best and decide which classes to take,
etc. I highly advise taking advantage of the professors and counselors around you to help you make some of those decisions. Since I’ve formed relationships with some of my professors and learned more about the structure of the department, school and life have been smooth sailing!

Were there any unexpected challenges?

I was always very confident with my photography in high school, and had a lot of encouragement and praise from my peers, family and teachers. A challenge I had to overcome, and that I think many art students have to overcome, was constructive criticism and acknowledging the competition around you. Every art student here is very talented, and at Cal Poly our professors push us to our limits and challenge our thinking and breadth of skills for a reason – to make us even better.

What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?

I have always been inspired by people and nature. I am a huge people watcher and there is nothing I love more than taking spontaneous adventures in the outdoors! I grew up in the northwest sailing, camping, hiking, skiing and exploring, so sitting and appreciating the natural beauties around me is something that is second nature to me. Along with the many trips I’ve taken and experiences I’ve had, I have also been lucky enough to be surrounded by an eclectic mix of art my entire life. My step grandfather was a very generous man who had a passion for art collecting. I will never forget Christmas dinners at his house, wandering the hallways, staring at the wide array of art he had from beautiful biomorphic glass sculptures to mysterious Native American Indian art. Between all of these experiences and exposure to art, I have created my own passion for discovering artists and writers on my own and being inspired by their passion for creating art as well. I sometimes am simply inspired by an idea, or even a word, or phrase, or dappled sunlight reflecting on a white wall. I am constantly being inspired! Maybe that’s why all my notebooks are covered in doodles and idea sketches instead of notes.

Having been at Cal Poly for a few years, what have you learned about yourself during that time in regards to growing as a person on your own and as a photographer?

I’ve learned that in order for me to learn and understand something I have to write it out in bullets, practice on my own, with no one around to help or give suggestions, and learn from my own mistakes. It’s easy to get paired up in groups and half-ass a project, or rely on someone else to do the dirty work, but you’re truly not going to learn one thing until you do it on your own and make mistakes! I know it’s daunting to be in the photo lab for the first time, looking at all that equipment, praying you don’t break something – trust me, I was there. But the only way to get past that is to just dive in! There are people all around to help us learn and grow from our mistakes. It’s just important to take advantage of these opportunities while we have them.

What has your experience in the Art Department/Photo Department been like?

It has been a roller coaster! We are given the opportunity to learn so many different skills it sometimes makes my head spin, and to think that I’m not even done yet blows my mind. I love

Do you have a memorable school or personal assignment? Why was it memorable?

There are no real assignments in school that stick out in my mind, but as I child I spent every single day after school eating a snack and relaxing in front of the TV, as I’m sure many other kids did. Instead of sitting and watching the television, my mom said I was always glued to a piece of paper with pens, pencils and crayons strewn everywhere, drawing away. One time, I remember doing a watercolor painting of a face; even as small girl I was enchanted by faces. I gave the painting to my step-grandfather, thinking nothing of it. The next time I visited his home, among all the great paintings and works of art, was a small watercolor painting of a face, in a green frame, sitting atop a large mantle below a humongous painting. My painting stayed there until he died – that will always be my most important and memorable piece of art.
the size of the department and how accessible all of the faculty are and as you get into the higher division classes for your concentration you become so close to your classmates. I enjoy coming to class because I have friends in every class that I don't normally see outside of school. It's refreshing to be around people who have common goals as me and who know how rough it can be sometimes! I don't know what I would do if I didn't have the art department. It's pretty much gotten me through college.

Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?

I feel prepared to search for someone to assist with and learn more about the business of photography world outside of a classroom! I think that making connections with professionals is really important because they can teach you so much more - we all have to work our way up the ladder.

Has your experience at Cal Poly encouraged or discouraged your desire to be a photographer?

Both. It has definitely cemented my love for photography, increased my curiosity for different styles of photography and increased my skill level. It has also opened so many other interests for me! I never expected to develop an interest in art history or learn that I've got a secret passion for typography — I feel that from my experiences I could go in any direction at this point.

Where do you see yourself going after graduation? What are your plans and did you have those plans when you first came to Cal Poly?

I will be graduating a little shy of five years from Poly, and as of now, I'm working one day at a time. Although I'm from Seattle, I'd ideally like to stay in California in either the San Francisco or LA area to pursue anything within the visual field. My passions run from PR to Fine Art. As long as I'm making a difference and doing something I believe in, that's all that matters to me! Honestly, I've always thought this way about my future, since 5th grade. I've said that I want to be a graphic designer before I even knew what that meant and my focus within the art world has not shifted. I will always be an artist in some sense or another.

Is there anything you'd like to say that I haven't asked you about already? A little rant? A story?

I just hope that anyone who is reading this understands that there are so many options out there and college is the just the beginning. Don't let your ideas, dreams and inspirations be confined to a bubble. Think outside of yourself and your world. Listen to yourself and go with the flow! There are so many options, so many people to meet, so many experiences to be had. Make connections and ask for help. Learn from those around you and beyond and never ever stop doing what you want to be doing, no matter what.

And the last question, if you had one wish...

This is going to sound boring, but it's honestly my dream. If I had one wish... it would be to live the rest of my life happily and comfortably with my family, children, cat, dog. Whatever it happens to be, making art (all kinds, not just photographs!) in my home studio and making enough money off of it to live. That's really all I want!
I was really ready for a change in my life.
Why did you choose photography?
I chose photography because it is what I love to do and what I am inspired by. Photography is something I always pay attention to and care about.

What got you into photography? What was that journey like for you?
My yearbook teacher got me into photography. She really pushed my whole class to take better pictures and introduced us to SLR cameras. We also had a project to create a photo essay and that really pushed me to do more and experiment with the camera.

Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again?
I think I would choose it again, however I think I would have gone about my studies in a different way. I wish I would have been more focused as a freshman, and I am not sure if Cal Poly's photography program was necessarily the best for me.

How long have you been a photographer?
Since about sophomore year of high school when I started experimenting with an SLR camera in my yearbook class. I have always been into art however.

How did you come to choose Cal Poly as the school you wanted to attend? What motivated you to choose it?
I mostly chose Cal Poly because they offered the major I wanted, which was photography, and my parents didn't think I should go to a specifically "art" school. I applied to five schools and was accepted to Cal Poly and UCSB. I chose Cal Poly and I definitely think it was the right choice of school for me.

Were you excited about Cal Poly? Excited to move away from home?
I was really excited about coming to Cal Poly. When I was younger we moved around a lot and so I think I've gotten used to going new places. I was really ready for a change in my life and to come to a new area. Living on my own was also a great new experience. I really enjoyed the independence that moving four hours away from my hometown gave me. Home wasn't too far away, but it was just enough to give me freedom.

