

Lee Jeffries - Episode 780

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SPEAKERS

James Geering, Lee Jeffries

J James Geering 00:00

Welcome to the behind the shield podcast. As always, my name is James Geering. And this week it is my absolute honor to welcome on the show, accountant, revered photographer, and the man who did the latest Metallica album photography, Lee Jeffries. So we discuss a host of topics from Lee's Childhood Mentor that led him into the world of accounting, a chance meeting with a homeless woman in London that became the genesis of his photography career, his experience with homelessness around the globe, finding that soul connection with people, he photographs, his own mental health journey, how he ended up working one of the greatest rock bands of our era, and so much more. Now, before we get to this incredible conversation, as I say, every week, please just take a moment, go to whichever app you listen to this on, subscribe to the show, leave feedback and leave a rating. Every single five star rating truly does elevate this podcast, therefore making it easier for others to find. And this is a free library of almost 800 episodes now. So all I ask in return is that you help share these incredible men and women's stories. So I can get them to every single person on planet earth who needs to hear them. So with that being said, I introduce to you, Lee Jeffries enjoy. Well, Lee, I want to start by saying, firstly, congratulations on the incredible success that your work is having at the moment. And secondly, to welcome you to the buy in the shield podcast today.

L Lee Jeffries 01:52

Oh, thank you. It's a it's an honor to be here. It's honor for you to ask me to do this. I've noticed the podcast and I've been waiting for the invite for for a long time and it eventually came. So yeah, I mean, the work. The work that I do is gradually been slowly taking a path which redirects you'd like to do what's for about 15 years now when suddenly it's just exploded. The last couple of years. I've just been crazy. So everything's good and I'm really happy and I'm just happy to do the podcast with you.

J James Geering 02:32

Beautiful now for people listening where on planet earth we finding you today.



02:37

I live in I was born in Bolton in Greater Manchester, and I still live in Bolton in Greater Manchester.



James Geering 02:44

So before I even get into your life journey for people listening who don't follow football, soccer, football is what it's supposed to be called. You guys just had the most epic FA Cup in your city because it was Man City and Man United. So how did that pan out being in Manchester?



03:02

Well, the thing about being in Manchester is I'm a Liverpool fan. I've always been a cell that's fine. I mean, I'm so I'm happy to be a Liverpool fan. I've been I was a Liverpool fan when I was five years old and my dad took me to the first game that I'm feel we went to watch. I remember it vividly. We went to watch West Brom and Seville Regis. I don't really remember him.



James Geering 03:28

I do actually. Yeah.



03:29

Yeah, he was playing. And I always remember it was just a really good experience. And yeah, I've been a Liverpool fan ever since. So the the FA Cup Final really didn't make any difference to me. I did watch it, but and I think it was willing city to win secretly. And they did.



James Geering 03:49

Were there any negative impacts. When I was young, I'd actually never really had a team. And it was partly because when we were little, you know, dudes would murder each other over 11 men in short shorts. So it wasn't really something that dragged me towards the sport specifically. But now you have this Darby between two teams in the same city. Was there any negativity violence, or was it well received by everyone?



04:13

No, I think it was well received by everyone. I don't think there's any violence. I don't think there was any. I mean, there's just been one thing on the news with the guy who wore a shirt. I think the is it the 9097 people died at the Hillsborough? Yeah, the Liverpool fans, and he was

sure that said 97. And he said over the top not enough. So that's caused a big stink in the UK at the minute and he got arrested for doing that. So good. Good job as well. Yeah.

J

James Geering 04:48

No, no, exactly. All right. Well, then you mentioned about being born in Bolton. So let's start at the very beginning. Then tell me about your family dynamic, what your parents did, and how many siblings

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05:01

Okay, I have my parents divorced when I was eight. And that's probably shaped my view on on my whole life looking back he did did he messed me up completely. So my dad just worked for the British Aerospace, making airplanes and bombs and whatever you whatever they used to me. My mom didn't work. So when my parents divorced, how I ended up with mom in a council estate in Bolton, and you know, it was practically till till I went to university, I lived in that council house 10 years. That's all my childhood was really based on. It was to see him on a Saturday. And then back to back to mums for the week. And then the following week, Saturday, maybe I'd stay over. And it was that tooing and froing. It was that destabilization as a kid looking back now that it's kind of led to whatever I've been doing. It's been one reason why I do what I do when I go out on the street. And photography has been my outlet with the homeless shots. But yeah, it led to, you know, I get back from a dad's and all I do would be try to be with my dad, because I was with my mom. And when I was with my mom, and I had to go to my dad's. It was destabilizing, and it was upsetting to leave my mom. So yeah, it was really it was where it took its toll. And it's took its toll on the relationships as well that I have with them now. very distant from them. We, as a family, we were not. We're not tight in any way. I have a twin brother identical. Looks just like me. Unfortunately, for him. He's a firefighter. Really? Yeah. So he's been a firefighter. Since he was 18, just retired. So you get 3030 or 30 odd years, 35 years or something in the service, and just retired about three months ago. When Yeah,

J

James Geering 07:33

well, you have this, we'll get into it. Obviously, this lens on personal mental health on the mental health to some of the women that you see on the streets. Have you had any conversations about the impact of the job on your brother's life path?

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07:49

I don't think my brother thinks that deeply. I think the way that way that the job has impacted him him is he's become a lot more compassionate as well. I've never talked to him about it, but I can see the things that he does. He does a lot of things for the community. He'll go and he does gardening for the for the local council, free of charge. He was raised a lot of money for health care for heroes. When the soldiers Yeah, so we will golf golf events, and it raises a lot of money. I think he's raised two or 3 million pounds. Over the course of what he did over the course of while he's been doing it probably more. But the job in terms of having a conversation sitting down with him and having a conversation on and saying, Stacey, you know, what did the


job he would only ever say to me that it go out on shouts. And he would never talk about it. He said Lee I've seen some some stuff that he just just wouldn't want I wouldn't want anyone to see in the life. And I think that was the extent of the account that we kept it bottled up and I think he's having you at his release now is to is to help to help a bit where he can I guess we've I guess we've got that thing running through both of us in some degree, by his his driving force against what was his job. And my driving force is my sense of loneliness, which I'll probably go on to explain.

 James Geering 09:29

Yeah, absolutely won't be interesting if he listens to this interview as well if this may be opened some doors for his inner his journey into dealing with some of the things that he that he's seen because we we obviously can't just break down and burst into tears when we're on the scene. But a human being is not meant to just keep these images to themselves and stuff it down as well. So it may be that he's just got some great great coping mechanisms like gardening, for example, you're out in the fresh air you getting soil under your fingernails, mess over Every therapeutic thing. So it may be that he's found things that work for him. But I'd be intrigued to circle around after a few months and see if he listened to this and found some value in other episodes of the podcast as well.

 10:10

Definitely point him in their direction. And we'll see what he see when he does. Maybe it'll give you a call and say, James, can I have an interview?

 James Geering 10:19

Yeah. And open door has it right now. All right, well, then with that, so you you're bouncing back and forth. And that was actually when I went through my divorce, I grieved to the impact it would have on my son, I kind of knew that my marriage was done. My, my ex had clearly through her actions demonstrated that she was not into the marriage anymore. But the anticipation of that household, a household thing, you know, it really, really tore my heart out of my chest. And it's, you know, I've spent the whole rest of my life trying to make sure it was as stable as possible. So when you look back at that, you talked about that. Were there any other elements of that upbringing, or even where you were living in the council state that were also traumatic when you look back?

