

Written by Allan Besselink
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It started as a prize in a photo contest. The camera, an Olympus OM-10, was awarded to my father in a photography contest. I am sure he took thousands of photos over the years, so this particular photo is now just a distant memory at best. I do, however, remember the camera and how my father passed it down to me. Hold it like so, and cup it with one hand underneath so that your fingers don't get in the way. Yes, just like that. Steady on the shutter button. Such simple things were the foundation for exploring the creative world inside me.

Years before, I had already found great personal enjoyment in photography. I remember my mother bought me a Kodak Instamatic back in elementary school. It was the old-school precursor of "point and shoot" only because that was, literally, all it did. One button. One small lens. No settings. A film cartridge. Oh, and it used those nifty flash cubes as well.

Some of the most vivid memories of my youth stem from the countless auto races my parents and I went to over the summer and fall months in Canada and the United States. I discovered I could take some amazing small-format photos with this little Instamatic. Many of these still exist in my portfolio and slide boxes. My father saw this, and when the opportunity presented itself, he passed his contest winnings - the OM-10 in question - on to me. At the time, he had an OM-2N, so he didn't need what amounted to a beginner's camera of sorts. But to me, it was a real photographer's camera, my very own SLR.

It was like a whole new world opened up to me. This was a tool for creativity. It was only limited by my imagination. I found myself looking at the world from the perspective of the viewfinder divided mentally into thirds. I slowly learned how to be in the right place at the right time to catch that one moment on film that everyone craved. Those were the days when you had to catch "the moment" and get it right then and there; you didn't have the digital tools that we now have to edit the image after the fact. A roll of film might have 24 or 36 images, but getting two or three

good photos that avoided the garbage can was a successful roll of film indeed. I eventually built a portfolio of the images I'd created with the OM-10 over the previous several years.

Of course, digital photography is the way of the recent past, present, and future. I will admit that I resisted the trend toward digital for many years. It didn't feel right to me at first. A large part of getting "that photo" on film was about timing and composition on the spot. That was a reflection of your investment of work, time, repetition, and composition; in the end, you couldn't screw up the opportunity in the moment. It just seemed far too easy to get a decent digital photo - and if you didn't like the photos you'd taken, you could delete them or edit them to make them pretty anyway. Strangely enough, while film is a long-lost entity anymore, I now see that it is making a bit of a comeback, much like record players. Imagine.

I'm not sure where that camera ended up. However, several years ago, I went to eBay and found myself a used OM-10. When it arrived, I unboxed it slowly, appreciating the thoughts of a bygone era. It had been many years since I held that camera in my hand, but it felt perfect in my hands. It was an old friend I'd not spoken to in years, one that knew all my deepest thoughts and feelings. The magical memories started coming back one by one. One moment, I was sitting at corner 5 at Mosport; in the next, I was standing in the garages at Watkins Glen during an F1 weekend at a time when you were within arm's length of greatness, be it man or machine. I found myself back on the sidelines of a BCI football game or at the Canadian Schoolboy rowing championships, making my best attempt at being Neil Liefer of Sports Illustrated. Which reminds me - thanks for that inspiration, Neil; you were one of my heroes. Each and every moment was as vivid as the images I'd composed in the viewfinder of that OM-10. It took me back to so many important times in my life.

That camera sits here to this day, one of my prized possessions. It serves as a reminder of an important piece of my personal history. A time when life was wide open, and my horizons were expanding. It was a time of diving deep into a creative world of self-expression and self-discovery that remains with me to this day.

It was a time of finding ... me. Through the lens of my OM-10.

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