

First Steps In Film Photography

Photo Blog #1 | Aspen S. H. | 6 Oct '25 | 15 Act '25

A Continuation of Life Blog #1

A good multiple weeks ago, I started my photography class for my first semester of my last year of highschool. After learning a little bit about the history of photography, we dove straight into pinhole photography, and instantly I fell in love with it. During the pinhole photography unit, I wrote a blog, Life Blog #1, titled, *Samuelian Photoportrait, Analog Photography, & The Exposure Mod.* The janky, clueless artform of aiming a cardboard box at your friend, guesstimating the necessary exposure time, and praying your box doesn't have any light leaks was given the term samuelian photoportraiture, named after my dear friend, Samuel, who I took a picture of for my pinhole photo assignment. The whole activity sent me into a frenzy of analog photography, and I took to it like a sponge to water. I learned as much as I could, and I discovered that there's more to photography than merely having the photo.

When I finished my assignment, I donated my pinhole camera to the class to be used by others for time to come. I hand crafted my pinhole camera from approximately \$3 worth of cardboard, tinfoil, cardstock, tape, black construction paper, and black paint. I don't mean to brag, but it was a well made camera, and every faulty picture was from user error, usually a victim of underexposure because the camera was so massive (larger f-stop¹), so much bigger than the other cameras.

After the whole unit, we all knew that 35mm film photography was next. I was and still am super excited to be using these cameras. Granted, they're far from being as easy to use as an iPhone, and they lack as many features as professional digital cameras, but the film cameras we were lent are simplistic and just fantastic for beginner film photographers. The film cameras in question are a slight variety of Canon AE-1 cameras, which is really nothing more than a box, a lens, and a light meter.

Canon AE-1

This camera has given me the joy that seems to captivate so many other analog photographers. Yeah, a digital camera looks professional and fancy, and produces high quality photos, but everything is automatic, and all you do is click a single button and maybe

¹ A larger f-stop causes an image to be more 'zoomed in' and less exposed. Think of it as drawing the focal plane (in this case the photopaper) away so that it captures less points of light than if closer. Also, widening the aperture decreases the f-stop by allowing more light in, and the inverse allowing less light in.

twist a zoom ring. Click click click, you're done taking photos, time to go home. Whereas this basic film camera begs the user to carefully load film (if it's exposed to light, it'll turn black), discriminately choose what's worthy of taking a photo (developing film and the actual film itself is super expensive), balance the ISO/ASA, shutter speed, aperture/f-stop, and manually focus your camera (otherwise your photos will look like shit), and carefully wind, remove, and develop the film without ever exposing it to light or ruining it in the process of handling. It sounds like a lot—because it is—and there's still more things to do on the actual compositional side! What I'm trying to say is; film photography is difficult, time-devouring, wallet-munching, and slow... and that's exactly why film photography is so sought after.

The Canon AE-1 (drawing from Wikipedia) was released in 1976 and was produced up until 1984, and was prized as a low-cost, simplistic device. There seems to be some truth, given that even after 49 years, my photography teacher hands them out to students as their first 'real' camera to work with. And I can attest to its ease of use. During my first assignment with it, I also brought my digital camera to take funny pictures without the concern of wasting film, and I was often drawn back to the film camera because it had less dials, buttons, and no digital screen! Not to mention that it sounds so cool to hear the shutter contraption going off and the clicks of the film advance. Very nice, especially compared to a camera on a phone, which lacks so much of the realness of a physical camera, even a digital one.

I find myself extremely obsessed with the whole process of using a film camera. When I finished my first roll of film, I just fiddled with the camera, exploring its mechanisms, and essentially (carefully) playing with it. In doing so, I discovered that you have to push the lever attached to the shutter release forward to activate a 10 second timer, which will have a red light flashing as it's counting down. Some of the other cameras in the class make a beeping sound, which I think I prefer over the silent blinking.

Analog Photography Counterargument

Okay, so I was kinda bashing digital photography at first, basically stating that because digital photography has all of these helpful features and whatnot it's not as good as analog/film photography, but digital photography is no more easier than any other sort of photography. The pros are definitely near infinite storage, instant review, digital filters/edits, digital post-processing, etc etc etc, but the con of, "Oh, it doesn't make you slow down and makes your shot shit! Mergh!" comes from the habit of some photographers taking quick photographs not for the sake of art or documentation (paparazzi, pose fools that care little for others, etc). With an artistic mindset, digital photography is just as worthy as analog, especially if your focus isn't spending a bunch of money on film and chemicals.