 11:03

I don't think the council estate was necessarily necessarily traumatic. I think that, I think if I was to say anything about living on a council estate, it humbles you, you know, I've been back numerous times over, particularly over the last couple of years, I'll just go go round in the car, sit there and just look at the house that I used to live in. And I just sit there with music in the car. And I think to myself, all sorts of things. How the hell did we all fit in there? You know, me, my mom, and my brother, and it was like a two bedroom terrorist council that was in the middle of this massive council estate, how did we fit in there, the times where we just play

headers and volleys outside against the garbages, you know, just whacking a ball against the steel garage door, then the noise it would make. How my mom coped on her own as a dad, now, I know how difficult it is to bring a child, finger child with love and everything that a child needs. And it must have been particularly difficult for her with no job on a council estate, and no prospects really, no hope. The whole I guess, was Me and Me and My, my, my brother. So yeah, it was it's difficult to go back and look at various things. But then, like I say, it really is, it was a defining period of my life. It's made me appreciate everything that I've worked hard to get. And because I'm still, you know, I still work full time. It's still a full time accounting. You might think that Lee Jeff is is this this famous photographer, but he still does tax returns for clients, and he still does accounts that need submitting. And, you know, that's my full time job. That's why I worked for him in my career. But yeah, it is kind of strange to go back and just relive those moments. Because when you're a kid, you're filled with a sense of this is a wide world. Everything is open to you. You have no sense of duty, no sense of what's the word? I guess the world is your oyster. And there's a there's a light, there's a hope. And whilst you might not appreciate it at the time looking back, oh, man. So go back and live those days again. I mean, it's an old cliché, isn't it? If I could just go back and be a kid again? It would just be it's just the best time of your life. Yes, we had no money. Yes, we lived in a council house. Yes. My mum didn't allow me to drive a car because that was the only one he had. And I had to wait until I was 21 to drive and all those things that I didn't have, as you know, if I didn't have that situation, over good things that I had, you know, I lived a normal, normal life, other than the emotional upheaval. And the emotional upheavals still bothers me to till today. I have a recurring dream I have to recovering really. One is that my parents will get back together. And I still have that dream, you know, frequently, and I wake up and think I'll get back together and It's never happening. And the other one is that my granddad never got sick. My grandfather was the rock of my childhood. So we, it was, we used to go down, me and my brother used to be put on the train in Manchester. And we'd go down to see him and my grandma grandmother in reading in Barcia. Until they would be the reading Train Station Meeting goes, this is like to 10 year old kids on a train on breeding with it now. But then it was it was okay to do. So we're just used to go down and spend two weeks three weeks with my grandparents and go fishing on the Thames. And yeah, my grandma and grandfather would used to light fires in the garden. And now you know, when I'm when I'm out running, or I, I just catch, catch the scent of burning wood. It just, he comes back to me instantly. It's like it's here, it's this disease here with me. So yeah, it's just memories from childhood like that are just a beautiful things when you get to 52 years old to look back on and appreciate. And to be in a state of mind where you can appreciate them. I think it's very unfortunate to be able to be able to contemplate things like that. Not many people are afforded that time and look for you to really look back and look at the good things.

J

James Geering 16:36

I was walking my dog this morning. And I've been jumping back into meditation the last few days, trying to create space for this book that I'm writing. And I was walking along and I caught myself with those kind of monkey mind thoughts, you know, the to do list that bounce around between your ears. And I'd kind of took a moment and just try to go back to that meditation state that I'd been in, you know, an hour prior. And I had this epiphany, I'm like, this is a difference between a 49 year old former firefighter, and a nine year old little boy walking around the farm I grew up in is you didn't have those thoughts bouncing around your head, you could be present, you could smell the air, you could smell the fire, you could see, you know, the nature you you fall over and feel every grays and you know, and now we're so preoccupied in the new ad in technology, it makes it even worse, that one of the things I yearn for as a child is

to just have that clear mind where you actually are present in the moment. And it's so hard, you know, with with a careers worth of stuff to start chipping away and getting back to the to that, excuse me, you'll never get there fully. But a version of that at 49, where you can just sit and you're not thinking about the next thing and you can just be present. I think that's one of the things that I've chased for a long time. And it kind of hit me today what that thing was.



18:01

I think that in terms of what you're saying there, I think that photographer photography for me is that is that space is that place where I'm, I'm 10 years old again, and anything can happen. I can be walking through the streets of New York, turn a corner, and just something magical happens. I'll tell you a story. I mean, I was in New York. And I was just just doing some street photography. And I was it's in the book. It's in my book, actually. And I was just walking towards Washington Square Park. And as I'm walking through Washington Square Park, I turned the corner and I see this guy sat under this huge tree on a fire. He looks so familiar. And as I'm approaching it's dawning on me this is this is Andy, this is the guy that I photographed five years ago in Miami, outside of Starbucks. So as I'm walking closer and closer, it is endearing, it's him. And it's those moments that when in photography that suddenly it opens that that that that sense, that sense of space, that sense of unpredictability, that sense of light and hope that you have when you were a kid when nothing else is interfering, and nothing else was interfering with that moment. I shouted Andy and he just took one look up and shouted Lee Jeffries out of the confusion and all the the trouble that he was experiencing and his own homelessness. He remembered mundane. And it still gives me chills to think about that. And it's, you know, it is the it's moments like that that seem to happen to me frequently. And I don't know why they happen. I guess I'm open to them happening. That I mean, that might help a little bit. But it's these moments. And the photographs that I take are really? Is it serendipity? Is it? Is it just pure luck? Is it destiny? I don't know. But, you know, in terms of what you were saying, in that sense of trying to get back to somewhere where you were, as a kid, photography has given me that, that way to get there. I never happier than when I'm out on the street. And yeah, I go in homeless areas, and it stinks. And there's, there's fishies, and there's the urine, smelling streets, and there's the smell of drugs in squalor. But I love those smells. I love being around those smells. I love the people. I love the connections. I love the vibe. I love the excitement of the place. And I love the fact that I can connect with another human being on a deeply human level, like I connected with Andy. But we'll go into that, I guess a bit later. But that was just my way of saying, You know what? I agree with what you said, themes.



James Geering 21:31

Now, there's a great story, especially, you know, when you see Andy again, on the other side of the continent, basically, this is phenomenal. Yeah.



21:38

I mean, it's to photograph him in Miami, and then to see him again in New York, and not seen him for five years. And obviously, we'd had no contact it was completely about all the people in New York, I would, I would see it would be him.

 James Geering 21:52

Amazing. Well, going back to your youth, when you look back now were was photography, or were there other areas of art that you felt kind of No,

 22:05

never, never. When I used to go to see my grandparents, my uncle lived in a place called Daljit which is just outside of Windsor. And he was an accountant. He had his own accountancy practice. From an early age, I just wanted to be my uncle. It was he had a lifestyle, he would have even mega parties, the parties he would have in his garden in the summer. And you know, big jugs of Pimms would be on the table. And, you know, I'm only 12 and I'm having a Bims it was he was the coolest uncle you could ever imagine. So yeah, I just wanted that lifestyle, which is why I drifted into accountancy it was the Are we the product of our childhood, this is this is the Metallica thing, this is the 72 seasons, this is, you know, through the first 18 years of our lives define us. And they certainly define me in terms of the divorce in terms of my career path. So yeah, it's I guess it's it is a defining period of your life. And I think it's really affected the way I view things.

 James Geering 23:37

So initially, you entered the world of accounting prior to that kind of pivotal moment where you, you know, began the journey on photography and the homeless population specifically, what were those first few years? Like, where were you satisfied? Were you happy? Did you start noticing any any of the traumas from when you were younger, kind of showing their face at that point?

 24:00

No, it was, when I first started photography, it was really I'm a keen cyclist and always been a keen cyclist and I had my own cycling business, and I had to shoot photo product images to sell them, obviously. And the more I shot these product images, the more I wanted to get a bit more artistic with them. I think this is where the artistry came from. And we used to lose a bunch of guys it used to be on a on a website and it was like a forum thing. And we used to like have competitions on who could take the best shot of the side of the bike first and the cycling components. So I think it really that's the real really the way it started out and that ignited the sense of artistry in what I do. So it was shooting bicycle stuff and then it turned into street photography, the favorite. There's a famous story where I was in London to run the marathon. I've done a lot of running of marathons and cycling and all over Europe. And so I was in London, London to run the marathon. And I was just about the day before Saturday, Saturday before the Sunday race, I've just been to collect my number. And I had my camera with me and I have a big tune in millimeter lens, and I was just walking around and just trying to do some street photography. And never really thought about street photography before. But I thought I'd say the camera and try and do some. And then I see this young homeless girl. She's in a sleeping bag, blue, blue and red sleeping bag. Never forget the colors. And our eyes were crystal blue. And I could see them across the street. And it just it just that moment where her eyes met my eyes. It is what I call a moment of instant recognition. She didn't notice me, and I noticed her