What was school and life like for you once you arrived here?
I lived off campus but in a dorm-like situation. I really liked living with a bunch of different people. There was always someone around to hang out with, talk to, or trick into modeling in a photo shoot for you.

Were there any unexpected challenges?
I actually adapted very easily to SLO and dorm life.

What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?
I get a lot of ideas and inspiration from magazines and other photographers' websites. Sometimes you see something and you just want to try it. I am also inspired by a lot of things that are vintage. "Mad Men" has an awesome style that is very inspiring, and I love the 60s look that is prevalent in the show.

Do you have a memorable school or personal assignment? Why was it memorable?
I did a book project of cyanotypes for one class. I actually really enjoyed working on it and in the end I was proud of what I accomplished.

What do you feel is the most challenging thing about being a photographer?
Working with people and depending on them can be hard. I've had difficulty finding models and working around their schedules.

Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?
Sort of. I guess it would be more appropriate to answer this question a little bit closer to graduation time. I definitely feel like I need to assist other photographers before I try to start my own business. I don't feel prepared to do that on my own.

Has your experience at Cal Poly encouraged or discouraged your desire to be a photographer?
At times I get discouraged but I think in general, it has been inspiring. I've definitely had unsure moments but I guess I am still on that path.

Something you're saving up for?
I am definitely always "saving up" for new lenses. I really want more of the faster lenses. I really want to try out the video on some of the new Canon cameras also, but I just got a new camera so lenses are a priority.

Something that is overrated.
Not really overrated, but really annoying... reality TV

What is your greatest fear?
I have this unsubstantiated fear of getting in a really bad and unexpected car accident. I really do not know why.
Name one musician you would like to take a portrait of?
The band "Harry and the Potters", mainly because they played at my library, they dress like Harry Potter, and are kind of awesome.

If you could have lunch with anyone who is famous who would it be?
Zooey Deschanel... I don't really know why but I love her.

Your favorite film (movie) of all time.
I don't think I could ever choose an absolute favorite, but I love the movie Romeo + Juliet by Baz Luhrmann. It has so much great visual imagery, and I love how they reworked the story.

First thing you would do if you won the lottery?
Hire someone to help me manage my money. I've heard too many horror stories of lottery winners.

What would you like to be doing in 5 years from now?
Hopefully, working and sustaining myself independently as a photographer.
Attitude is everything
**Why did you choose photography?**

After deciding I didn’t want to be an engineer, to take what I thought would be the safer road to “success” in later life, I took some advice and decided to do what makes me happy. Photography was the creative outlet that did just that.

**What got you into photography? What was that journey like for you?**

Like most of us, I got really into my high school photography class. I also have a very specific interest in the visual art of cinematography. The two interests caused me to think of most other things in terms of composition and basic visual principles — things they teach you that make a good photograph are easy to see if you’re always looking for them. Once I dropped out of engineering and was back in community college, I decided to make photography a larger focus in my day-to-day life. I started bringing a camera with me everywhere, trying to capture so many of the moments that I had seen back in high school. I found this more difficult than I thought it would be, and I think that gave me the final push towards a degree in art. I had thought about just finding work as a photographer and diving right in. In retrospect, I’m glad I didn’t — the rest of college has helped me grow; learning about the business side from the safety of “student-hood” and given me a chance to develop working relationships more readily than would otherwise be possible.

**Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again?**

Actually knowing what I know now I would have focused on video as well as still photography.

**How long have you been a photographer?**

I started thinking of myself as a photographer about a year ago. At a certain point, you gain the confidence and personal drive to just present yourself as what you want to be. At some level I think we all wait for someone to bestow a title upon us. I took it upon myself.

**How did you come to choose Cal Poly as the school you wanted to attend? What motivated you to choose it?**

I had attended Cal Poly right out of high school as an engineering major — I knew that I loved living in SLO and that I liked Poly as a campus. My initial motivations for coming here were the classics, I guess: get away from home, reinvent myself. . . . Coming back here was a goal I had after dropping out, at the very least I told myself I should get back to where I was before, if not someplace new. In a way this was my second “off to college” moment.

**Were you excited about Cal Poly? Excited to move away from home?**

My reaction to being readmitted was just extreme confidence. Since we got in via portfolio review, the fact that I was chosen gave me a boost in confidence that I was finally choosing the right path. So of course I was very excited to start down that new path.

**What was school and life like for you once you arrived here?**

I have been working the entire time I have been in school; something I find is not necessarily always the case with my fellow students. I really enjoy the “college town” lifestyle, but it has taken me almost three years to figure out how to balance that with work and school in a way that keeps me happy and afloat in all three areas. I’ve been imagining that life after graduation will be much better now that I’ve learned these things, considering work will be the focus and there will be no school to schedule the social activities around.

**Were there any unexpected challenges?**

Of course there were but those are the welcome things that you need to learn from.

**What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?**

Since we live in a world now saturated with visual imagery, it’s hard to feel confident in your own ideas — how do you know that they aren’t watered-down versions of something you saw last week? I’ve found that most of my inspiration comes from literary imagery, film style, and my personal experiences, especially seeing how other artists work — not their content, but their relationship to their work.

**Do you have a memorable school or personal assignment? Why was it memorable?**

I’m very excited about my senior project — I’m exploring lots of different things, new things, that I hope will make this a memorable experience for me.

**What do you feel is the most challenging thing about being a photographer?**

One thing I’ve had to overcome is the challenge of working with people — strangers mostly — who end up being your subjects. Directing them and forming a good rapport within a few minutes of meeting is one ingredient in a good portrait, or whatever scene they’re in.

**Having been at Cal Poly for a few years, what have you learned about yourself during that time in regards to growing as a person on your own and as a photographer?**

Attitude is everything, and for me that boils down to having confidence and the will to get things out of my head and into fruition.
Would you choose it again?
Hells yeah.

What has your experience in the Art Department/Photo Department been like?
I have mixed feelings about it. On the one hand we are lucky to have it at all, but I feel like the emphasis lies in so many places besides photography that really the most valuable things are when we learn on our own, above and beyond the classroom experience we get. Like pro practices. . . . not entirely sure that class was worth our time, but our questioning of its validity made us explore the reality of the business world we plan to enter.

Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?
I’m getting there. Trying to make that transition is basically gonna be the focus over the next few months. I hope to have some freelance work in the can before graduation — although I don’t plan on relying solely on my own business right away.

Has your experience at Cal Poly encouraged or discouraged your desire to be a photographer?
Well my overall experience I think has helped me get my bearings, but my experience in this department has not really helped as much as I had hoped. Don’t get me wrong, I’ve learned a lot of technical skills, but I have had to learn all the most valuable lessons on my own — nothing wrong with that, except I’m paying way too much for school if that’s happening all the time.

