

ON // Learning New Things

ISSUE 1 of 3

“Repetition is knowledge and power.” - Skye Gyngell

Let that sink in for a minute.

As the Michelin-starred chef and hospitality queen puts so succinctly, experience counts, and determination to stick with a thing will eventually turn into competence and understanding, knowledge and power.

But sometimes brand new stuff shows up on your radar and you've got absolutely no idea where to start on a thing that you've never seen before. Like, say, a global pandemic, or a huge recession, or a closed border, or a stay at home order. At times like these it's natural to ask the people who do the same thing as you for ideas and help and direction, but that kinda focused 'silo' thinking can mean you start following each other over a cliff very quickly - just ask the stock market, lemmings, or anyone who wore jeggings in the early 2000's.

Instead, right now is a good time to zoom out, look around, and remind yourself that, while you may not know much about global pandemics, you do have a fantastic skill-set for dealing with New Things.

So here's a bunch of our favourite interesting friends on 'New Things'. Stop, breathe out, listen to them riff on all kinds of takes from their different walks of life and remind yourself that now's the time to put your knowledge and power into practice.

You've got this.

Bayly & Moore



Al Keating



Auckland-based A.K. is the CEO and creative leader of global coffee powerhouse Coffee Supreme. Steering a large multi-country coffee roaster (and occasional benchmark cafe founder) navigate the cut-throat waters of international bean buying/shipping/roasting/branding while staying at the forefront of every new hospitality direction, Keating also has a keen eye for smoked trout, fine brews, and a good piece of toast.

@coffee_supreme
@alkeating

How do you approach New Things?

I've always been into new things. Being a guy with a really short attention span, and someone who bores easily (not holes) it's suited me quite nicely. I don't enjoy repeating myself; whether it's a favourite recipe, a musical progression or my morning routine - it's almost like I'm compelled to try something different just for the sake of not doing it the same way again. Why would I do it that way again? I've already discovered that...! Instead, I see things as an opportunity to find a new method. The possibilities are endless, so I'm set for life. Frustrates many people in my life though, truth be told.

What's your current New Thing learning curve?

I know you're hoping this won't all be about #viruslife, but quite honestly, this COVID-19 business is the biggest learning curve that's ever been thrust on me (followed closely by learning to live with a woman who is right more often than I am).

It's ripped normal away from me - all my plans, the things I assumed would be, even myself and how I'm responding - washed away like a poorly-planned sandcastle in a freak wave. I'm learning a lot about my assumptions and defaults. Not just mine, but my generation's as well.

Our parents' generation built much of the way that we live and respond to the everyday, and this situation I'm learning is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be a part of a global reset on all of that. It's like two enormous tsunamis coming at us.

One is the virus, sweeping around the world and forcing us to carefully adjust - even if for just a short period of our lives. The second is the catastrophic result of the virus on our economy - our way of life. I feel like we are being separated into two groups: those who will fight to see things return to normal (or as close to it as possible), and the rest of us.

**“I believe the new way
will be dependent on our
collective contentment.
Contentment, after all, is
true sustainability.”**

This is the single biggest opportunity of our lives, and I'm having to ask myself some big questions before I jump into being a part of it. I'm happy to let the huge wave wash many of the things in my life away, leaving our generation to rebuild it into something we're proud of.

I'm a typical Gen-X'er - we complain about what we hate, but struggle to articulate what we love, or will fight for. Now, however, we have to be proactive about how we will contribute to rebuilding our culture, our economy, our communities, our businesses. It's exciting. This is my New Thing learning curve.

What's the biggest mistake you've made that's changed how you see New Things?

I've made countless mistakes. Some huge, many insignificant. My biggest mistakes have been the ones I've repeated, or the ones I could have avoided had I paid more attention to previous folly. I'm a risk-taker by nature. I've been accused of 'always landing on my feet'. This has given me stupid confidence in many situations. Sometimes I pull it off, winging it, and sometimes it's been a train wreck. One mistake I try hard to avoid is going into something ill-prepared. I also can't be f*cked measuring twice, which has caused a few avoidable blunder-cuts.

How do you know when it's time to ditch the old thing for the New Thing?