but what I did do was I lifted the camera to take a picture. That was my first mistake. Hitting the shutter was my second. And then continuing to do that was mistake after mistake after mistake. Because she kicked off. She shouted, screamed at me. I had all the people that were I mean, this is near Leicester Square. So I owe people I mean, this is packed. So I have people looking at me. And I mean telling me that you know what you're doing what you're doing. And it was embarrassing. And I had the choice, the other choice I would I just get out of there completely. Or would I go and talk to her. It was so easy just to run away. But I didn't. I went over and sat with her and just had a conversation. And we started to talk. And she was 18 she had been kicked out at home, she'd been homeless a few months. And they just taught I don't even remember what we talked about now. But it was it lasted a long time and the impression and the impression she left on me really dictated the future path that I would take it would, it would never be a shot from across the street. If I was going to do any kind of portrait photography. I wasn't even sure I wanted to do party photography. It was just, it was just an event in a whole series of events that are happening to me that have conspired to make the whole thing Hooli Jefferson is now so yeah, she eventually let me take a photo. And it's, it's the photo of a girl in the sleeping bag, which is one of my it's my first homeless image. And it's I think that changed the path from suddenly doing well, not suddenly taking pictures on my bike and bicycle parts to photographing people. And it just switched something on in my head that that basically for most of my life, it was it was all about me it was it was never about anybody else. I've never really listened to anybody else's story. I had no sense of compassion whatsoever, whatsoever. But listening to her listening to mean 18th on the street in London. And here's me and yes, I've I've had a relatively tough childhood compared to others, but nothing to that extent. And I fell for her. And it hit me hit me really hard. So that was the first experience. But the way it developed was really it's quite personally, it's probably a story that not many people want to tell. But I met somebody with a long distance relationship. So as I'm going through this process of artistic development, I'm looking online. I'm I'm looking for inspiration. I'm looking for photographers, I'm like, what do they do? How can I make it better? Just like people come to me now and ask me questions. what lens do you use? What's your setup? And just the usual questions. I was asking those questions, you know, 1520 years ago, and I approached a woman in in LA, just outside of LA and we got talking and we we created quite I have a poor. Anyway, we this went on for months and months. And we, we ended up meeting in London. By the time we met, we were totally in love with each other it was, it was it was a kind of love where you would do anything go anywhere. Just for her, I will at the drop of a hat, it would just be for her. So environment in relationship continued. And during the continued for about another six months, and then her mother got sick. And it was terminal. And she she was a devout Catholic, it never been anywhere near Rome. And I hadn't been to Rome at that stage. And she was desperate to go to Rome before she died. And it was just not going to happen. She was so sick. So I suggested that I go for her. And I to go to Rome to have to get a rosary to buy a rosary in the Vatican and have it blessed, which is what I did. So I took myself off to Rome. I remember getting this this rolls we while I was I was late to the Vatican. So the Vatican was just about to close, there's a shop in the in the place where you can actually buy these rolls. And I remember running through that I had to go all the way through the Vatican to get to the shop at the end, I remember running through the corridors trying to make before before they closed, and I got to the shop and I was just I just burst out into tears. And I was explaining, I explained to the woman what I was doing. And she put her arm around me and then she she blocked me this rolls away and we got we got it. I paid for it. And then she she arranged for a priest to come in, bless the rosary, which she did. And then I then sent that to the states for this this lady's mother, who was then, you know, buried with the rosary when she passed. So it was that that experience in Rome that what I'm trying to get at is I guess it was my first time in Rome. And that's heavily influenced that whole experience was the first time I did something that anybody else without thinking of myself. It was my first time in Rome. So as

I'm running through the corridors of the Vatican, I'm just being bombarded with painting and fresh goals and all kinds of beautiful art, which I'd never experienced before in my life. And it really is ignited. It just took that artistry development to the next level. And when I was in Rome, I shot, I shot an image and it's become my signature image because of that experience. And it's the woman that prays and embodies not only the vibe of Rome, but it's so special to me for though for that personal reason why I was there.



33:28

So that's the story behind that shot. So if anybody asked me, I never really go into Rome, everyone's gonna hear it now. But this story is behind the trust ever behind that images is the fact that I was there for somebody else. And the fact that someone upstairs must have given that moment to me as a reward or some kind of personal recognition because it was completely on the fly. It was just a complete quick turnaround. And she was there. It was almost wasn't set up. It wasn't it was just a pure, pure sweet moment. And the way the light falls in is just it just embodies everything about that trip and everything about the city that that I feel about Rome and Italy itself. Literally is is the biggest inspiration for what I do. So every image of stone subsequently every single homeless image. Every single metallic image has an element of trust ever into weaved in into the image. There's always a piece of trust ever in everything I've done since. So the relationship carried on. And it was a long distance relationship. And it would lead to insane periods of loneliness when I wasn't willing to All I wanted to do was be with her, but I was in the UK, she was in the States, you know, it was just not. So it would drive me insane, that sense of loneliness. And for some reason I go out on the street. And I just walk on the street. And every, every street that I went down, I would hope to turn a corner and see her eyes. And I never did. But what I did do was I was looking into strangers eyes looking for her. And it's and that's the motivating factor. And that any drove me out even more. So I go out one day in Manchester say, and I turn a corner and I've been looking for I'd go to London, and I turn different corners, just workplaces, we'd been, I'd go back to places where we've been been look, and just deep looking stranger's eyes, trying to see her. But the more I did that, the more I didn't see her, the more I saw the people that I'm looking at. And I saw their sense of loneliness, and I felt their pain. And it's something like I said before is the moment of instant recognition. This is what I call it. I don't know if it's the right name. But this is this is the name that I've come to term, whatever I'm feeling. So it's that moment of instant recognition that my photograph is always about. It takes a relationship to get back to that moment of instant recognition, if that makes any sense.



James Geering 36:42

No, it does.



36:44

So I'm going down the street. I'm looking into strange his eyes, but I'm not just glancing I'm really really looking into stranger's eyes, and I'm absorbing what those eyes are telling me because eyes are their most communicative thing that you can a human being has. And if you look deeply into someone's eyes, they tell you everything you need to know, I want to go in these homeless areas. It would, I would feel their loneliness, just like I felt my own. And that

would be the spark for a conversation. That would be the, the ignition for me moving forward instead of moving away. Now a lot of people try and take pictures of homeless people. I mean, never soft target. I mean, it's just and they do it. To take a photograph, I'm not there to take a photograph, slightly selfish reasons to leave it to. I mean, I'm kind of there to alleviate my own sense of loneliness. But I don't think there's anything wrong in in the pureness of that. There's a there's a two people with that same same feeling connecting is a beautiful thing. And the images that I've produced, and the relationships that I've developed, are a testament to that. So yeah, I mean, the more I did it, the more connections I made, the more relationships developed. And these I was falling in love with these people. My own state of mind was, I'm so lonely. I'm so open to a relationship, that when I did create a relationship, I would I would fall in love I was. And there's been Margo, in Miami, for example. I mean, I'm just sat on the curb. I've been walking around over town in Miami for about five hours just walking around just and when I go into these areas, I'm accepted because I become part of their community. I'm not there to, you know, take the pace, or I'm there to help if I can, and which I do. I'm there to offer a conversation. I'm there to just be there. Please. People recognize that to the point where it's Haley sharp across the street. You're here again. And I said, Yeah, I'm here again. It's good roll. I remember I'll never forget that. Guy shouts Haley, you hear again, said yeah. So good for you. So yeah, I mean by yummy, I'm sat on the curb, and I look up and it's Margo stood above me. And full Hawker mode. So she had a leopard skin fur coat on high heels short skirt. And I was I was like what? Very, very surprised, because I was just taking a break. And we started to talk and she explained who she was she was, she explained that, you know, she'd been on on the streets as a prostitute for a number of years. And back in the day, she was a very famous huge pastor. And I didn't mean anything to me. But we created this relationship. And she invited me back to to her place, which was like a six foot by five foot gavage that was just annexed to a derelict house. And in there, she lived with, I think, four or five girls all doing the same thing she was, and it was just like, just mattresses laid on the floor and this garbage. So problem with addiction. All the girls had problems with addiction. But that that's not something that I'm judgmental about, you know, if, if these girls are addicted to addicted, I'm not there to to make any kind of moral judgment over them. I'm just there to, to be with Margo to enjoy her company and tell her story. And we connected to the point where I felt something deeply for her. I know she felt something deeply for me. And it was we fell in love. We can never be I've never crossed the line. I'd never because my life is such that it just wouldn't do that. But it doesn't stop you having feelings for another human being. So when I say I fall in love with these people, I really do I connect on a really human level. And it was so upsetting because Margo, she she was she was the one in Overtown that looked after everybody she was the she was the woman that all the other girls. She was like the mother figure she would she would take care of them. So if there's any problems, Margo would be the one to go to. Florence Nightingale of all the town, I guess he was just just a beautiful person. And it was so exciting because I think it was about three, three years ago now that she got herself clean. She was she was off the street, she was just about to start a job in in a needle exchange for the city. And then one evening, she she went to bed and then had a heart attack. So this is like at 45 years old. He passed away. And it's it's just something that really still it still hurts badly. And that the second edition of my book is dedicated to her. So the first passage, the first page in the book is, is about Margo is just for Margo. So yeah, I told my goal story. And she she knew that I told her story. And it was, you know, dumb videos and all sorts of things. And it was covered in the Huffington Post. And she she'd read all this stuff. And she was she was always so happy that that people could read the kind of riches to rags story. And what the exploitation of particularly men, the way that men exploit these girls in that industry. And she wanted to tell that story, because, you know, it's the Peter nos of the world that sat in the big mansions. And she's the one on the street in, in, in Miami. And I think it's it's just a real sad situation that many of these girls find themselves in that they can you know, that they're confronted with all this, I guess, at