Where do you see yourself going after graduation? What are your plans and did you have those plans when you first came to Cal Poly?
One of my life goals has been to travel to Europe and places like New Zealand. I’ve wanted that since forever, but realistically I just hope to be able to go with the flow and take on projects that I enjoy at least some of the time. Being happy in my day-to-day life is essential to surviving I think.

A photographer who inspires you.
Hell, I don’t know.

A website and/or blog you visit often?
Strobist.com, and my Grandma’s blog: joanontheroad.com

If not a photographer, what would you have been?
You’d have to ask alternate Jim, but based on my conversations with him I’d have to say being a musician is still something I’m very into.

I would love to have you talk about what particular things you love to photograph.
I like shooting (photographing) people the most I think. I’m also currently working a lot in documenting other artists’ work, like installations and sculpture, using still and video.

Something you’re saving up for?
Retirement. Social security will not exist by then.

Something that is overrated?
Approval, but I still crave it.

What is your greatest fear?
Repeating the mistakes I swore I wouldn’t.
What talent would you most like to have?
Anything that requires balance – something I have a short supply of.

Name one musician you would like to take a portrait of?
Weird Al Yankovic

If you could have lunch with anyone who is famous who would it be?
Bill Murray

Where you’ll find me on a Friday night at 9 p.m.?
Shaking my groove thing.

Your favorite film (movie) of all time.
I’ll let you know when I see it.

First thing you would do if you won the lottery?
Start a business, eliminate my debt and invest.

Which five words would your friends use to describe you?
What a big fucking weirdo.

What would you like to be doing in 5 years from now?
Landing some sweet gigs and loving life.

And the last question, if you had one wish…
Just one? Videographic memory.
These flashes aren't putting out as much as they should be. How nice of you to join us!

I want more.

It is grey. Right?
I'm starting to discover my little niche
Why did you choose photography?
Because it was something that I was already recognized for. One of the few things I had been told to keep pursuing by my peers. And when you’re told to keep doing something and that you are good at it as a kid, it’s really uplifting.

What got you into photography? What was that journey like for you?
My mom was always photographing trips, taking it beyond just touristy photos and all that. She would shoot candid portraits of the family and for other families in our neighborhood, but she never found the time to make a career out of it. I got my first camera the first time I went to Europe, just a cheapo little point and shoot. One of my photos got framed and put up on my mom’s wall of “good photos,” which was like winning a contest to me. At the same time I was skating a lot and running with a crew of skaters from Portland—eventually I had more interest in photographing them then skating. I thought those skate photographers had the best jobs—just to travel with their friends and make them look good.

Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again?
More so now than ever. I think I felt more intimidated of photography as a kid, and now that I’m starting to wrap my mind around the business and lifestyle of it all, I’m starting to discover my little niche.

How long have you been a photographer?
I think I always had the eye; I just didn’t always have the button to push.

How did you come to choose Cal Poly as the school you wanted to attend? What motivated you to choose it?
Well, I wanted out of miserable, cold Oregon, I wanted to surf, and I needed a decent photo program. I only applied to San Diego State and Cal Poly.

Were you excited about Cal Poly? Excited to move away from home?
I was oblivious to what I actually wanted and to what I should have been expecting. Just being in California was amazing to me—10 minutes from the beach, blonde surfer girls on every corner and all I had to do was shoot photos? Sounded pretty good.

What was school and life like for you once you arrived here?
I got hit with California culture shock pretty bad. About a month into my first quarter, I was starting to miss Oregon—the landscapes, the city, even the rain. I thought that maybe I hadn’t been ready to go to college yet, kind of went through a mid-mid-life crisis. I transferred to an art college in Portland after my first quarter at Cal Poly and that seemed like a huge mistake—going from conservative California to overly liberal art school, I couldn’t find my balance. I felt completely lost. After some heavy soul-searching, I decided to try Cal Poly again the following year with a slightly different outlook. Everything seemed to click together on my second attempt: rediscovered my passion for photography, connected with a gang of surf girls who would later become my most used models, and most importantly got a car so I flee to the beach when I need to.

What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?
Youthful, creative people. I want my photos to express a certain young and lively energy so I’m constantly cruising though teen magazines and surf and skate culture blogs and vlogs, trying to keep as up to date with young people media as possible. There are quite a few photographers and creative firm websites that I check weekly for updates and ideas. Sometimes it just comes down to “well that sounds fun!” and I’ll just grab some kids and make a party out of it.

Do you have a memorable school or personal assignment? Why was it memorable?
Nothing yet.

What do you feel is the most challenging thing about being a photographer?
Being recognized and remembered. I’m not even out of school and it already feels like I have to fight my way through the crowd. Inspiration isn’t too hard to find, but getting all the people together to make it happen can be stressful, especially college kids.

Having been at Cal Poly for a few years, what have you learned about yourself during that time in regards to growing as a person on your own and as a photographer?
I think after moving back and forth from Oregon to California, I’ve learned that having the right people around you can make all the difference—the first year I was here I felt lost and had no idea of what I wanted to do at all. Now, within the last 2 years of really diving into the surf culture and cliques, I feel like I’ve really been able to dial in exactly what makes me happy to shoot. I’ve discovered people and things here that have really let me open up and learn a lot about what I want to do and what I think is possible for myself. It’s all been insanely positive and I think it’s really starting to show in my photographs.

Would you choose it again?
Totally.
What has your experience in the Art Department/Photo Department been like?

The department can be tricky at times. It's hard to get exactly what's best for you out of a single class professor. I think success in the photo department really depends on how committed you are to putting your own spin on things. If you just go about getting assignments done, I guess that's ok. But if you can make a statement about yourself or something and still impress your classmates, that says something. Grades in the upper division classes do not matter—what matters is getting people to talk.

Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?

Of course not—I can’t imagine anyone is comfortable with going out there. I imagine the first few years will be terrifying, but I’ve got ideas and somewhat of a game plan, and I know I’ll figure it out.

I have confidence in myself and I’m really just excited to see what I can put together.

Has your experience at Cal Poly encouraged or discouraged your desire to be a photographer?

I wouldn’t say Cal Poly in particular has encouraged me, but I think I’ve become more encouraged since coming to Cal Poly for sure.

Where do you see yourself going after graduation?

What are your plans and did you have those plans when you first came to Cal Poly?

France was nice and has a booming surf industry. San Clemente seems to be the headquarters for California surf photographers, but southern California stresses me out. There’s a good chance I’ll head back up to Portland to try and work at a creative firm up there but these are all just ideas I’ve come up with in the last month, haha.

A photographer who inspires you.

Embry Rucker, Stephen Zeigler, Steve Lippmann, Dewey Nicks

A website and/or blog you visit often?

You’d be surprised at how much cool stuff is on Facebook. Coolhunter.com, Vanityfair.com, random stuff I see.

If not a photographer, what would you have been?

Soccer Player, Architect, or a Paleontologist—Jurassic Park was rad.