For me, it's time to ditch the old thing once I've finished it. And, there's nothing new, just different to last time. I really do believe that there are infinite ways to see something - a new idea, a new way, a slight variation or a totally different approach. Like I said - I get bored easily. However, new doesn't mean at a cost, or that the old needs necessarily to be wasted. I'd like to think of myself as a content guy. That seems like I'm contradicting myself now I know.

After COVID-19, I believe the new way will be dependent on our collective contentment. Contentment, after all, is true sustainability. The New Thing will be settling for the old - now there's a new idea.

Michael Antonia



Los Angeles-based M.A. is a serial entrepreneur, genius international DJ, the power behind Yeah Rentals, and roller-of-the-dice on multiple LA venues and schemes. In our experience, if you find something good in the world you'll be sure to discover Señor Antonia just under the surface.

@yeahrentals
@theflashdancedjs
@frankielosangeles
@missionroadstudio
@officepartyofficeparty

How do you approach New Things?

My move is always to talk it out. I have always been a bit quiet, a little shy, awkward... Coming up with little talking points has been my default defensive mechanism... don't know what to say? Talk about _____ so I tend to talk about the same thing over and over again and get different perspectives until I fully understand it and then I move on.

What's your current New Thing learning curve?

I always start with community. I feel like community is the answer to everything. So, at the moment, I am examining how a barter / cash free micro economy would work with my community. Everyone I know is craving human interaction and most people are cash poor... how do we get back to work with those 2 handicaps (or could we re-frame it as opportunities?)

What's the biggest mistake you've made that's changed how you see New Things?

I am quick to judge, and while I think that serves me more than it hinders, it has put me in bad situations. I feel as creatives we need, more than most things, to trust our instincts, but after we trust our instincts we need to go back and check our work (that is the part I often miss).

**“I always start with
community. I feel like
community is the answer
to everything.”**

How do you know when it's time to ditch the old thing for the New Thing?

I am bad at this. My head wants to drop the old thing and move on, but I am sentimental, and my heart makes me hold on to things (sometimes) too long. On the other side of that coin, I am primarily trained as a DJ, and the skill DJs trade in more than any other, is the ability to read the room, the timing to make a change without the audience even noticing (before they even knew they were ready for it). I have to remind myself that I have an abundance of creativity and where energy flows, attention goes... if I can bring myself to close a door, I know I can open another...

Greta Kenyon



Auckland-based G.K. is the founder and editor of world-leading wedding magazine Together Journal. A highly respected photographer before she got into the global publishing game, she now juggles everything from recruiting high-end advertisers, to styling shoots, managing deadlines, massaging printers, and shipping pallets of TJ's to the other side of the world.

@togetherjournal
@greta.kenyon

How do you approach New Things?

Well, heck, every day is bringing a new thing at the moment! I'm breaking things down into bite-size chunks and accessing my (hopefully never-ending) stores of eternal optimism. It's all about controlling the things I can control and being thankful for what I do have. The whole world is affected, and I feel incredibly privileged to be in New Zealand with a home that I can be locked down in; we must be strong, and we must act with grace. I don't feel like I even have a right to complain about the way things are at the moment.

I like to have several new projects bubbling away at once. Business and the digital world move so quickly, especially in times of change. This pandemic will open up new opportunities, especially around the way we will need to deliver content; we are already deep into working on this.

Seek out the right people in the right fields to work with if you want to succeed. Initially, I didn't have many contacts in media, and we had lower (read: non-existent) budgets, I couldn't always hire experts or partners. I made a few mistakes back in those early days trying to do everything myself and I worked myself completely to the bone. But because start-ups are so nimble it's easy and acceptable drop something that's not working and start on something new. Fail fast, learn from it and move on.

Once I have an idea in my head or a project on the go that I know is going to be successful I am like a dog with a bone and I can't rest until it's done. Business is hard! You have to have stamina and grit to push through. You basically need to be crazy-town addicted to your ideas, brand and work.

“I firmly believe you should not try and compete with other companies. To do so is to take your eye off your own goals and to waste much-needed creative energy”

What's your current New Thing learning curve?

I'm doing a lot on the digital side right now. Even before COVID19 struck it was our main focus for 2020. I have an incredible web developer who has been with me right since the launch of Together Journal and I started working with

a digital strategist in the middle of last year. We have been pushing our website and social channels to the next level. It's been a huge learning curve and one that I love. Working with dynamic people who you can learn from and be challenged by is empowering and inspiring. Passion and drive are contagious, so make sure you surround yourself with others who have it. Especially in times like this, it's great to have a positive team around you who are telling you they will stick by your side and do whatever it takes.