an early age, all this power, all this, this sexual power this. And then before long, it's just time, time just catches up with them. And then before they know it, addiction takes hold and they're on the street and it's a vicious circle from that. And it's very difficult to get out of but she had the she had the balls to get herself and get herself clean. And it's such a tragedy that she was taken from us when when she'd worked so hard To get to that point so yeah, I mean the in terms of what I do the the relationships I'm falling in love with these people I'm creating relationships with these people. And then the photographs become a kind of the my way of saying goodbye, the final piece the camera never comes up. Going to take your photograph that's never has never an option is always once a creative relationship once I spent a good amount of time with the person as always, can I document this for for me, Can I Can I take a photograph, there's going to mean something for me, and this is what the photographs has always been. They've never been a contest to see who's the best photographer they've never been a a way of creating something that's not authentic. They've been away for me to say goodbye to a relationship that could never last. Because of my life because of their life, it they've become a way for me to help organizations that help them. Whilst I'm, whilst I'm not naive enough to think that I can't help them whilst I'm there, which I do, obviously, I've taken people to hospital, I've bought people food or bought people clothes, I'd give I give people money. I just because they're going to be gone use that and maybe buy some drugs. That's not my issue. That if that's what they need at that particular point, if that keeps them going on the street.



46:40

To earn money to pay for that, then I'm not I'm not judging. So yeah, over the years, I help on a micro level. But what the images also do, they help on a macro level. And because of the notoriety they've received, they can help. And then they do help organizations. Like I've worked with Seattle's Gospel Mission extensively. And they have total use of my image, images free of charge, and they use them. They use them for all their advertising campaigns. We had the we had a big project in Seattle a few years ago. And we projected the images onto the skyscrapers in the city to raise awareness. And it did, it was covered in the news, it was covered on TV and the radio, I remember doing a radio interview with the CEO of the mission on Seattle radio when I was there, and it created a real buzz and it it generated a lot of funds for for the mission. And there's there's countless other charities I worked with where the images are used. And the exhibitions I have, I always donate a percentage to whenever there's anything sold, always percentage goes to the charities. And it's really a it's a, the images have become my way of saying goodbye. And they've also garnered a, a general popularity and because of I guess it's the authenticity of what I do is based on real relationships, and it's based on it's not based on anything else I you know, it's not, I'm not going on to these homeless areas, just to take a photo is that's not the reason why I'm there. And I can't stress that enough. And it's when photographers asked me, How do you do this leap? I mean, how would you explain to somebody the way you feel? How would you teach somebody the way you feel? The photographs are a product of my whole life. They're a product of the experience in Rome. They're, they're a product of the love I felt in my life. There are products of my own sense of loneliness. And unless you've experienced those things, I don't think you can really do what Lee Jeffries does. So now when I'm, I take a commission, for example, I still approach the commission with the same sense of love and authenticity, that I would a homeless person. So I have to get to know the person I have to be with the person first I have to I have to fall in love with them. I have to really connect with them spiritually and otherwise it doesn't work. I mean, I've done stuff for the mission, the status mission where they wanted me to photograph staff members, and it just didn't work. It just wasn't there was no authenticity there is too staged. It

was too wasn't spontaneous enough, it wasn't, it didn't really didn't work that way. So, but yeah, the images are, they help, they help on a macro level. And I think that's my mantra is if you want to help homelessness, if you want to, to try and contribute positively to the issue, then do so on a macro level, rather than a micro level, yes, you can give a few dollars or a few quid to a homeless person on the street. But it's the organizations like the mission that are there everyday for these guys that go out every night, and give them soup and a warm blanket, these are the people that make a difference. Every single day, these are, this is the macro way to hell, these are people that can save lives, literally save lives, and they did. And when these these homeless people are ready to come in, the mission is there with open arms come in, we've got a place for you. So, for example, Margo, if when Margo was ready, there was someone in Miami, there's an organization in Miami waiting for her to take her in and take her through a program to to get back to where she was she wanted to be, but they got to one to these homeless people that you they need to make that decision themselves. It comes to somebody doesn't come to others.

 James Geering 51:40

So you have a very unique lens, where like you said, you weren't self confessed, altruistic prior to this experience, then you find yourself within the homeless community. I think a lot of us when we were younger, you know, the tendency is to, to see homeless as almost like a nuisance, you know, and again, that what's wrong with you get a job kind of mentality. And then you mature and you realize, Hey, these are human beings. And it's not what's wrong with you. It's what's happened to you. So as you have these in depth conversations, you connect to these people's souls. What was some of the common denominators you started seeing about some of these men and women's background that led them to this place of desperation?

 52:27

I mean, I don't think there's any commonality at all, I mean, I think the, the way these people end up on the street is just so diverse. And for so many different reasons. Homelessness is a very complex problem for for the people involved. And for societies that are whole to deal with. Skid Row, a lot of a lot of the guys down on Skid Row. If you're if you're asking me for a common denominator, a lot of the guys are, they always used to sit late, this is temporary, I'm only here, I'm just passing through. But then I'd go back two years later, and they still be there. And then five years later, they'd still be there. There's there's never there never seems to be a loss of hope to get back to where they want, where they think they should be. But there's there's always seems to be a disjoint to them getting there. There's always seems to be a barrier that prevents them getting from just being just passing through. And I don't know what those reasons are. And, you know, I can guess and but it's just the why why these people end up there is Margo, for example. She She was famous porn star just drifted into drugs and then took his took his toll. Many, many guys just lose their jobs. breakdowns of relationships, find themselves lonely like I was, but they don't have an avenue, like I did with photography, to to vent, their sense of loneliness. And then those guys tend to drink maybe our first 10 terms once once they're drinking. They can find themselves homeless pretty quickly. And then they get preyed on by the gangs that inhabit these places. So Skid Row is it's just the drug problems endemic it's just once you in that situation. It's very difficult to to break free, I guess.



J James Geering 55:01

An analogy I talk about a lot is the preschool. You know, we're now basically toddler age, you look in a room of preschoolers, none of those children are dreaming of becoming a porn star and of those children of dreaming of becoming an addict of homeless, you know, a gangbanger. So this is what really kind of irks me about the judgment element of a lot of people and their view of home homeless, especially when love these people visit holy places every Sunday, for example, and are reading kindness compassion, acceptance, you know, community and then come out and you know, step over homeless people that get to their their car. But,

i 55:42

but what's worse than that, what's worse than that James is when these people go to places like skid row, and then training, indoctrinate their own sense of faith on the community. And I found that particularly Galen, because these people will go down, and they won't, they will go down with with a carload of food. And they won't give them the food until they've actually done a sermon, or some kind of preach preaching to them, and then made them sing in line before the food is dished out, and that's just, there's just craziness to me, I just don't understand that. But go on. Sorry.