I would love to have you talk about what particular things you love to photograph.

Is it weird to say happy people? I just want to show situations of the higher points in life. Those seem to always involve friends, the sun and sometimes-large animals.

Something you’re saving up for?

More photo equipment, as always, and I gotta get back to Europe.

Something that is overrated.

Breast implants, white lifted trucks, shoes.

What is your greatest fear?

Swimming into a gang of jellyfish.
What talent would you most like to have?
Reading minds. Is that a super power?

Name one musician you would like to take a portrait of?
The cast of Stomp; those kids who bang on trash cans and fences.

Where you’ll find me on a Friday night at 9 p.m.?
Working at San Luis Surf Company. Come watch surf videos and make fun of people from Iowa with me.

Your favorite film (movie) of all time
Jurassic Park.

First thing you would do if you won the lottery?
Buy more surfboards and head to southern France.

Which five words would your friends use to describe you?
Smelly, deaf, surfer, hippy, immature.

What would you like to be doing in 5 years from now?
Well, I’d be 27 and be roughly 4 years out of college. It’d be nice to be working for a hip, creative firm or agency or at least assisting for someone in the surf industry... and I’d like to have a dog.

In regards to your journey as a photographer up to this point, is there anything you’d like to say that I haven’t asked you about already? A little rant? A story? Anything?
Shoot into the sun more often, the results can be surprising.

And the last question, if you had one wish...
Warm water waves with just my friends.
Sometimes I just see someone and instantly create an image in my head.
Hi. My name is Michael Rogers and I graduated from Cal Poly in June 2009 with a BFA concentrating in photography. I'm originally from Orange County, CA, where I live with my mom. I have a lovebird. I am passionate about meeting new people, traveling, and understanding why and how things work. I'd say I'm pretty self-motivated and not afraid to experience all that life has to offer and try something new.

**Why did you choose photography?**

The real question is why did I choose to switch into photography. I originally began my college career at Cal Poly as a landscape architecture major and made the switch into the art dept. sometime between my second and third year. In all honestly, I chose to try photography as I was not really happy with landscape architecture. It was time intensive, laborious, and a very detailed major, which did not give me the rush that I normally experience when creating works of art. Although landscape arch is an art form in itself, I realized (quite a bit late into the game, I'm afraid) that it was not my passion. I knew, however, that I have always liked art so I began to research the art dept at Poly. Out of my three options, I quickly ruled out studio art as a concentration as sculpture and painting are my least favorite mediums to work with and decided graphic design wouldn't give me the rush I was looking for in an art degree. So, on a whim and with very little photography experience, I chose to try photography. And low and behold, I kind of liked it.

**What got you into photography? What was that journey like for you?**

I had always liked to take pictures, but had never done so with anything besides a point and shoot. In fact, most of the images in my portfolio that I used to get into the art dept. were done with either the film camera I borrowed from my parents or the 7 megapixel point and shoot I had bought the previous year at Costco. To make the photos appear more "professional," I faked the depth of field and a lot of the lighting in Photoshop. Apparently, it worked as I was accepted into the dept. on my first try. Although this all sounds fun and dandy, the journey was not (and never is) easy. It took a lot of back and forth on my part to actually finally decide to leave the landscape architecture dept. I had spent most of my high school career planning and researching to be a landscape architect and to just up and switch to a completely different field had many of my close friends and family very confused and concerned. My dad, in particular, was not happy that I was leaving what he felt was a very lucrative and successful field to join the "art world," where he feared I would be a starving artist. I had to meet with multiple advisors and talked with both departments about me leaving one and coming to the other. The landscape department was also not very easy about letting me go and the art department was seemingly hesitant to offer much helpful information about switching. I was very intimidated at first and many times doubted my decision to switch. In the end however, I made it happen for myself by pestering the right people and knocking on the right doors to get my questions answered and forms signed.

**Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again?**

This is quite a loaded question. Would I choose photography again? Over landscape architecture? Well yes... I definitely enjoyed my remaining years in the art department. Would I choose to come to Cal Poly for photography to begin with however? Probably not. In all honestly, I don't feel that the art dept. here is the best it could be. It felt that it was a constant battle with certain people to be able to use the studios and the program was not exactly as focused on the type of photography that I like to do. As well, many times I felt that I was teaching myself or learning to do things from other students and not learning from the professors. While I am and like to be self-motivated, there are some things I just do not know and would have liked to have a few more professors in the dept. who were more knowledgeable about digital photography. Many times it felt that I spent more time battling the dept. rather than them applauding the students creativity. There are a few professors, however, in this dept. that Poly should be VERY grateful that they have ("cough" Bob Howell "cough") as these professors make the program as good as it can be. Not to sound horribly negative- I did learn a great deal about photography in the short time I was in the department. However, I feel that perhaps San Luis Obispo is not the type of town where creative art thrives and I would have personally known what I know now, chosen to attend an art school in a more metropolitan area.

**How long have you been a photographer?**

I started in the art dept. my third year so that is when my official career in photography started. However, I guess you could say I have always been a photographer as I have always had a camera with me. I am "that guy," the one with the camera.

**How did you come to choose Cal Poly as the school you wanted to attend? What motivated you to choose it?**

You have to remember that I chose Cal Poly for its architecture program so this answer may not really be pertinent for potential applicants to the Art Dept. I researched architecture programs at multiple schools, and narrowed down my choices (based on location, atmosphere, and price tag) to Cal Poly Pomona, SLO, and Berkley. I applied and got into all three but Cal Poly SLO was always my first choice, especially after visiting the area. I fell in love at first sight. Great school, accreditation, cowboys and a small town to top it off? Count me in!

**Were you excited about Cal Poly? Excited to move away from home?**

I was super excited to attend Cal Poly and scared shiteless at the same time. Being an only child, my parents were extremely protective and I could tell empty nest syndrome was setting in with my mom early and I wanted to get out of the house ASAP. High school was a lot of fun but I was ready to move on. I also felt that Cal Poly, being 5 hours away from home, would be a great way for me to start over and cultivate a completely new
personality separate from the one I had in high school. I was not true to myself in high school and college held many hopes and dreams for me that I felt I could not achieve when home under the protective and watchful eye of my parents.

What was school and life like for you once you arrived here?

School was pretty fun actually and freshmen year is still my favorite year of college. I was so incredibly awkward and socially retarded it isn’t even funny. I learned to make friends quickly, however, and adapted my high school personality to a more college aged one. I made a lot of great friends and had a lot of good memories. In fact, I can’t even remember much of the studying part, but the memories and funny stories, ah!, those are there forever.

Were there any unexpected challenges?