We are in the process right now of launching Together Journal virtual editions; they are due to go live this week! It's something we had planned to do later in 2020, but we have pivoted and pushed this project forward at break-neck speed to combat courier restrictions created by COVID-19.

What's the biggest mistake you've made that's changed how you see New Things?

In the early days, I accepted content or the odd ad that was not 100% the Together Journal vibe. If I was completely honest with myself I knew this in my gut but I pushed them through anyway because we needed the ad revenue or we had to make deadline. Now they will stare at me forevermore from the pages of early editions. Maybe I needed to do this a few times so I can always see these examples and remember not to do it again?

Picking the right people to work with is key. We are a small close-knit family at Together Journal. My team embodies the Together Journal brand and they really care about the product and the audience. Most of them have worked with me since day one, I trust them implicitly and they have all become wonderful friends. But I have made the odd mistake in the past. Balance can be disrupted so easily and it can be stressful having someone who is not right, it can take up time and drain energy.

I'm not sure where I get my stamina from. I have always been a very determined person (my parents would stay stubborn). I played a lot of rep netball growing up. This defiantly contributed to my drive to succeed and toughened me up. I have a competitive nature, although these days I am competing only with myself to become the best I can be and to drive my business to its full potential. I firmly believe you should not try and compete with other companies. To do so is to take your eye off your own goals and to waste much-needed creative energy, you must always stay focused on what you are doing and not be too sidetracked by others.

How do you know when it's time to ditch the old thing for the New Thing?

It's something you feel in your gut. To stay front of mind you need to be constantly listening to your market and reinventing.

New things can come in so many forms; collaborations, new channels, new projects. I re-invent at different rates, I often have a longer-term project I am working on behind the scenes but I can just as easily wake up one morning with a new idea and get straight onto doing that alongside other projects we have on the go. I think you have to be partly planned and partly impulsive to succeed.

I'm motivated by many things, my competitive nature and drive to succeed, the wonderful wedding community and my family.

I'm also driven by what we have achieved so far. The Together Journal brand, following, and community has become a force. I have no doubt in my mind that we will survive this period and come out the other side more resilient than ever. It does feel a little bit like we are back in 'start-up' mode again, but I console myself with the fact that we know what we are doing this time around, we have a brand, a following, we are wiser and as always I do love a good challenge.

Emma Case & Pete Smyth



Liverpool-based E.C. & P.S. are a powerhouse creative couple who started out as Rangefinder-awarded wedding photographers with a knack for documenting the glorious messiness of people in love, built a towering educational presence through their 'Welcome Home' workshops, founded the 'I Do Community' fundraising initiative, and are currently rolling the dice all over again with 'The RED Project' collecting historic fan stories of Liverpool FC.

@emmacasephotography
@idocommunity
@the_red_archive

How do you approach New Things?

There is inevitably a sense of trepidation, how will this work out? Are we doing the right thing? What the fuck are we doing?

For us and now more importantly for others too, the motivation is collaborating and being willing to learn, to not always have the answers. To be the beginner, to be open to creating in new ways, not always sticking to the same, pre-determined and known processes. i.e. not always about taking pictures. What can we learn from this, what does this tell us about ourselves and how will it benefit others.

What's your current New Thing learning curve?

Honestly, it's felt like a 4/5 year process for us, the need to return to the source, where our personal passions go hand in hand with our natural skill sets. We both come from a social care background. Before photography Emma worked in communication support with deaf adults, while Pete was a care worker with disabled children and young adults, What we've always known is that our main drive is to make things fair, equal and enabling for all.

In some ways it transpired through our photography work, especially in the way we shoot weddings, the way we place

value on the smaller things as well as the grand gestures, the sometime under-represented things, less spectacle, more ordinary. How will this feel in 20/30/40 years from now.

If you've met us, you'll know we can be very expressive in our emotions, sometimes annoyingly so! We cry a lot and until recently we hugged everyone a lot. So, the mantra seems to be, if you feel something, then you're on the right lines, whatever

**“Become your own rudder,
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that may be. It could be art, photography, social justice, education, enabling others. We want our work and our life to be about how it makes us and others feel.

What's the biggest mistake you've made that's changed how you see New Things?