J James Geering 56:21

No, I agree with you, by the way, actually, I was. I was interested in a an organization that volunteers as firefighters in Africa, but the prerequisite is you have to go and spread Christianity while you're there. And I was like, oh, okay, so we're not actually doing it just purely out of the goodness of our hearts, there's a ulterior motive, so I kind of lost interest. Because, for me, personally, that wasn't what I wanted to do, I just wanted to take my skill set as an American responder, and maybe help equip and train some people overseas. But with these paths, there are people that have very, very traumatic early lives. And by chance, by mentor, ship by, you know, whatever it is, they're able to navigate and still, you know, stay in their homes and hold down a good job and start a family, etc, etc. But there are some people that just don't know, they can't. And so what I see as a common denominator, and this is more through obviously, the conversations, it's not like I'm constantly surrounded by the homeless, but that the the Genesis the origin story is trauma, you know, and in a society that prohibits the use of drugs, and you will be thrown in jail, if you are using drugs, you know, you look at the way our system is set up, it is not designed to raise people up that are hurt, that have fallen, you know, you go to prison, there's not, you know, we don't have a great recidivism rate. In the UK, in America, our prisoners don't come out rehabilitated, most of the time, they usually come out, you know, worse than they went in a lot of times, you know, they can access drugs, they may become more violent, when they when they leave, they're kind of out the back door and say, Alright, well, good luck. And that's a, you know, an easy road to homelessness as well. So what I see coming from a simply kindness and compassion lens, is a lot of these people, if we reach them in time, as you said, are trying to navigate, but no one's given them the map, no one's actually held their hand and say, let me help you. You know, so you look at some of these other countries that do very well in that area. There are there are social programs that are set up, and we look at that as like, oh, handouts, you know, people are just gonna want more, you're always gonna get the people that want more, with the very poor and the very rich, you know, we have a whole spectrum of people that are very selfish, but you just shut the program bounce, and no one has it, would you go well, that we're always going to have the people that

abuse the system, but 80% of the homeless population will actually benefit from these programs. So that's, that's what I see when I you know, when I do get to speak to some of these people, some of the people on the on the show were homeless, and now they're firefighters or you know, all kinds of other professions. But it was the trauma, it was that that early childhood experience that really was the genesis and if no one kind of entered their life that had a positive effect. A lot of these people just go further and further and further down.



59:18

So I mean, it goes back to what I was saying earlier, I mean, yeah, I think we were a product of childhood and we, we develop our lives develop based on based on things that have happened to us and you know, I don't I don't profess to be an expert by any means in in, in this subject. But I just know from my own sense, my own life, my own story, that everything when I live by now 52 years old, everything that is that has happened to me is definitely been influenced by the first 18 years of my life. For the photographs that are taken in the homeless people are me, I'm not digging into their trauma, this is not what I'm trying to do this is I'm connecting on a on a just a human level, it's just, it's just two human beings connecting, wouldn't wouldn't ordinarily connect. Now there's a stigma stigma with homelessness, to 90% of the population, they're frightening. And they're frightening because they, a lot of them manifest their homelessness, with the trauma that they they feel in a felt. So whether that's with drug use, or with psychiatric problems. Places like skid Skid Row are notorious. notoriously dangerous for the normal person. Yes, they are dangerous places. And, you know, they, there are gangs and all sorts of things, but you go there as a human being. And you know, I used to walk there with a camera strapped to my shoulder, and I had no trouble whatsoever, of like, 10 years, 10 years of going there. It just shows that if you go to these people, and you walk towards these people, instead of keeping a distance between them, you give them a path, like you said, give them a pathway to a connection, instead of being frightened of the person, then it's just all about human beings connecting, it is connecting on a human level. And once that connection is made, then beautiful things can happen. progress can be made. And this is why I support the charities so much because they're the guys that move forward towards these people. They're the they're the connection, they're the link between. They're the only link. When it comes down to it, they are the only link that they've got. Because the family for families aren't there for them. You don't get 1000 The Jeffrey's going down into Skid Row and making a difference. And just one man I can only do what I do. So yeah, it's trauma is yes, it's a it's a big element of, of why people find themselves there. But we need to as as non homeless people and just ordinary people, we perhaps just need to look back at our lives and, and take a more compassionate view.



James Geering 1:03:01

Absolutely. Well, you spoke about human connection, something that I've talked about on here. It's amazing how you can connect even as we are now. So we're what two and a half 1000 miles away from each other. But with the beautiful side of technology, some of these deep conversations, you know, you really are able to connect with someone else's soul. And there's many, many interviews that I've stayed good friends with people that came on. One of those people was Josh Brolin, who's a mutual friend now. So you've started, you know, the photography side, you're now you know, publishing your art. Talk to me about how you met Josh, and that interaction.



1:03:40

I can't even remember how I met Josh, that was honest, honest, James, I just cannot remember how we met. It was it was a number of years ago. And I think he just, he just followed me on Instagram. And I was obviously flattered that Josh had followed me and he just kind of looked at some of my images. And I think I think I sent him a message. And then to my, to my astonishment, he sent me one bag. And I didn't really expect anything. And then we just started to have a conversation and we just seem to connect, he seemed to understand the conversation that we've had today. He seemed to understand me without actually having the conversation. So he, it was almost like he knew me. And then when I explained and you know, I'd gone into the conversation that we've had, and then that's when he really it was a lead Jeffrey's found and I guess, if you like if we really understood the person and yeah, he's just been so I mean, the guy is just a beautiful man. I can't expect he goes out of his way. To help people, he walks towards people, not away from people. He's not afraid to hit use his influence for the common good. Even if you take shit for it, sometimes he'll still he's, he's a man of principle. He's a man of love. And every time I look at him and Catherine, when he pulls pitches together, it just is that that relationship, the way she holds him the way he loves her. It's, it's me, it's, it's me back 15 years ago is may that be do anything go anywhere, kind of love. So I look at it with fondness look at it with a sense of hope. I look at it. And then you know that it could happen to me again, it could really, it could work. So I think that's what we are looking for. I mean, when I first looked at Josh's Instagram, it was about him and caffeine it was, it was an I felt it. I didn't I didn't look at it, because he's just rolling a movie star. I was looking at it because he found that that thing that I was looking at, I was searching for that thing that was driving me out onto the street, he found that thing that I'm looking into strangers eyes for. And I think that's that's how I connected with him. And that's how we started to talk. And that's how, you know, I'd send him a piece and he would love the piece. And then eventually he agreed to to write the foreword for my book, and he's done so many other things subsequently, it's just what the PC wrote for the book is just beautiful. It's just, I couldn't have asked for anything more pertinent. And, Josh, I tell him all the time, every time I speak to him, I said, I always say to him, I owe you so much. And this is what you've done for me. I just cannot repay you done out of the goodness of your heart. And I will forever be grateful. And I always will. And Josh, if you're listening to this, I love you, man. And you're the absolute best.



James Geering 1:07:29

It really isn't. You know, we did this first interview, like I said, kind of carried on talking became friends. He wrote the foreword for my book as well. And again, I always tell people, the most embarrassing thing is after the foreword, we're with Josh's beautiful writing, then you have to read my writing. And on the audio book, you have this you know, Hollywood voice and the writing the foreword, and then you have my squeaky English voice doing the rest of it. But this people don't understand the here's the good news for everyone listening. He is finally written a book that he's been wanting to write for a long time and he just told me that he's he's sold it and it's going to come out so people you know, the average person now will get to really experience what you and I have seen with with the word Smith that he is I mean, yes, he was in the Goonies when we were young. And that was cool. And you know, he actually came on during what they call the summer of Brolin, which is the Avengers movie and Deadpool two and 1000 other things that he had going on and still came on the behind the shield podcasts with this firefighter that had a tiny audience. But I am so excited for that side of him. And he was a

volunteer firefighter when he was younger when he was in Hollywood. You know, but His written Word is it's incredible. And it's the kind of thing I would never try and emulate. But he has his own unique lens on the world through art through word and through his acting.



1:08:50

It feels on a human level. He he's writing his his human is based on experience. And it's based on love. And it's based on you know, his life. And I think he did mention that he was doing the book, so I didn't realize it was it was complete. So yeah, I'm sure. I'm sure I'm gonna be buying my copy. And I'm sure it'll be a best seller. So wonderful. Wonderful to hear.



James Geering 1:09:17

Yeah, absolutely. Well, I want to get into some of the other you know, I hate the word celebrity, but you know, well known people that you just worked with. But prior to that, you know, you've talked about this loneliness. You talked about the pursuit of that, that love that you felt so deeply with the woman in LA. You've got this, this trauma from early life kind of when did that manifest in your adult kind of timeline?