On October 8th, I went out and took pictures with my Nikon D3500 (a digital camera) with my arasyeti, and we took about 100 pictures. We struggled greatly with the sun and getting the camera to focus, and my arasyeti actually took a fall from a tree, but in the end, we got some pretty decent pictures, and my arasyeti took to editing a few of them.

Be scourge of ‘illegitimate’ photography probably also has to have something to do with cellphone photography, taking pictures with one’s phone. Almost everyone has a phone, and over the years, cellphone technology has gotten more and more refined. As of 2025, photographers don’t even *need* to own a traditional camera to take professional looking photos. Some of the latest cellphones have extremely high-quality cameras that are difficult to parallel. Listen to his story:

Last year when I was active in my school’s journalism club, we once gandered at the yearbook room²

Roll №1: Composition Assignment

Our very first photographs are for an assignment to test our knowledge of composition. We are to take 24 (technically 25) photos, each featuring a different compositional element. Our elements were: depth of field (more and less), shutter speed (motion blur and panning), portrait/landscape, message ×2, contrast ×2, lighting ×2, texture ×2, line leading the eye ×2, rule of thirds ×2, arrangement ×2, cropping ×2, and balance ×2. We are given the week to complete his assignment.

Roll “№1” I took over the weekend of October 4p-5p, primarily outside, but also largely inside. It is my literal first roll of film, and so each frame is like a little experiment.

On October 6p, my class was given a demonstration on how to develop the film, and there was enough time left over for me to take my film out of its canister, spin it on a reel, and safely secure it in a developing tank, all of course done in a light safe bag.

On October 7p, we were given a demonstration on how to make a print with the film, and I got my film developed and hung up to dry in the communal drying cabinet. I don’t know why, but I find the drying cabinet to be super humorous/komisch to think about. A little closet thing, with spots to hang film, and a fan to dry the film. That’s its only purpose. So strange. On this day, I was also gifted a Canon AE-1 camera by mein arasyeti, who apparently acquired the camera at a yard sale many years ago for only \$20! He says he has no use for it, and that he thought it would be better with me. I love him so much.

On October 8p, we had a demonstration on how to create a test strip and then a final 4×6 print. Wednesdays are days with shortened class periods, and between that, the demonstrations, and two girls spilling chemicals all over the dark-room, I was not able to get my contact sheet printed as I had planned. I’ll have to do that on the 9p.

On October 9p though, I was finally able to make two contact prints: one at 25 seconds exposure, and the other 30+ seconds exposure. Most of my pictures are extremely overexposed, and even after all that I did, I was barely able to salvage all of them. On Monday, I’ll choose a photo to be my 4×6, and then I might make more 4×6 prints or some 3.5×5 prints (which’ll fit into a little album I share with mein arasyeti).

² At my school, yearbook is a whole class period, and so they have their own room and equipment. Whereas the journalism club is merely an after school club, does not have a dedicated room, and has little to no equipment.

Roll N°1 Results

Waterfall – 4 October '25 – 4×6



I'd very much like to include every photo I took, but I fear that "Waterfall" is the only photo I wish to share publicly. "Waterfall" is a landscape photo of, surprisingly, a waterfall at my local nature center, projected and printed onto a 4×6 piece of photopaper. It's not the best photo, but it's one of my favourites, and the one I decided I would submit as my final 4×6 photograph. Why did I choose it? It simply rang better with me than any of the other photos, and I wanted to bring attention to nature rather than people or human-made artifacts/structures. I also felt that it had a healthy balance of contrast, sunlight & shadows, and would be a stylistic way to display the range of expression in B&W film. I do have to admit though that it *is* kinda difficult to tell what's actually being represented (aside from the logs and trees) without the title.