In any form of work there is competition, but in any creative industry there always feels a slight nagging to over compare our lives with others, to not value the achievements we have made, both personal and business. To always be looking forward for the next thing, to improve the process, to plug the 'gaps' where we felt we weren't running a perfect business model, shooting exciting things, living an exciting life.

Sometimes you need to see those things to appreciate that it doesn't answer the questions you have. In the past we have experienced some of the elements of 'success' that a modern life promotes, and personally for us, it was never enough, it never leads to a sense of true fulfillment.

If anything has kicked us hardest in life, it is seeing those we love, get ill, or pass away, especially if it's before their time. It's always too soon, but when you've seen your family, friends and peers be taken too soon through illness or devastating accidents, you just take a moment to pause and reflect and finally give yourself the room to see your path, is this what I want? is this where I want to be, if my time came too soon would I be content? Current global events have really amplified those emotions, more than ever we don't want to devote time and energy to work or projects that don't fully reflect who we are, what we stand for and what we value.

How do you know when it's time to ditch the old thing for the New Thing?

It feels hard to articulate a feeling... I guess if ever the work or process becomes a chore or it's harder to motivate yourself, when you no longer thrive in the environment.

It has never been reinventing for the sake of something new, not because we fear failure or change, it's more about just knowing yourself, knowing that this thing you're invested in means something to you. The drive is still from a purposeful place. When that changes as it inevitably will, don't fear the change, follow your heart, follow the path that comes from within. It won't be simple, straightforward or easy. But it will be freeing, if you allow the outcomes to be unknown, let go of the need to control.

Take our current situation, transitioning from shooting full time weddings, and running workshops, speaking at conferences to creating a socially engaged project from the ground up. We never once sat down and thought "why don't we shake things up! Let's do something completely different" It was a natural shift, possibly we had achieved everything we ever wanted from the wedding industry? We also had a child 4 years ago, our priorities shifted, our instincts shifted, it was a little bit of survival mode, a bit of feeling like a new challenge and feeling out of step with our current world.

How could we feel engaged and fulfilled? How could we bring the elements of our world views, passions and create something engaging, enabling for others and personal all at the same time. The road is always varied, it will always throw curve balls in your path, and whatever way you saw the things pan out at the beginning? will inevitably, completely change as will you too.

Become your own rudder, have a set of true core values to you, to your life. Then whenever things change or crumble, you can return to the source for guidance.

Nadia Reid



Dunedin-based N.R. is one of Aotearoa's most treasured songwriters and at the forefront of a wave of genius NZ women providing a new kind of soundtrack to the world. Celebrated by the good people of NME, Pitchfork and Mojo Magazine as someone you should be timing your day by, Nadia has a keen eye for a melancholy story twist and is currently figuring out how to promote her brand new album 'Out of my Province' in the age of global lockdown.

@hellonadiareid

How do you approach New Things?

When I think of New Things, I think of people. I've always been very transient. I've moved almost every two years since I was 18 and freshly out of high school. In fact, I get itchy when I'm in the same place for too long. That's partly why I love touring so much. The newness of place, of people, and that sense of movement. I've also tried to maintain a childlike wonder about people, life, and nature since I was young. Observation. Making sure I always pay attention. But to be honest, it's becoming harder and harder as I've grown older. Is that growing older...? I would like to learn more...I would like to think less, remain more open, but learn more...

What's your current New Thing learning curve?

A month ago my band and I were preparing to tour my new record. After sitting on the album for 18 months, I had a strong desire to be on the road again and a new found inspiration to do This Thing. But here we are...the world changes fast. It always has. So, I've started to knit a puppy jumper, and I'm teaching myself rockabilly guitar on YouTube...I've had the same feeling in my chest that I had when the 2011 Christchurch Earthquake happened... it's not bad... it just is. If I don't read the news too much, this new found home-life makes me feel like I'm on a retreat. I don't feel as inspired as I'd like but there's a simplicity to life now, for a while. However, I was ready to get on the road. To tour Out of My Province the best that I could. To learn songs by The Clash, to go deeper at

becoming a true artist, to get stronger at singing, to get further into the art, to connect with all humans... to sing and express being human all over the UK, US and further...

“I’ve never once felt like an entertainer but rather a conduit. There’s always been this sense of channeling. A mysteriousness to the whole thing.”