1:09:44

It wasn't until my sense of loneliness really. I mean, what drove me artistically wasn't until I met the person. It was that love. It was feeling a love that I'd never felt before in my life. And then suddenly being without that love. And then the periods where we were part. So I guess how old was I 3534. So it took that long. Because for 30 years of my life, it was all about me, it was all about me being an accountant, it was all about me being my uncle, I was gonna be nothing other than my uncle. And I was going to have my own accountancy practice. And I was going to drink pins in the summer. And that was me, that was my life mapped out. Then I met this person, and she had a compassion for the people. And we are the product of the people we meet, as well. I mean, everyone we met in our life always leaves a part of them with us. And her part that she's left for me, is it significantly shaped the rest of my life. And I, it was about 3435, when things changed, and that sense of loneliness, and that sense of contemplation of my childhood really started to happen. I mean, the contemplation of, of the trauma of my childhood and the, the tooing, and froing is not, I think the older you get, and the less runway you have in front of you, the more you tend to reflect on the runway that you've you've just left behind. I think that's a natural thing for, for a man a person or a human being, to, to contemplate, you know, in your 20s and 30s. That path is just stretched stretched out before you and you don't even think about what's happened. You don't think about trauma because you're too concentrated on the here and now. Which is perhaps why Josh has written a book now, not 20 years ago, or 30 years ago, it takes time for these things to develop, simmer. And really, to create something beautiful, is not something that happens overnight. So the impatient student photographer that contacts me now on wants it there, and then I just smile and just think you have to wait you have to be patient, you have to work a lifetime to get truly, truly to a position where you're producing something that's, that's meaningful and authentic.



James Geering 1:13:00

So with your own journey, where was the the lowest place that you found yourself in, in those years after? And then what were some of the tools aside from photography that you use to bring yourself back up?

 1:13:14

Gosh, that's a difficult question. It's, I wouldn't say I wouldn't say I felt any lower than I felt when I'm, I'm out on the street. But I'm at my happiest.

 1:13:31

So when I'm out on the street, and I'm looking into strangers eyes,

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I cannot explain that sense of loneliness and how empty I feel. And how how much personal relief I feel when I feel that emotion is someone else. It's almost like an antidote, an immediate antidote. So it's not the photography as such, that's, that's a tool to yes, that's that's a way of communicating and documenting, documenting the actual process. But the tool that I'm using is, is this, this sense of loneliness this, this friend kind of walks with me every single day and still does. And it becomes I don't know why as loneliness is so hard to explain, but sometimes I'll sit and listen to classical music just in tears in a complete state of loneliness, but never be happier. It does that make sense?

 James Geering 1:15:02

Yes. It's the kind of paradox of light and dark.

 1:15:06

Yeah, it just, I can sit there and just be in tears sat on my own in the dark and but revel in the in the sadness you to even think about it in into I can't even explain why I've never even thought to explain why just something I feel or maybe it's those those times that a man I mechanism to get through to, to get just to just to get through the day just to feel that sadness and feel the elation of that sadness. And then that gets me through another evening. I mean, Christmas is a new years are completely awful for me. It's just I hate New Year's, it's just terrible. But yeah, it's I mean, there's no particular mechanism. It's just a, it's just a process of Wi Fi and just, and just absorbing and just, and just just being and just rolling with it and, and accepting the fact that there's this sense of loneliness that I felt since I was a kid. The sense of abandonment, the sense of no one's going to love me is, is something that's always going to be part of my life. It's not something that's just going to go away. I guess I've just learned to walk with it. As it walks with me. It's become, it's become a friend.

J James Geering 1:16:46

Well, you mentioned that you were a father now. So was there a relationship that you thought was the thing and then it wasn't the thing? Yes, I

 1:16:54

guess there was, but it was just those things happen, don't they? It's just not something that you were in relationships are so hard to explain. It's just the felt on such different. I mean, you're married now. Yeah.

J James Geering 1:17:16

Yeah. So I've been divorced and married again. So yeah, I've been through the lows and the highs and my second marriage is absolutely what we're talking about. It's it's the soulmate hands down. But the first marriage, I have my son, so I've got no regrets. The marriage itself wasn't great, but I got a beautiful little boy. So again, kind of a little,

 1:17:35

I mean, my little girls everything to me, my you see, if you see my Instagram posts, I, I leave little notes for her, you know, when she needs them. So I just leave a little message. So one day in a life when, you know, maybe I'm gone and my Instagram was still there, she can go to those messages, and she will read them and she'll just think, you know, Daddy, Daddy was that he was good. He was a good man. He was a good daddy. And he left me these notes. And so I just leave leave one every now and again, just to just throw it out there. So yeah, she's she's my world. I mean, if it wasn't, I mean, that's another mechanism. That's another way I call BS just which will bring us on to the Metallica thing. I guess it's you know, she's 10 now. So for 10 years of my life, I've thrown myself into her as well. So it's just been about it's been about just living just the photography. I've not done many photography projects in the last 10 years. But a lot of it came early URL before Francesca, so it's too cold. I guess I've just thrown myself into bringing her up and just watching her grow and just being being the best that I can be. Just be be the dad that I never had. You know, my dad was there Saturday, but I don't have a relationship with him now. It's not like he wants a relationship with me. It's just I don't want that with my daughter. I want my daughter to be a daddy's girl. We look at daddy in Nola. He's he's he's a rock. He's there. And I love it with all my bones. She's just the best thing.


J James Geering 1:19:35


Yeah, well, I can relate. Like I said, I've got I got one as well. He's almost 16 So a little bit older. But yeah, I mean, that's, that's where 99% of my soul has been invested into for the last 16 years so I can relate 100%

 1:19:48


Totally. And when you're a parent, you just know there's just no love like you can't explain it.


You can't. You can't articulate it. You can't do anything other than just say is there


 James Geering 1:19:58
is a constant episode don't think


 1:20:00
it's the most beautiful love you've ever felt in your life.

 James Geering 1:20:04
100%

 1:20:05
kind of love is so different. You know, it's not that. I mean, it is that go anywhere, be anywhere, but it was, you know, when you when you when you fall in love with a person and you just get on a plane just to be with them. How exciting is that? How have a live do you feel when that happens? And yeah, I mean, maybe one day,

 James Geering 1:20:29
I believe I really do. Like I said, it took me um, I've been married with my wife now for just over 10 years. So it was a little younger than you. But my sister, for example, she just met the love of her life. I think it's been three, maybe four years ago. So she is four years younger than me. So she would be oh my goodness, making myself do math now. 4541. And they had a little boy when she was 42. I think 42 or 43. And then they're trying for one more. So you know, when we have this timeline that we're told, oh, you should have married by this age and kids done by this age. You know, I mean, Josh, for example, he's still knocking out babies as 50s

 1:21:17
He's older than me and he's still knocking out baby.

 James Geering 1:21:19
Exactly. So I believe you know, that incurable romantic, that you are that that person is out there because I've lived it. I've been with some some great people. You know, my last one definitely was a lesson in a lot of things that I didn't want in a relationship. And my current one is phenomenal. And it's not, you know, Disney movie, we argue sometimes that we knock heads occasionally. But that is my soulmate hands down. So having been through the journey that I've been through, you know, I, I always hope that someone will believe enough to open

their heart for the right one to come along. Because when they do, it is phenomenal. You know, they literally, you know, yeah, it's, it's it was that love at first sight pretty much with her. And, you know, 10 plus years later, we're still like to school kids, you know, my heart still skips a beat when I'm in the store. And I come around the corner and see her. So



1:22:16

you too.