Unexpected challenges? Well, college itself. I left high school number 12 in my class with a 4.4 GPA and I didn’t expect college to actually be a challenge. In fact, getting my first F in philosophy was the biggest shock of my life! I almost cried! (ok, so I DID cry- don’t judge me). Classes were actually hard and I had to study- totally a foreign concept to me. I quickly realized that high school was quite a joke and my biggest fear was becoming a “peaker”- someone who does super well in high school, peaks, and fizzes out in college. While I was never able to push my GPA back up to that straight A average like high school, I did graduate with a relatively high GPA and noticed a significant grade improvement once I found a part of school to be passionate about.

What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?

I find inspiration everywhere! From magazines, ads I see, colors, outfits on people, it really depends. Mostly though I get my inspiration from people themselves. Sometimes someone will walk by or smile in a way or catch my eye and I just know I have to photograph that person. And I find a way to make it happen. In fact, many of the people in my photos are random people I solicited at the bars, who came into my work, who simply walked by and caught my eye and took my breath away. I cannot describe what that feeling is, but when I meet a person that is worthy of being a Michael Rogers model, I just know it. As well, the people, many times inspire the shoot they take part in. Sometimes I just see someone and instantly create an image in my head.

It’s like when you hear a song and start to imagine what the music video might look like- I see a person and imagine how I would photograph them based on their coloring, demeanor, style, etc. It really depends. And sometimes I refer to my idea book- a book I keep of scribbles and stories that I use for inspiration, whether they be pictures I have printed offline to use as reference or ads cut from magazines that really spoke to me.

Do you have a memorable school or personal assignment? Why was it memorable?

I think my most memorable school assignment was shooting at the Estrella Warbird Museum in Paso. In all honesty, nothing went right that day and yet it still all came together and it felt the most “real” of all the shoots I have ever been on. The models were fussy, people were late, equipment didn’t work, there were time limits and constraints, and it all took place at an awesome location that I didn’t even know existed in SLO County. I got some great shots from the day and learned so much about photography in just that one assignment.

What do you feel is the most challenging thing about being a photographer?

Finding a job! OMG! I thought I would graduate and have Prada art directors banging on my door to hire me. HA. Biggest misconception EVER. I’ve learned to deal with rejection in the past few months as I have been rejected from job after job. It seems to be a very hard career path to break into but I’m told once you do its very rewarding. As well, it’s also a very expensive career. But I’m pretty sure I will be able to make it work. Its what I want so I’m going to make it happen. It just may
Having been at Cal Poly for a few years, what have you learned about yourself during that time in regards to growing as a person on your own and as a photographer?

I have learned that you cannot compromise yourself or what you believe or want to do. I have also come to realize that everyone is really out for themselves and that you have to make something happen for yourself because NO ONE is going to do it for you. And stick to your dreams. Even if everyone tells you that what you want to do is wrong or not good for you, if you have a passion for something, you can make it work. So many discouraged me from switching into photo and yet I had the most fun I have had in a major my last two years at Poly as an art major. I actually began to like coming to class again and it became something exciting to do versus a challenge I had to deal with. Switching majors helped make learning fun for me again once I found and unlocked a hidden passion.

What has your experience in the Art Department/Photo Department been like?

My experience was mostly positive though there was some negative sprinkled in. Like I said, I constantly felt that in my last year I was fighting more with certain individuals to be able to use the resources I was paying for in tuition. I felt discouraged many times rather than encouraged and often didn’t know where to turn when I had questions or problems. It did help me become more independent, yet some things you cannot just guess the answers to and having a few more references at my disposal might have been useful.

Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?

Definitely not. But I don’t blame the art dept as much for that one. As organized as I am, I am not good with money or dealing with charging a client. If I could, I would (and usually do) give my services away for free as I am what you might call a bit of a “people pleaser.” I like to make people happy, and if that means a great portrait or whatever, I have problems charging even if it consumes a lot of my time. As well, I feel that the general public does not understand the amount of work that goes into a single image, from gathering props and models to post production. A lot of my friends assume my images come out of my camera looking like a magazine cover and therefore cannot swallow the price tag of what I would and really SHOULD charge for my work.

In regards to your journey as a photographer up to this point, is there anything you’d like to say that I haven’t asked you about already? A little rant? A story?

Rants? I always have those. If you haven’t noticed, I like to complain. But hey, it keeps things fresh for me. A story? Well all my photo shoots come with some pretty funny stories attached— from splattering models with paint, covering them in fruit, or asking my friends to get naked for one of my weird photo ideas, photography was always a party and never a dull moment. This major definitely keeps things new and exciting. There is no limit to your creative side (well except maybe studio space) and if you can imagine it, you can do it on film! That’s the exciting part. Can’t really say that about many other majors. I remember one night, my friend was talking to me through texts and asked what I was up to. I told him I was photographing two gorgeous girls covered in chocolate, naked. He responded that he was doing calculus. I laughed at him. He responded with an expletive. Oh yes, I really did enjoy photography.

And the last question, if you had one wish…

Oh Matt, I DESPISE this question. I feel like I’m on Miss America. World peace? Cure AIDS? End hunger? If I had one wish, I would wish that everyone in the world ALSO got one wish, because I’m sure we could all come up with some pretty funny and creative wishes. And those wishes might be really fun to photograph…and I’d make sure to be there with camera in hand!
I really enjoy being part of a community.
I really enjoy being part of a community. It was a place where I could be myself and express myself. I developed a sense of belonging and found a niche in that world. I was also able to connect with others who shared my interests and passions.

Nicole: I think photography was the art form that best expressed me as an artist. It allowed me to capture my experiences and express my emotions. Photography became a way to connect with others who share the same passion.

Why did you choose photography? What was that journey like for you?

I chose photography because it was the art form that best expressed me as an artist. I took my first photography classes as a junior in high school and just decided that's what I wanted to do for a living.

What got you into photography? What was that journey like for you?

Essentially what got me into photography was photographing hardcore shows... yes I used to go to local hardcore shows up in the Bay (EBHC= East Bay Hardcore). Capturing light and movement and passion at these concerts really made me happy. Obviously my journey has changed a bit since then. I came to Cal Poly, loved all my classes, had an internship with Mitch Tobias (Bay Area photographer) during the summer in between 2nd and 3rd year (which was awesome), and then I decided I wanted to pursue art more so than a commercial business.

Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again?

I think I still would have chosen it. I always knew I was meant to be doing something with art, and photography really helped me to discover the art world and help me to figure out what my niche in that world would be.

How long have you been a photographer?

About 5 years, if you consider high school. I was already giving bands the shots I took of them at these shows.

How did you come to choose Cal Poly as the school you wanted to attend? What motivated you to choose it?