What's the biggest mistake you've made that's changed how you see New Things?

The immediate thing that comes to mind here is the fact that through my life I've considered my lack-of-knowing to be something that made me less of a musician ... I am musically illiterate and felt uncomfortable about that until very recently. I never went to music school and I never finished University. Essentially I'm a University drop out...(but I think that has a good ring to it...!). Sometimes I regret it but mostly I don't. I'm

grateful for my part-time Steiner education and for growing up in a household where Art was considered of great worth. My paternal Grandmother was a nurse, teacher, wife, mother AND a policewoman and I had many other strong-headed women in my life... I truly believe I could be and do anything I liked.

How do you know when it's time to ditch the old thing for the New Thing?

Leading up to the release of my new record I was asked a lot about 'conscious decisions' and some questions along the lines of 'what did you want the listener to think/feel here...' and it caused me to reflect on how insular my process has been. Writing, recording, performing has always felt quite intimate. I've never once thought about 'the listener'. I'm not sure if that is wrong or right. Good or bad. The "I" in my songwriting has always felt very universal never an egoic I'.

I was also asked how I had changed since my two records? I responded that I had found this new sense of artistic freedom. That I had truly stepped over to the other side...wherever that was. I had been accepted in my own mind now as an Artist, writer and young woman... living sometimes in Dunedin, New Zealand and sometimes other places. I've never once felt like an entertainer but rather a conduit. There's always been this sense of channeling. A mysteriousness to the whole thing. I dunno what you'd call that...

Oli Sansom



Melbourne-based O.S. is quite possible one of the most talented maestros you'll ever meet. Occasionally crazy, always head-turning, and usually referred to by just the one name (like Kanye/Jacinda/Plato/Beyonce etc), he's renowned as a photographer and visual artist with a process-driven obsession that results in pure magic.

@olisansom
@briarsatlas
@thearbourists

How do you approach New Things?

I feel that once you see there's historically a pretty predictable pattern with "new things" (of the variety that don't kill or harm others), that there's only two ways to approach your relationship with that age-old, jarring concept: having something in your world disrupted by "new". And that's either lean in or adapt. There's no leaning-out (hint: that also falls under "adapt"). There's nothing else. So the next question is - since you know new stuff is happening, and new things (people and ideas) can come your way, you get to kinda be the architect of what that means to you. Are you gonna be on the knives edge? Or are you gonna adapt and merge perfectly the old with the new, and exploit this newly created context given to the past (here's looking at you, @1924US you clever, apocalyptically talented savant). This goes for art, the way we connect, and the way we can make our income. The same patterns will continue to repeat, and music is always a good measuring stick. Rap subculture enters mainstream, boomers express their disdain of it, history repeats. Try traveling back in time 500 years and playing Elvis to someone. No-ones going to be dancing to it. A great recent example out in my industry, was a new venue startup, that was going out to entirely disrupt the wedding planning model. It's pretty clear, historically, that if you get a bunch of savvy upstarts in a room with no prior biases, they're gonna uproot shit. So you can get upset all you want - or you can lean in and celebrate it, and then ask "how can I reinforce my own business to both support and leverage

this new way of doing things". The idea that folks might piss and moan about change on their iPhone in an Uber is always a strange one.

**"Fall in love with ambiguity,
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outcome driven volume
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everything..."**

What's your current New Thing learning curve?

My current "new thing" learning curve is how to look at designing the future a little bit. By "the" I mean "mine" and, en masse, as a consequence, "the". I've been talking for years about wanting to get into a proactive state instead of a reactive one, and we're all suddenly graced with this pretty

wild opportunity to take agency over our time, when just for a minute, we're not stuck in an endless cycle of swinging our dicks around. "How in control of my week to I want to be and what makes for a week well spent".

What's the biggest mistake you've made that's changed how you see New Things?

The biggest mistake I've made in how I see new things, always comes from that feeling you get when you know you're being communicated to from a place of difference, or shaped through art thats gone around that pretty pervasive impulse to cast a wide net - and then, momentarily, ignoring it.