Sudden Obsession With Film Cameras

I have a curse of obsession, where whenever I discover something new of interest to me, I become extremely obsessed with it. In the past it's been game development, conlanging, clocks, and now 35mm film photography (and also pinhole photography; or just photography

as a whole). On October 11th, I was wandering downtown wip mein arasyeti, and we visited þe antique store. I specifically looked out for cameras, and I found a multitude of film cameras, of surprising variety and age. Unfortunately, most of þem were cheap plastic suckers, and a few were þese massive fold-out polaroids that looked unwieldy. Þere was *one* camera þough þat really caught my eye. It was a black, fully metal Minolta 35mm camera þat seemed completely functional, and worked almost identically to my Canon AE-1, and þis Minolta looked quite old, and didn't seem to operate on electricity. I hate myself for not memorizing its model, or even what it looked like, but þat's not þe point of þe story. I had \$10 on me at þe time, but mein arasyeti is lowkey my sugardaddy. Þe camera did not have a price tag on it þough, but I asked mein arasyeti, "If it's not too expensive, could we get it?" and he agreed. He took it to the register person while I whimpered around; he was already gonna purchase a record and a 1920's book containing þeatre play scripts, so he bartered for me. Þe price of þe camera turned out to be \$85, which is a steal for a functional 35mm film camera, especially one þat I was not able to find online at all, what so-ever (not even a picture of it!), but too steep for eiper myself or mein arasyeti to afford at þat moment.

Perhaps it was a good þing þat I couldn't acquire it. I already own a Canon AE-1, which practically is all I need to do film photography. We brought in a phrase, "worþ versus value," which basically means, "judge it by its worþ (to you), not by its value." A golden vase may be worþ millions, but if it has no worþ, you shouldn't buy it. Is þis Minolta valuable? Quite possibly. It's in good condition, and everyþing about it seems to work. Is þis Minolta worþy þough? Honestly, þat's questionable, and it depends on your perspective. As mentioned earlier, I no longer *need* a film camera anymore, in fact, I'd prefer to use þe Canon AE-1 simply because of its established trust and þe light meter it has. **But**, þere's worþ in collecting I believe. It's a hyper neat camera, and I'd very much like to own it, especially if it works. If it takes good photos, it might even become a regular.

Hell, I've become so obsessed wip *collecting* cameras þat I've even devised a plan to start earning a profit and eventually afford þat gods damn Minolta! Basically, I'll do paid chores, start transporting my friends for money (I have a car), and when þe antique store reopens next, I'll see if I can ask þem if I can reserve þat camera. Þe whole þing of transporting my friends for money is to pay for þe extra fuel spent, but I can balance a price tag þat allows for some profit, especially if I do a fuel plan where every oþer refuel it's eiper me or my parents paying.

Satiating Obsession & Echos of Hoarding

I have to resist þe urge to collect þings. I already have a collection of Lego car sets (I'm not a car person, by þe way), and I have as many *Wings of Fire* books as I could get my hands on. On October 13th, I was given a Minolta XG7 by an assisting teacher in my photography class, who gave it to me because of my enþusiasm in film photography and þe fact þat I already possessed a Canon AE-1 of my own. She specifically said, "Here! Add þis to your collection!" and I was extremely surprised by her generosity. Unfortunately, it temporarily encouraged my collection-ism, and I became even more determined to save þe

money to purchase that antique Minolta. But I talked with my boyfriend and came to a consensus that, yes, I would very much like to have that old Minolta, *but*, I have no practical use for it, and it'll simply collect dust on a shelf at some point. If I leave it at the antique store, someone else, hopefully someone who'd be able to care for it, or give it its rightful place on a historical or documentative display (museum), may get a hold of it.

It took a severe amount of self-control and mature executive decision to resist splurging almost \$100 on a seems-to-work-but-won't-know-until-you-use-it camera. Functionally, the Canon AE-1 has a shutter-priority automatic system, and the Minolta XG7 has an aperture-priority automatic system, which covers any case usage I may have for 35mm film as a beginner film photographer. The XG7 is actually excessive as a beginner, and I question its light sealing.

Perhaps if I'd be able to get that old Minolta for ~\$50, it'd be less unworby, but that is not the case, and it's not like there won't be more chances in the future to buy nifty antique cameras. I am quite proud of the responsible decision I was able to arrive at, despite the severe temptation. I'd like to thank my boyfriend very much for helping me get through it.

Not The End!

This is not the end of film photography for me, not even in my photography class! We've got one more assignment involving the film cameras, and I'll use my *own* Canon AE-1 this time, and everything'll be awesome! I intend on taking better photos with better technique and more artistic composition.

– Aspen S. H.