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Gwen Coyne
 • She is a graphic designer and manages a digital marketing team.
 • Her favourite movie and book is *Andrei Rublev* by Andrei Tarkovsky and *Nausea* by Jean-Paul Sartre, respectively.

Vignettes of Innocence

Conchita Fernandes takes a look at Gwen Coyne's compelling narratives of her daughter, that are filled with sparkling moments from her childhood.

Our memories age just as we do. With each passing year they lose their veracity, resulting in the loss of tiny slivers of details. But soon, our senses take over, smoothening and embellishing, filling in the fractures. No wonder that, sometimes, our memories turn out to be better versions of reality.

Yet, our memories have tried to break away from the moulds of our thoughts, to pave the way for a more physical representation of past encounters... Poetry, music, painting, photography... Things that we can hold on to and feel. Gwen Coyne takes us on one such visual journey, to preserve a version of her daughter's incredible childhood.

What drew Gwen towards photography was the immediacy and flexibility of the medium for journaling. Today, she employs the same thought while documenting her daughter.

Breathing Life into Memories

"I remember my childhood being magical and intense," she said. This was one of the several aspects which stirred her to create a photographic memoir of her daughter. At the same time, it was spurred by another event, one that took place during her childhood. "Most of the images I have from my own childhood are in my memories, as my parents' camera was stolen when I was little. Maybe these undocumented early years influenced my approach to photographing her—a desire

to evoke a fantastical sense of childhood," Gwen mentions.

Her photographs of Greta are a pleasant and unexpected detour to what one would expect from the chronicles of a child. They aren't your standard family album pictures. Greta is unposed and left to react and interact with her surroundings, while Gwen lingers close, ready to press the shutter when the moment presents itself.

Her vision entails creating a version of Greta's childhood that is distinct from reality, and so you are presented with a

The best advice that she received was during a workshop she took with David Alan Harvey—"You don't have to go anywhere. You should stay in the same place. There is no excuse. You have to finish."



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For Gwen, it has never been about documenting specifics. It is about collecting unposed snippets that capture Greta as she is.

colourless, yet dynamic glimpse into the little girl's life. We get to see the various qualities that lends Greta her lively and spirited personality, something that Gwen is keen on recording and preserving. The photographs also have a healing and invigorating aura around them, and was a means for Gwen to cope with Greta's

fragile health. "She has asthma and I never know when a mild cold will turn into an emergency. With my photographs, I want to record moments that will help me remember a space and time in between these periods of intensity," Gwen says.

One of these photographs was made around the time when Greta first started

She hopes that over time, the series of short stories of her daughter will form a more comprehensive portrait of her early years, leaving room for her imagination and memory to fill in the gaps.

She took up cellphone photography after the birth of Greta, as a means of documenting her life. "Toting around a film or DSLR camera wasn't practical with a baby. Moreover, I didn't have time for processing photos on a laptop or in the darkroom. The phone was more convenient and allowed for a less invasive and more immediate response to what was going on around me," she said.



For Gwen, Greta's best attributes entails her healthy disregard for authority and a need to do things her own way. She mentions, "She is still relatively uninhibited in the way she thinks and behaves."



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➔ When it comes to sharing work online, Gwen alternates between being very selective and wanting to share a daily journal. She mentions how she tends to be self-critical, even running the danger of "analysis paralysis". "In order to get past a creative block, it sometimes helps when I post more liberally. But more often than not, I prefer to remain silent until I figure out what I want to say."

walking, and remains to be one of Gwen's most favourite images. "Sunlight was illuminating her in the shape of a spotlight, throwing her father, who was walking beside her, into the shadows. She was frequently very ill in her early years, and I find the image symbolic of her struggle and perseverance," Gwen recounts.

Greta's Interaction with the Camera

Since her birth, Greta's reaction to the camera has continued to evolve. From regarding the device as an extension of her mother, she is gradually becoming more conscious of Gwen's focus on her. "She makes it clear when she is not

interested in being photographed, which I respect. But for the most part, she enjoys the attention," she said.

Juggling Motherhood and a Career

Very often, Gwen's hectic work schedule leaves very little time for herself and her family. "Balancing work and family is not easy, and very often I find myself quite exhausted. Moreover, I can't help but feel guilty sometimes, taking the time I need to pursue my personal interests," she says. But Greta makes it all worth it. "Fortunately, what gives me joy outside of work is the time I get to spend with my family," she mentions. Whether it's a trip to

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• Instagram: @gwencoyne

I want to take pictures that tell their own stories—that become something in themselves. In that respect, any subject has photographic potential for me.

the park or the beach, or even setting up a playdate with one of Greta's friends, Gwen makes sure that weekends are almost always reserved for Greta.

Gwen's images embody all the qualities that make motherhood special, and will mature and become stronger as the years go by. I am in fact reminded of something that Virginia Woolf had once said, "I can only note that the past is beautiful, because one never realises an emotion at the time. It expands later, and thus we don't have complete emotions about the present, only about the past." What a wonderful way to look at why we photograph... While some of us do it to remember, others do it to discover themselves. 📷



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➔ (top): She is of the opinion that if you focus on something that's personally important to you, and wait until what you see inspires you, your photographs will automatically imbibe your thoughts. (bottom): When asked how her vision has evolved in the six years that she has been photographing her daughter, Gwen responds, "I think I must be growing with her, because my camera seems to be getting smaller every year!"