We're in a time when volume matters: Gary Vee is running around presenting the merits of releasing 64 pieces of content a day, and any context he had around that is stripped away as we all lap it up and go for volume, volume, volume at the expense of bringing something more subtle or useful to the table. Tony Robbins runs programs to "unleash the (whatever fucking thing it is)", and instead of that being applied to a diverse set of practices on a granular level, it's spawned a pool of quasi-life coaches pumping volume, manifestation, and any other number of empty platitudes wrapped around a new coaching program available for \$x in 4 split payments, with zero accountability afterwards. When we apply this to our creative vocation, I mean it can work if you've got a full-time social media manager or something, but you hit a point where

you've just eroded every last little precious piece of quiet real-estate in your brain that lets great challenging, and subtle ideas percolate. It's the only thing that's ever let us enjoy any of the great long-form bodies of work or transcendent collections of songs.

So to that, you step away from all that noise just for a minute - and ask what thing has connected with you most, or what person or thing has mattered most - and for me, the answer is almost without exception, someone who fell off instagram a long time ago, or gave a talk that didn't pander to a shitty "TED talk formula" (can we please stop promoting "how to deliver a talk like a TED talk" like that Big Mac of oratory dance is a good thing), but instead buried their head in their laptop mumbling for their entire presentation - but you could feel the connection they had to their work and the precision, power and innovation of what they'd made. I think the biggest thing I worry about, is losing the love of the soft, subtle and the challenging to consume.

So the biggest challenge with new things is to adopt a process vs outcome approach. Fall in love with ambiguity, "What ifs", and not the outcome driven volume culture thats taking over and spreading a thin layer of cicada piss over everything - because it works, and stuff that works should probably be seen as harmful.

How do you know when it's time to ditch the old thing for the New Thing?

I think change for changes sake isn't always a good thing, but if you fall back to the idea of process over outcomes, it's pretty hard to go wrong. I had a conversation recently about educational content, and the idea of delivering something different, and how to do that. My response was - if you want it to work, and put money in the bank - then just do what everyone else is doing, and leverage your audience. Because that works, that sells, and being safe is actually a reliable ROI. Many of the absolute blowout brand successes I can name jumped on ideas, tones of voice, and models of selling that were half a decade old. The nature of change is that it's always feared, and it's actually almost as if the sweet spot of leveraging change is to let it run its course and embed in the climate a little first.

Trey Horvath



Los Angeles-based T.H. is the guy who always shows up with just the right amount of energy for whatever problem you're trying to solve. Splitting his time between being an art-buyer in the high-pressure LA ad agency scene and fishing out the front door of his cabin in the Sierra Nevada's, Trey's recently thrown his hat in with the world-leading artists he commissions and subjected himself to the famed VII agency masterclass.

@treyhorvath

How do you approach New Things?

I love new, I thrive on new. If I didn't have New Things to discover I honestly wouldn't be able to stand the monotonous hum of regular life. Whether it's learning photography, Spanish, surfing, moving across the country, Indian cooking, Muay Thai fighting, or buying a cabin in the woods, overhauling an engine, or some other obscure skill or life experience, I'm always challenging myself to keep doing New Things because I honestly need them to survive.

I tend to reevaluate my life more frequently than most. Usually once a year (if not every 6 months) I'll step back from everything (often whilst sipping whiskey around a campfire or watching the sun set over a river) and ask myself "am I satisfied with how things are going?" and "could I do anything differently to make it better?" The follow-up questions and list-making exercises usually guide me in a certain direction and then the only thing left to do is muster the willpower to start changing... again.

Taking those first steps to New Things are obviously the hardest ones. If you're a romantic type, listen to Lao Tzu: "The journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step." If you're a rational type, consider Newton's First Law: "An object at rest, stays at rest." Either way, the moral of the 'tackling New Things' story is: 1) decide to do it, and 2) do a little bit every day.

What's your current New Thing learning curve?

I just wrapped up a 7-month Masterclass with VII Photo Agency in Barcelona and I was in Spain when the virus ramped up and the government locked us down. It was kinda unnerving seeing national laws change hour by hour and thinking you might be

"If you avoid challenging yourself to adopt change in your life, you're actively choosing to remain the same and live with your dissatisfaction."

stuck in a foreign country for months on end. Pretty much like Italy, but with less singing from balconies and more fines for being caught loitering in the streets. That was definitely a New Thing, but not really the thing I wanted to talk about.