James Geering 1:22:18

So I believe Lee, I believe. All right, well, you you touched on Metallica. So let's gonna go down that road now. You



1:22:28

the boys, water water bowls. This is being last October. Out of the blue. I get a phone call from New York. So I picked my phone up. And it's New York calling. Who the hell is calling me from New York. Nobody calls me from New York. So I didn't answer the phone if I'm not answering. And within two minutes, I'd had an email from my writer who is the manager of Metallica. From headquarters in he must have been I think he lives in New York. Anyway, he says says on the email Lee. We love your work. We're interested in in exploring the possibility of you doing some portraits of the band, would you can they get back to me? I nearly fell off. But yeah, no way. This is this is a winder. This is not this is not happening. And I'm so excited. I couldn't couldn't contain myself. So I I called him stay back. And yeah, he. He said, we're we're doing a new album. And we'd like and the guys would like particularly for you to do the through the politics. You are their number one choice. I say really? Yeah. He said are all the people that have been put forward? The guys love your work the most? I went oh my okay. I didn't take much convinced I said yeah, I'll do it. But I couldn't have a chat with you. He said, I'll put you in touch with the creative director and you can have a chat through what what is required. So he did he put me in touch with the creative guy. And David, he called he called me from San Francisco. And we had a over the next two or three days we had something like five or six conversations. And each one of those conversations I stress to him that yes, I would take the job, but only on one condition that the guys would have to do it the way I do it. You know I'm not going to turn up with a big Entourage is just me my camera. And we go out on the street and we have a walk and we we get to know each other. But I want them to go on the street work in a place that I'm comfortable with that where I know the light well I know the people where I know that community so, you know, if I'm gonna photograph these guys in San Francisco or LA has to be, you know, in the, you know, in the Tenderloin in San Francisco, it has to be in. Outside in LA doesn't matter where it was in the Tenderloin was it that was always my request. So David came up to me and said, yes, the guys, I've got no problem with that they'll work with you. I mean, this is Metallica. This is like, the biggest Bob blood band on the on the planet, and they want to do it my way. They're not questioning. I mean, what does that say about the guys? What does that say about how much they trusted me, and what they believed in what I did, and how much they felt. From my images. I mean, it's just an amazing sense of trust they placed with me, it was just incredible. So we went on to David with no one went on to talk about timeframes. This is this is the end of October. So I had to be there, beginning of November. And

I had to turn the images round within a week. So the designers can have it for the album. I have no idea. We're about the on the on the album, this these images were going to be they just said they were going to do politics, I know, kind of visualization on how they were going to be used. David just said to me, Lee, just do do what you do, when he knew full well, how he's going to use them. But he just he just wanted me to do what I do and not be constrained in any particular way. Which was great, because that worked. Because like I said before, in the conversation that when you're when I'm directed is not really doesn't really work. So I flew to LA. And the first guy I met was Rob. And we were shot in LA The following morning. So I got to LA I think it was on a Wednesday night. Not Tuesday. I forget which night anyway, I got I got to LA spent the night in the hotel didn't sleep one bit. I had jet lag, like you wouldn't believe and I was just looking at the ceiling all evening. All night, not not not a single minute of sleep. So I get a and I don't use the breakfast and I had to eat breakfast that morning. Otherwise, I've never survived. And I met Robin. He was he was on his way from I think Santa Monica way. And it was like pouring down in in Beverly Hills where I was. And I was so worried about the light. And Rob knew that I was worried about the light because I conveyed that to David on the conversation earlier that morning. And novels phoned me saying Lee, we can always come back here when I pick you up. So this is like, you know, Rob bass player for Metallica helping me to get the shoot done. He was just totally going out of his way. Anyway, he ended up turning up and just the clouds broke. And it was great. And there's enough light and we did the shoe. And I was so nervous. And it before I took the job, I just thought I'm gonna take this job and just see if I can do it or not, I probably not be able to do it, I'll probably not produce something that they they like, but I'm going to go. I'm going to step out of my comfort zone and I'm just going to do it anyway. If they don't like it, that's what I've not lost anything. They may have lost some time. But I guess they were willing to take that risk. So after that first year with Rob, I knew I was killing it. I absolutely knew. The images I have of Robert are just sensational. And I've got I've got more I just can't use them at the minute. And then that afternoon, I flew to San Francisco and then got settled in the hotel and the hotel they put me up in in San Francisco who was just beautiful. It was just amazing. I just felt like a complete Rockstar. I had a big suite. It was just it was just epic. And the night was the night I arrived. I was due to meet laws in the morning. And then I then I was in the hotel last cold me and he was so it was kind of it was probably mean he was kind of nervous about what was going to happen. And you could tell that he was he was driving this thing he was he was the artistic driving force behind getting me to do this job. So he was really inquisitive on how it would go and he was super friendly but super encouraging. He wanted it to work Kenny would do anything for to work. So I met him in the morning, we got into a car we drove to drove around. And then I found a spot where the the light was beautiful. And we got out of the car and we just saw some photos. And then we had a walk. And then we took some photos in some other places, then we had a walk and a coffee. And it was just like, what I do on the street, it was just like, being my normal way. Jeffrey's street photographer selfie, you know, he could have been a rock star, he could have been a homeless person, it affects these guys were just normal people they weren't, you know, you think of Metallica as some kind of gods, but that, that beautiful, normal, responsive, human beings, that they feel like we do that, that that love light we do that have all the same emotions that we do. And it's, it was just amazing to connect with him in that way. And to connect with the other guys. Rob was Kirk was no, it was James that afternoon after last. And James was just, it was amazing. It's just so cruel to me. And subsequently, all the guys had been very well going into that. And then the last one, the next day was curved. So I got all the shots and had to get back. I wanted to stay in LA a bit longer. But I had to, I had to get back and saw solve the images out to actually create the images and get them over to them. So I said to David, the design guy that I'm going to give you four images, and these are my recommendations, I'd prefer if you make the release, make it the suggestions to the get to the guy that these are my recommendations. So he says to the he takes the images, and he goes into meeting with the

four guys. And the first thing James says before Davidson anything, are these the recommendations of late? And David said, yes, they are. And he said, That's pretty enough for me. And that was it passed.



1:32:14

They were that was that was all that was required. So they obviously I mean, it was a few chewing and throwing on some of the images. But you know, it was they love them. And I love them. And I think what I produced was authentic. It tells a story, it tells the story that they wanted wanted to tell 72 seasons, it's about the album itself is about, you know, the first years of our childhood and how it forms is and our own sense of vulnerability and humaneness. And I think that's what they wanted to portray. And I think that's what they do it. It tells a story of where they've been where they are now. And David knew exactly what he was going to get from me. And the way it appears in the album is just, it's just stunning, the way that the whole, it was really, the synergy of the whole meeting was just incredible. And just to re emphasize that point, I sent James a copy of my book at Christmas. And on the signature page, I just wrote a passage without darkness, there is no light. And, and this was just something that I felt within, you know, within me that was just something. So he gets the book of Christmas intense sends me a text message said Lee, I've just opened the book. And it's it's almost like a God moment. So I send a reply, what do you mean? And he said, Well, those are the lyrics from one of the songs on the album. And I'm like, Oh my god. Really? Yeah, he said, chasing light is is those are the limits. I haven't got a clue. And this is just me just trying to make something nice in the signature page. So the whole experience has been kind of really a beautiful synergy. And it's almost like it was meant to be. It was just, it's like one of those things in life that I didn't chase. They came to me. Obviously, they knew what they wanted. But it's fit together so well in the images are so beautiful. And then when the tour started, they had me out in Paris. So that was the first two concerts that I did in Paris and it was the first time I did concert photography and again, it was so when I got back from doing the the album pulse rates, what the biggest take that I got from doing it was one always answer your phone, never don't answer your phone, and then two is actually capable of doing this kind of stuff. It really, it really gave me a sense of wildly you can do this and you're killing it. And it is actually, it's beautiful work. And all the responses is to the, to the images. But since the album come out I've been, there's some negative, but there's always some idiot that's just gonna say, for the sake of it just internet warriors and but that the feedback that I get is for the images are really well received and it's just, you know when someone says send you an email and say these are the best images of the bundle I've ever been shocked, then you think to yourself, wow, I can do this, I am capable of doing this. And yeah, it was. It was amazing. And then to help me out in Paris and do the concert photography and just be around a bee on the inside of the veil. And just get all that inside access and be talking to James and last when they first saw me for them to come up to me and hug me and and really mean it. And to the point now where I'm going to Sweden next week to do the the concert in Gothenburg to both concert and then I'm fingers crossed, I'm going to be doing all four venues in August in the States. So I'm going to take the whole of August that just fee and Metallica Metallica photographer,



James Geering 1:36:37

what are the four cities here?



