



I'm usually out and about with a camera, trying to document everything happening in the area and do promotions. I do both through True Light Photography, which is my business, but I volunteer a lot of my time to document and post events, businesses, and activities. I also run Florence Unlocked; we share any events that get people to go out and experience Florence. I'm usually taking videos and photos, posting on social media, or rambling about different things I've discovered or am interested in the area.

I've always been super interested in photography. One of the first things that stuck in my head was one of the early Florence After 5 events. The Woodys were playing, which I love the band anyway, so that was

already a reason to go out there. But, I thought to myself, I'll take my three-megapixel camera back in the day, which was like a Sony, and I can get some cool pictures and invite my friends to come along and try to get some portraits and crowds. Maybe see a few cute dogs, which is always a big draw for me. It turned out great. Everybody seemed happy with it. I got some comments on the stuff I posted, which spiraled into taking more pictures and looking for more and more events to check out.

I've been doing more video work, and it's interesting to get that into the studio afterward and try to sculpt the story. You always think of stuff afterward. You're like, oh, I should have done that differently. Or I should have gotten more pictures of food or more pictures of this or that. So right now, and it changes, I'm like a classical painter. I have phases, and there are early pictures of Florence After Five. I did HDR, which I now cringe at when I look at something like oh gosh, what was I doing? So you evolve, and all the things [Downtown Florence] does and all the different charities that do these events gives me a good ground to play in. Right now, video is the main thing I'm focusing on. Previously, it was drones and then stills, and then before that, I did HDR and every time I got a new piece of equipment. It's a great excuse to get out, play with it, learn it, and then move on to the next thing.

Volunteering to do this gets me out of the house, especially after COVID. It is important to have some work-life balance. Even though I seem very social, I am only social if I have a camera in my hand. People need to have a work-life balance to balance out their time at home, especially when working from home like I am at my day job, and actually get out to interact with other humans in real life face to face. So this is a great excuse to do that.

There is a big benefit to volunteering that people may not realize. Networking is a super important skill, and volunteering helps you interact with other people, not even just people working there or other volunteers, but some of the same people come to events and there are different crowds, so you know or have an idea about who you're going to see. So those people start recognizing you and knowing you and working with you, even in a volunteer situation. Then, when they have something they want to do, they know you're reliable; they can reach out to you, they know your skill set. They've seen what you do—photography in particular. People often post and tag others so they see your work and say, "Oh, that's cool. You get direct feedback with photography, so I can see the likes and shares of each thing and know what works or doesn't. So, it improves my skill set for what I love to do and what I'm passionate about. I think volunteering in a lot of situations makes me much happier. I find that most people have day jobs they may not love as much as they do volunteering. When you volunteer for something, you're not getting everything perfect or exactly right because there's not so much pressure. You're just contributing, and you can do your own thing and be happy, which is wonderful.

If you are on the fence about volunteering, observe first; you can follow Florence Unlocked and see all the events that are happening. Pick a couple, go hang out, talk to the people working there, and talk to other volunteers. Everybody's happy to help each other. We're a really good, strong community here. So there is no harm in going out and speaking to people. You can help in a lot of different ways, so whatever your skill set is, they can certainly find a place for it.

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