The VII Masterclass was a rigorous program in documentary photography and photojournalism led by mythic-level photographers that shoot for NatGeo, TIME, NYT, Le Monde, etc. and have published timeless photo books, and toured world-class exhibitions of their work... the crème de la crème

of our lil corner of the photo biz. The 20-ish students from all over the world work on a personal project over several months with continuous feedback from VII photographers and photo editors, mentorship from industry legends, and hands-on sessions about making dedicated long-term documentary stories in a super fast and risky media landscape.

So in the world of learning curves, travelling to Europe several times this year to get to know some of the most incredible and impressive people in my life, hanging my first exhibition, and pitching stories to major newspapers and magazines in the US and Europe has definitely got me drinking from a learning curve firehose, and riding that high into the anxious void of this new corner that we're all turning into.

What's the biggest mistake you've made that's changed how you see New Things?

I probably wouldn't say that mistakes have shaped the way I see New Things as much as it's the experience of doing the New Thing itself. Sure, not everything has worked out, there's always been ups and downs, a lot of planning, self-motivation, supportive people, and perseverance involved. A lot of it has always depended on luck, good timing, and follow through. And to be honest, you're not always gonna get that perfect recipe in everything you try, but you won't know until you've had a crack at it.

My theory is that I'd always rather look back and say "that didn't quite work out how I wanted, but I learned a helluva lot along the way..." (in my best goofy dad voice, of course) than have to say "Damn, I should have been braver and done that thing... If only. Woulda, shoulda, coulda."

A 'regret minimization framework' definitely drives my life decisions.

I've been through clinical depression. I've taken jobs grilling in a "quick service restaurant" kitchen and packing boxes in a warehouse and lived in my old bedroom at my parents' house to get through rough patches. But when you have the chance to take big risks to achieve big rewards - if that's the worst that you have to endure - then that's a pretty privileged life. Documentary-turned-commercial photographer Joey Lawrence said something somewhere that has stuck with me over the years: "We are so lucky to live in places where you can attempt your ideas and not die. You can throw all your resources at it and not starve to death, and not get thrown into jail by a brutal regime. The worst thing that could happen is you get embarrassed, lose all your money, and have to live in your parents' basement for a while. If you really want to do this, why not?"

Or as Alanis would put it - "You live, you learn. You love, you learn. You cry, you learn. You looooooosEEEE, you learn...."

How do you know when it's time to ditch the old thing for the New Thing?

When the future seems uncertain, it makes us nervous as human beings. We don't like change. We've been trained over the centuries to stock up food against drought and famine, keep ourselves fit and ready if tribal warfare breaks out, build an emergency fund for life's unknowns or to invest into secure, AAA-rated government bonds for retirement.

But I think over the years I've trained myself to relish these moments of uncertainty. It's these times when it's easiest to seize the moment and do that New Thing I've had simmering away in the back of my mind. When everything gets shaken up it's the natural time to reevaluate. Sometimes old threads are cut for us by circumstance, and sometimes we come face to face with having to cut them ourselves and weave new ones.

Your job sucks and it's getting to be unbearable? Move across the country and find work in a new and exciting creative industry. Girlfriend broke up with you and lost your cool new job in the same week? Fuck it. Go to India for 3 months. CoronaVirus shuts down the world and all your clients cancel everything? Time for that personal project or side-business or volunteer effort you've never had the time to get into. The time is literally 'now.'

Listen, the way I know it's time to get back to the drawing board is when everything in life seems like it's had the joy sucked out of it and the same ole daily routine becomes unbearable. It's honestly part of human nature to be dissatisfied with what we have and where we are, to be looking for a change that improves things, to be asking "Am I living out my dreams and tryin' to reach my goals?"

Plumb the depths of your desires...what is it that you really want? Society attacks us with advertising messages and social media poisons us with peer pressures. Oftentimes we trick ourselves into thinking we know what we want, when we really have no goddamn idea. You wanna find out? Try this. Unplug yourself, abandon your routine for a few days, go into the woods, travel alone, eat some mushrooms, turn on, tune in, drop out (at least temporarily). Before you can come up with great solutions you need to really know what the problem is. How much change are you comfortable with and how much courage are you willing to muster to surf a New Thing.

Taking a leap always seems scary (way scarier than it really is), and it's easy to get stuck in planning and analysing until you forget to hit 'go' and take action. But sometimes life takes care of the leaping, the decision's already been made, you've got no choice... and it turns out that the timing for the New Thing is now perfect.