I knew that I wanted to go to a state school instead of a UC for a few reasons: 1) money, a CSU is a lot cheaper than a UC, 2) I couldn't deal with the size of classes at a UC, nor could I handle how small some private schools are... I would know everyone and it wouldn't be very interesting for me, 3) my grades/sAT scores from high school weren't amazing, but they were pretty good. So from those things, I chose 5 state schools; Northridge, Long Beach, Sacramento, San Jose, and Cal Poly... Cal Poly was my top school after visiting all those campuses. Our department seemed to have it the most together out of all the departments I visited. Not to mention when I visited Cal Poly for the first time and wandered into the photo lab. Kurt Brown was about to leave for the day (it was about 4 or 5 on a Friday), but he stayed to give my parents and I a personal tour of the lab and that was the selling point for me.

Were you excited about Cal Poly? Excited to move away from home?

I was very excited to be leaving to go to Cal Poly and move away from home, though not because of my parents or my friends... it was just time for change. It was time to go grow up.

What was school and life like for you once you arrived here?

Once I moved to Cal Poly, I felt that something was off. It took me about 3 days to realize what exactly was wrong, and then it hit me! Cal Poly had NO diversity and there were almost only white people here. I felt really uncomfortable about this because it seemed like going away to college would bring more diversity, but it was just the opposite of where I grew up. I mean at my high school, the majority was probably still Caucasian, but there were A LOT of Asian kids, Indian kids, Hispanic kids (not just Mexican) and African American kids. Being among that diversity felt very normal to me, and a lot of my friends in high school were pretty diverse... but almost NO ONE in my dorm was diverse. Not to mention all the kids in my dorm just wanted to party, and I just wanted to make some good friends (like they say you will in college).

Were there any unexpected challenges?

Well they say that college is a lot harder than high school, and I didn’t really take it that seriously until week 5 of my first quarter of freshman year. So then I worked my butt off for the rest of the quarter and still pulled off a terrible GPA. Since then I’ve been trying to raise my GPA quarter by quarter, that has been quite a challenge for me because in high school I worked for my grades, but nothing like I’ve had to at Cal Poly.

What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?

Many things inspire me. I love going to museums and galleries for inspiration, but I think just going somewhere new can really inspire imagery as well. Cities such as SF and LA really inspire me in general just because of how the flow of everyday life goes there. I love to capture little aspects of that. I also think that people in general are really inspiring. Sometimes I’ll just see someone and want to either photograph them as a person, or I’ll see something they’re doing and want to do a shoot based upon that.

Do you have a memorable school or personal assignment? Why was it memorable?

Well one of my favorite memories involving a school assignment was the “Look Alike” project for Portraiture (or whatever it was exactly called). I chose to use my friend Jack as the character “Jack” from the movie “Darjeeling Limited”. He happens to look exactly (or about as damn close as anyone...
What do you feel is the most challenging thing about being a photographer?

The most challenging thing about being a photographer is that everyone else thinks that they are also a photographer, and they are NOT.

Having been at Cal Poly for a few years, what have you learned about yourself during that time in regards to growing as a person on your own and as a photographer?

In the past few years I have learned that I really enjoy being part of a community. I never realized it before, even though I was on the same summer league swim team for 11 years, and yes that was a community in retrospect. But I really love to interact with people who happen to have a common interest and see how they interact with others around them. I learned that I do not want to be a commercial photographer, but I do want to continue to do my own photography for the rest of my life.

What has your experience in the Art Department/Photo Department been like?

My experience in this department as a whole has been pretty great. My experience in the photo department has been pretty great too, but sometimes I'm disappointed that we don't have more professors on staff.

Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?

If I wanted to, I could feel prepared as a photographer ready to start my own business when I graduate... but I don't think that's my plan anymore exactly.

Has your experience at Cal Poly encouraged or discouraged your desire to be a photographer?

It has encouraged me to become an Art Historian. It hasn't necessarily discouraged me to be a photographer though; the real world did that.

Where do you see yourself going after graduation? What are your plans and did you have those plans when you first came to Cal Poly?

After graduation I will need to work (doing whatev) for a little while to make some money for grad school. I would like to study art history and possibly get a doctorate in the future. I would like to teach art history/art theory, and I would also like to work in a museum at some point in my life. Even in museum administration.
A photographer who inspires you.
Richard Avedon (In the American West series particularly- he captures people’s souls I swear)

A website and/or blog you visit often?
Actually I visit the APA website a lot and look up photographers in different areas with different specialties.

If not a photographer, what would you have been?
A whale trainer. Probably would have gotten my undergrad in behavior/psychology and a masters in animal behavior.

I would love to have you talk about what particular things you love to photograph.
I like to photograph people, yes, mostly candid shots of people going about their day and bits of cities. In the studio, I really like to get people to do silly things for portraits, or I like to do fashion type shoots.

Something you’re saving up for?
A wide-angle lens. (And saving for my time in Paris)

Something that is overrated.
Hipsters.

What is your greatest fear?
Probably drowning.

What talent would you most like to have?
Magical power= breath underwater. Non-magical talent= To be more organized.

Name one musician you would like to take a portrait of?
Yelle

If you could have lunch with anyone who is famous who would it be?
Wes Anderson.

Where you’ll find me on a Friday night at 9 p.m.?
At a friends house making dinner, drinking wine, and possibly playing scrabble.

Your favorite film (movie) of all time.
I used to say “The Great Muppet Caper” but these days I’m stuck between “Rushmore” “Royal Tennanbaums” and “The Life Aquatic”.

First thing you would do if you won the lottery?
Get a massage.

Which five words would your friends use to describe you?
Friendly, Talkative, Silly, MusicSnob (see it’s one word!), Fun (I hope)

What would you like to be doing in 5 years from now?
Working in a museum, either as a curator or someone within the museum’s administration.

And the last question, if you had one wish…
For women (and other people without rights) to have rights in all countries.
I want to give back through teaching.
My name is Sara Tollefson. I am the youngest of four, and have three older brothers. I was born in Maplewood, Minnesota, and was adopted into my family at the age of one. When I was thirteen, my parents divorced and are now both happily remarried. My closest friends are those that I grew up with on my court here in California, Quane Court, from the age of seven. I have always been quirky and am stereotyped as “Sweet Sara” in my family. I can be found doing something crafty, meeting new friends or going on some sort of adventure (seeing something new). I can be competitive, but most people don’t see that because I love seeing others do well too. I enjoy thinking of my life as a movie and will daydream about what scenes would look like from a viewers’ perspective. I am someone who loves people. I am hard working. I am a photographer.

Why did you choose photography?
I tend to follow my heart - and I knew that I wanted to be doing something with my life that I found rewarding. When I go out and take pictures for myself, I feel that I can truly make the world what I want it to be - I also can escape, or release stress, from the worries of my own world. Photography is my communication, my creativity, my perspective, my point of view, my medium of choice, and a large aspect of myself. One of my favorite “photo-moment” feelings is when the world keeps moving as I quietly sit back and observe.