1:36:40

New York, and then there's Montreal, and then Texas, and then LA. And they go on to Arizona in September. But I don't think I'll be able to take that much time off. Still in accounting, so I still got to get that word. And so I'm gonna take the whole of August and just do those is two concerts in each venue. So it's there's no repeats. So it's like they say there's no repeats. So the setlist is completely different each now. And yeah, so that's eight concepts. So I'm just just to be there just to be on the inside and just to be part of this addictive. It's so addictive, James. It's just what a buzz I get. It's I'm alive. I'm creatively at the best I've ever been for years. That is ignited a sense of purpose. It's in that ignited just just something inside me that says, right, let's go again, let's go again. And it's just, I just want to get to this the sweetest concert and just kill it again. And I mean, I've got so many images that I have in the bank that I just can't release yet because we just don't know what we're doing with them. And it's just, it's just evolving as it goes. And it's a really great process. And I'm just, there isn't a day that I'm not. I don't think to myself, I am so blessed to be in this position. How lucky am I? And I honestly feel I am lucky. I honestly feel incredibly fortunate to to be in a position where 1000s of photographers would kill to be to be in that same situation and suddenly, let alone me from Bolton finds myself following Metallica round on the World Tour. How cool is that?



James Geering 1:38:42

That's amazing. It's fun. I saw some of the videos of the behind the scenes with James Hetfield is smoking a cigar bad to go on, you know, and you're there right right next to him. What's really striking though, to me, is you start with these incredible pictures of human beings that happen to be homeless, some of whom addiction is in their their story, then you find yourself working with human beings that happen to be some of the biggest rock stars on the planet, who addiction is also part of their story. You know what I mean? So it goes back to that mentor ship and that who was there to raise you up and you know, were you able to pour yourself into a guitar or a bass or you know your vocals and you know there but but by the grace of God go I think back to that preschool full of kids. Some of them became Metallica. Some of them died in a dumpster. You know what I mean? And this is what I see as a first responder is human beings, what happened to you not what's wrong with you? So the contrast between the socio economic status of some of the people on the street and Metallica is is night and day, but the humanity that you capture in your pictures shows the commonality between all these men and women that you got on film?



1:39:59

Yeah, I think that's I think that's the the synergy. That's why it worked. So well. I mean, I'm the I'm the communicator of that humaneness, I guess. And I think that's the thing that's coming across in the images that I'm shooting is they're they're not like anything they've had before. They're the sole human in the orientation and their approach, which is why we're still kind of thinking on, on the which way, we're gonna go with the way that I do this. So it's, yeah, I mean, for James, James to say, it's a godlike moment. I think he, he recognizes that fact to he recognizes what you're exactly what you've just said. He sees and I know, particularly James and last seeing my work that humaneness and that, that, that tactile element of getting back

the band getting back to the basics, and not being abandoned. I'm the the avenue to get in there. From a from a visual perspective, if you like, and I think you know, the portraits that I've shot and you know, photograph some shooting, go some way to doing that.

J James Geering 1:41:28

No, absolutely. Which is why it's moved. You know, Josh Brolin, again, 3000 miles away via social media. And it's why I, I forget exactly how the connection was made if he shared one of yours. And then I started following, but obviously you and I connected and we spoke a while ago. And here we are doing the interview, which is phenomenal. We're doing this audio only. So some people are going to be familiar with your work, some aren't. So obviously, we'll get to your social media stuff. But you have two beautiful books, lost angels and homeless. So firstly, talk to people about where they can find the books, purchase the books and find your other work online. Or the

 1:42:05

books themselves. The first book last angels was sold out. years ago. So last angels is complete, I don't even have a copy of that. The only book available now is portraits. And that's available for my website. Just Google Lee Jeffries. And the Jeff is portraits. And you'll find my my book available there. It's a deeply human book, it's an emotional book, it's become more to the people that own it is become more than more than about gates become a reference for their own sense of humanity, their own lives, it becomes you relate to the book in a deeply personal way. The people in the in the book reminds you of people in your own life, the stories are deeply touching. foreword, written by Josh. And it's just a beautiful thing to write. It's a beautifully human thing to own. And I would encourage you to just take a look.

J James Geering 1:43:18


And what's the website for people to find that?

 1:43:21

[www li hyphen jeffries.co.uk](http://www.li-hyphen-jeffries.co.uk).

J James Geering 1:43:26

Beautiful. Well, that is your book. I'd love to throw some quick closing questions at you if that's okay. Out. So first, is there a book written by someone else that you love to recommend? It can be related to our discussion today? Or completely unrelated?

 1:43:44

Oh, I'm not really. I'm not really a reader in that respect. So I don't kind of I don't read a lot of

books. I'm not that way. I've never been that way. I guess. I'm a visual person. And for me growing up and I used to escape into movies. Which is why I guess a lot of my images or my images, my photographs are cinematic. They are a cinematic experience in a single frame. So I'm particularly if I was going to I'm not going to recommend a book but I can recommend movies that move me and you know, a particular movie or genre that moves me the Malick Terrence Malick Malick movies. Now I've been fortunate enough to work with talents. A few years ago he sent me a camera and I did some footage for his movie The voyage of time. And his movies are just just embody everything about humanity that I believe in. I mean, you look at the movie. To the wonder, a love story. It seems to that movie scene. to describe my life and the way I view things, it's exactly the role my experience the love is just just a beautiful movie.

 James Geering 1:45:17

So the last question for you make sure everyone knows where to find you on social media, what do you do to decompress?

 1:45:25

Printing to see my images in print is amazing. For me. It's just the most gratifying process to actually take an image, shoot an image and then print it yourself and sit there and just contemplate the image in front of you. So when I've gone through the whole process, I can just sit there and just relax and just, wow, I did that. That's just and have it there in front of me. And that's

 James Geering 1:46:07

Metallica. I'm assuming that's Metallica.

 1:46:10

Yeah, that's step firms. So for me to be able to sit there and just just ponder that I was capable of doing something like that credibly therapeutic, incredibly relaxing. And that's how I was spending my time then spending time with my daughter. That's been to just been to Disney. So spending time with my daughter at Disney. I love I love being there with her.

 James Geering 1:46:42

Was that Euro Disney? Europe? No, Orlando. Oh, really? You would just hear my I'm like an hour from Orlando here. And

 1:46:52

there was the guy's name from Seattle's Gospel Mission, Jeff.

J James Geering 1:47:00

Okay, brilliant.

i 1:47:03

He was the CEO of Seattle's Gospel Mission. And he's the guy who moves towards people. He is He taught me that expression move towards rather than move away. When I first became involved with the mission, he was the one that took the chance he was the one that wanted to embrace what I did. And when you go through your life as an artist, and as a photographer, not many people are willing to take chances on you and you need those people. So you need the people like Josh Brolin. You need the people like Barbara in Italy, that took a chance on me, too. When I had my exhibit in Milan. You need the people like Giovanni, who had you gave me my first exhibition in in Rome. And you need the people like, like Jeff, the CEO of the CEO of Seattle's Union Gospel Mission, who see you and see your work for what it is on a human level. And Jeff is the most human person that I've ever met. And he did. You know, he helped me with some of the writing in the book. And if I if anybody in the world should come on and talk to first responders about their experience of pain, and trauma, Jeff seen it all he's, he's been there. He's been on the frontline for years. And incredibly compassionate man. Incredibly beautiful man. And yeah, he'd be my recommendation.

J James Geering 1:48:55

Beautiful. If you're able to help me connect, I would love to get him on. Yeah, sure. Definitely. Fantastic. All right. Well, then the very last question, if people want to follow you on social media, or reach out to you that way, where are the best places to find you?

i 1:49:11

And most of my social media stuff is on Instagram. So you'll find me at Lee underscore Jeffrey's saying on Facebook, Li Jeff is photographer. Twitter li underscore Jeffries. I think those are the main three. I'm not quite going to tick tock yet. I don't think you'll see me dancing. It's not it's not my kind of thing. But yeah, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. They're my main social outlets.

J James Geering 1:49:40

Brilliant. Well, Lee, I want to say thank you so much. It's been as you said, we've gone back and forth with with interviews for a few years, but it's never solidified. We finally sat down today, but I think the universe is crazy when when interviews finally pan out. It's always because they're supposed to and here you are now on the back end of the month. Calico experience as well, another entire chapter to discuss but, you know, leading us through your own kind of journey and trying to overcome some of the trauma and how that's mirrored in some of the men and women, these beautiful human beings that we, we see living on our streets. And then

you know, the other side of that with the musicians that you've got to work with. It's been an amazing conversation. So I want to thank you so much for being so generous with your time today is my pleasure.



1:50:26

Thank you, James. It's just been an honor to do the interview. And I'm glad we could get together and sort this out. And I hope all the listeners get something from it. And, you know, it's, I think the moral of my story is, be, be human, be compassionate and do things that that test you do things and take, take that leap of faith and wonderful things.