What got you into photography? What was that journey like for you?
I have always been interested in crafts, photography, theater and visual arts, overall, as a kid. My love and energy for photography really began in high school. It was my junior year when I discovered I wanted to take photography to the next level and learn how to make it a career. I still remember the pleasantly surprised expression of my photo teacher, Mr. Shields, as I told him I wanted to become a professional photographer. He helped advise me through the next year and a half. Now that my goal was in mind, I wanted to do what it took to reach it. My senior year I was in three photography classes and an advanced art class, on top of my regular class schedule, to focus on a college acceptance portfolio. A few months later, it was a wonderful moment to see the acceptance e-mail from Cal Poly. I feel like my hard work and passion is paying off...and I’m anxious to continue this journey.

Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again?
I would choose photography again, but the type of photography I am passionate about has changed over the past years. When I first went into photography, I wanted to be a photojournalist for a church or organization - and now, at this point in my life, I am finding that I really enjoy using studio lighting and creating scenes. My current goal is to deeply master and experience my field of photography so I can be a wonderful photography teacher. I want to give back through teaching. Although, at some point in my life, I am surely to do work for non-profit organizations.

How long have you been a photographer?
I consider myself a photographer since I picked up a camera at the age of 13, but as far as a professional photographer goes...since I was 19 years old because that is when I started doing photo jobs for money.

How did you come to choose Cal Poly as the school you wanted to attend? What motivated you to choose it?
There are a couple main factors that influenced me to choose Cal Poly. First, not too many people know this about me, but I am competitive. I had gotten great grades in high school, so UC’s contacted me asking me to apply. What that did to me is take the fun out of the competition. I knew that Cal Poly would be one of the most difficult schools to get into based on the rigorous selection process - especially for the arts, so I naturally wanted it more. I wanted a school that would allow me to dive into my major quickly, and Cal Poly has it’s curriculum set up so I could do that. I also get bored really easily, so being able to take classes I am passionate about would keep me going. Lastly, this is pretty cheesy, but Cal Poly’s motto, “Learn by doing” was and still is appealing to me. I am a kinesthetic learner, so for me to understand something best, I need to do it. (Also, it helped to have my brother Chris in the Art Department here...he’s one of my best friends.)

Were you excited about Cal Poly? Excited to move away from home?
I was more excited than I was sad to be leaving home. I had some moments of homesickness when I really missed my best friends and family, but overall, I was content. There was always a lot going on to keep my mind preoccupied...and calling and writing home helps too. I feel that my transition into college was very smooth because of my brother, Chris, being here. We really understand each other and enjoying hanging out. Overall, between art classes, hanging out with Chris, meeting more new friends and exploring San Luis Obispo, my bucket was filled.

What was school and life like for you once you arrived here?
Life was fun, exciting, adventurous and challenging. I was introduced to and became really familiar to pulling the “all-nighter” for school. This is when I began to notice how much of a perfectionist I am...I am getting better...but some things just won’t change completely!

Were there any unexpected challenges?
I came to Cal Poly with a pretty open mind - I didn’t think about the fact that I was going away to college until the day before when I had to pack...although there were some unexpected challenges awaiting me. I had my first real “boy-friend” my freshman year and began to learn how relationships work...School related; I learned how to be diligent and patient with my work. If something doesn’t work how you planned, do it again!
What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?

Several things will spark my creativity - It may be an image from an artist I like, a song that has importance to me, objects and shapes that form a unique pattern or world events that I feel passionate about. Right now I am passionate about LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) people being accepted and treated fairly, so that is what I have been drawing from... and I am sure the concept will be arising in my photography work soon. If I am under pressure to develop a concept, I will start by writing down broad categories that are interesting, and then create lists of specific ideas within each topic. Even if I am happy with an idea, I will continue to brainstorm until I feel like I have several great ideas to choose from. If I am having trouble finding the broad categories, then I will go through Google images, listen to music and talk it over with a friend (usually my brother, Chris).

Do you have a memorable school or personal assignment? Why was it memorable?

Hummm... this is a tough question... If I have to choose one... ok, I narrowed it down to two: The first project would be a photo show that I put up my junior year. I wanted to learn how to use studio lighting with people. I thought the best way to learn would be to set up a project with a deadline. I talked to a friend who was in charge of the UU Gallery Space and signed up to use it at the end of that quarter... so I had a quarter to learn studio lighting and create images that I would be proud of to display. It was one of the most challenging and most rewarding experiences for me at Cal Poly. My second memorable assignment would be the book I made in Expressions Class. I put a lot of time into pre-planning and was very meticulous about the craft of the book. I took images, which were glimpses of my life, and compiled my favorite images together. The surprise of the imagery in the book was how I placed the images together. I found unexpected relationships that were open to the viewer’s interpretation. In order to find the matches I printed out small thumbnails of the top 100 images and placed them all over my bedroom floor. I spent days going through which images coordinated well with others and why. Then I made a mock-up book, and finally worked on the final project. This was a time-intensive project, but gave me a wonderful reward in the end.

What do you feel is the most challenging thing about being a photographer?

I feel like one of the most challenging things for me is to be understood as a photographer. I feel that there are many people who take for granted the work I do (and other photographers). People think that photography is easy, and all you do is “click a button”... little do they know! I am always working diligently on whatever I am putting my mind to - and yet people see it as just talent. It is often misunderstood how much it takes to pre-plan, organize, practice, learn (technical and conceptual), shoot, and post-process images. Quality images do not just poof out of the sky.

Having been at Cal Poly for a few years, what have you learned about yourself during that time in regards to growing as a person on your own and as a photographer?

I have learned how to think of myself as a professional. I am really hard on myself, and sometimes struggle with confidence in the work I produce. I feel like I can always make my work better - I am eager to learn and improve all the time. I am at a professional level at this time in my life, and need to remind myself to act that way. It’s ok to tell people “sorry, I am booked” or to charge money for the work I do. Also, I now feel more comfortable taking risks and discovering new techniques with assignments and clients. If I treat myself better, others will too.

Would you choose it again?

I am about 80% sure that I would choose it again. I enjoy expressing myself and I enjoy challenges, which are both in photography. I’m not 100% sure because I have developed other interests over my time here at Cal Poly (which can be applied to my photography work). I have other passions such as: teaching others (especially people with special needs), doing community service, learning about other religions and woman studies. I am very happy with my photography path thus far, but most likely, later in life, my love for other people and diversity will take me down an unexpected path.
What has your experience in the Art Department/Photo Department been like?

The memories that I have regarding the Art and Photo Department have to do with teamwork. When I imagine the physical painted walls of Dexter, or the class rooms I have spent countless hours in, or the seventies-style photo lab I have practically lived in, I think about the people who contributed through the journey. I remember the sleep-deprived moments working on design projects with Sara, Tierney, Cassy, Sean-Paul, Adam, Kelly and Andrew my freshman year. I think of working on 4x5 projects with Trevor and Michael. I imagine Bob telling us life stories in the photo lab... "If you went up to a ticket window without any idea of where you wanted to go..." :) I remember how Kurt keeps our equipment in shape, and keeps us out of "the zone", and how Eric helped me so much on my Expressions book, or Jefferson helping me with printer settings on our unique-minded Epson 4800 printer. My memories of the encouragement from my peers, the guidance of my professors and my self-perseverance form my experience of our Cal Poly Art Department.

Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?

I have learned as much as I can learn about photography through a university setting. I have an educational background that will serve as the base for my career, but I know that I will learn much more when I am immersed in the photography market. I feel like I have the drive to spark my career - and I also understand that it will take time to establish myself. The transition from college to the world is a jump that most likely will not occur overnight (unless great connections happen sooner than later). It takes a few years to find your bearings and have the word spread. The most important thing to keep in mind is that with the right mixture of believing in yourself and an enthusiastic attitude, life will fall into place. I am not going to worry about not ending up financially secure, but rather enjoy the process of becoming successful.

Has your experience at Cal Poly encouraged or discouraged your desire to be a photographer?

Overall, I feel encouraged. I have seen hard work pay off, and I understand that it can also pay off in the real world. With that being said, not every moment at Cal Poly has brought thoughts of security. I think that is because life overall is unpredictable, and it is natural to wonder about one’s future... but I ensure myself due to past cause and effects. I work hard at something I am gifted at, and see positive effects (sometimes not at the moment I predict). I should not waste energy worrying, but rather put the energy into making “it happen”. I am happy to have gone to a competitive school and earned recognition (through class projects, exhibits, compliments by friends and teachers), and positive criticism. I have learned that the photographer’s road is not easy, but it’s something I am still attracted to.

Where do you see yourself going after graduation? What are your plans and did you have those plans when you first came to Cal Poly?

My plan when I first came to Cal Poly was to be a photographer. I had a broad brush stroke at what I wanted... but I needed further thought. Now, I want to be a commercial photographer that works with people, and then become an art teacher. My plans for after the fall of 2010 are not carved in stone. I am currently looking for internships with a company that I can work my way up through.

And the last question, if you had one wish...

I would wish that people who are discriminated against or judged poorly in the world would be accepted - I wish that people would love those that are different than them - I wish that people with a different sexual orientation would be looked at as equal. That’s what I wish.
My friends are a big inspiration.
Why did you choose photography?
I chose photography after I picked up a camera when I was 15 or so. I really loved playing around with my mother’s old SLR and it is just something that I continued to do.

Describe your journey to photography.
My first real jump into the medium was after high school when I began working as an assistant for a local portrait photographer. Within the course of 2 years I went from carrying the camera and helping out to shooting my own events and weddings and even helping to run the business. This job definitely influenced my decision to attend Cal Poly for photography.

Knowing what you know now, would you choose it again?
Maybe, I might try to be an engineer instead.

How long have you been a photographer?
I would say about 8 years.

How did you come to choose Cal Poly as the school you wanted to attend? What motivated you to choose it?
I made a list of public schools in California that I would want to attend based on what part of the state I wanted to live in. Then another list of schools that offered an art program. Cal Poly offered an art program with a photography concentration. It was really just a matter of having one list match up with the other.

Were you excited about Cal Poly? Excited to move away from home?
I was excited to attend a university after 3 years of community college. But I miss living next to a big city (San Francisco).

What was school and life like for you once you arrived here?
I lived in Cerro Vista my first year so it was cool to have the whole college experience. I really immersed myself in the program and just did a bunch of art.

Were there any unexpected challenges?
The red tape of the school was difficult at first. It also took me a while to figure out what I had to do to get a degree.

What gives you ideas and inspires you to create your imagery?
I have been tending to base a lot of my projects on things with historical significance or obscure references. Also my friends are a big inspiration.

Do you have a memorable school or personal assignment? Why was it memorable?
I have lots of memories of taking photographs for assignments by just grabbing my camera with some friends and just start taking pictures. I think that I have made some of my favorite photos by just trying to capture the moment.

What do you feel is the most challenging thing about being a photographer?
Staying consistent is hard for me. I’m all over the place and I tend to neglect my camera sometimes. A good photographer should be taking pictures everyday.

Having been at Cal Poly for a few years, what have you learned about yourself during that time in regards to growing as a person on your own and as a photographer?
There is always a surprise around the corner and sometimes things are completely out of your control. All you can do is be ready and prepared for when opportunity knocks.

What has your experience in the Art Department/Photo Department been like?
I like the art department as a whole. The photo dept is sometimes lacking but I like it. I wish we had some young guns in the photo dept. I also wish there was more of a mixture of disciplines.

Do you feel prepared as a photographer to go out after graduation and start your own business?
Starting a business? No. They don’t teach us anything about that.

Has your experience at Cal Poly encouraged or discouraged your desire to be a photographer?
A little bit of both. It made me realize parts of the photography business that I don’t want to do.
Where do you see yourself going after graduation? What are your plans and did you have those plans when you first came to Cal Poly?

I'm going to move to San Francisco and make art. That's all I got right now.

A photographer who inspires you.

Andrzej Dragan

A website and/or blog you visit often?

Flickr is awesome.

If not a photographer, what would you have been?

A mercenary soldier of fortune type guy

I would love to have you talk about what particular things you love to photograph.

My favorites are people but mostly I just fall in love with the light on things and decide to take a picture.

Something you're saving up for?

A gun. Seriously. To go shooting with my friends.

Something that is overrated.

Dating.

What is your greatest fear?

Having my family hurt or killed by forces of nature/terrorists/bears

Name one musician you would like to take a portrait of?

Andre Nickatina

If you could have lunch with anyone who is famous who would it be?

I would have lunch with Haruki Murakami.

First thing you would do if you won the lottery?

Buy a sick motorcycle.

Which five words would your friends use to describe you?

Funny, dependable, helpful, serious, an enabler.

What would you like to be doing in 5 years from now?

Earning money making art. Living in San Francisco.

In regards to your journey as a photographer up to this point, is there anything you'd like to say that I haven't asked you about already? A little rant? A story? Anything?

I'm a man that is full of surprises.

And the last question, if you had one wish...

Be better at everything.
I don’t have much of a project if my classmates aren’t agreeable, so thank you for allowing me into your homes and for answering my laundry list of questions for this book. Thank you to Bob Howell for giving me the green light to pursue this idea when it was proposed in class last year and thank you to Eric Johnson for allowing me the freedom to make this book the way I had envisioned it. Lastly, thank you to Summer, my wife, for helping and supporting me throughout this entire process. This book wouldn’t be nearly as satisfying if you hadn’t taken the time to critique it. Saying all these “thank-yous” makes me feel like I’m giving an acceptance speech for an award or something.