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Lawyers describe life behind the lens

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Jeffrey Freedman, above, stands in front of his print of a Cuban man playing a guitar, on display in AIDS Community Services' Elmwood Avenue offices. At left is another lawyer/photographer, Glenn Murray, in his Buffalo office with images of the mechanism that runs Erie County Hall's clock tower. BOTH PHOTOS: JIM COURTNEY/BUSINESS FIRST

From behind a camera lens, photographers escape into another world where the daily pressures of life slip away into the background as the world around them comes into focus.

Several area lawyers enjoy photography as a hobby. They say they do it to meet people, to enjoy local and international culture and to simply share their love of capturing images with others.

Jeffrey

Freedman, Glenn Murray and Michael Taheri came to photography, and to enjoy the hobby, in different ways.

A traveler's perspective

Freedman, of Jeffrey Freedman Attorneys at Law, started taking photographs while traveling abroad with his wife, Barbara Hamilton, who enjoys shopping in the countries they visit.

"Rather than me rushing her out of the stores, I had to find something to do to keep busy while she was in the stores," he said.

So, equipped with a Canon Rebel film camera — he has since graduated to a Canon Rebel digital with multiple zoom lenses — Freedman started taking

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pictures of people on the street, on buses and around town while traveling.

“I’m more interested in interacting with the real people than the tourist stuff,” he said, referring to photos he took of prisoners and police at a Caribbean jail. “You smell the smells and see the sights. I like to have my senses going. I like to be in a different culture.”

Freedman began venturing out to remote areas, although Hamilton would prefer that he didn’t. He’ll often hire a guide or bodyguard when in treacherous territory.

“Sometimes it works better than when I’m by myself, but not always,” he said, recalling a time when residents of a St. Lucia ghetto called out to him, “Hey whitey, get out of here.”

Freedman’s speciality is getting up close and personal with his subjects, often children and seniors. A lot can be read from the twinkle in their eyes or the wrinkles in their faces, he believes.

“Each person shows the culture of how they live and the life they had,” Freedman said.

When he spends much time with his subjects, Freedman will often give them \$5 or \$10, or as much as \$50. “Each (situation) is different, but I do it because it’s a nice thing to do,” he said.

Freedman would like to travel next to India or remote regions of China and Tibet to document the struggles of people there.

“I would like to go anyplace in the world where historic events are happening. That’s edgier,” he said.

A new focus at mid-life

For Murray, a Buffalo solo practitioner whose practice focuses on DWI defense, photography arose out of a sort of mid-life crisis two years ago.

“It seemed like a much healthier and more affordable option rather than the pursuit of younger women, faster horses and older whiskey,” he jokes.

He started by taking photographs at his sons’ lacrosse games about three years ago with a point-and-shoot camera, but he realized he would need to upgrade to get better action shots.

Murray, who now shoots on an Olympus E-510 digital, primarily photographs area architecture and festivals and shares his photographs through frequent e-mails to about 100 family members, friends and acquaintances.

He’s often asked where he finds the time to travel to out-of-the way places such as Salamanca and Persia, in Cattaraugus County. He says he manages to pull over and take a few shots while traveling to area towns for court appearances.

When he wants to take pictures of places that may seem off-limits, like the inside of the Riveria Theater or the clock tower of Erie County Hall, Murray will just ask to gain behind-the-scenes access.

“Access can be obtained by being friendly and not being afraid to ask,” he said.

One time, when he left his wife at a restaurant to get shots of sunset at Buffalo

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Niagara International Airport, Murray was stopped by two Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority police officers who demanded identification and asked him what he was doing there. Another time, a sergeant at the Connecticut Street Armory interrogated him for taking photographs of the building.

In both situations, he admits, “I was a little bit nervous.”

Family time

Taheri, a partner in Taheri & Todoro PC in Williamsville, also got his start in photography taking pictures of his children, kayaking alongside them while they sailed on Lake Ontario.

He eventually turned his attention to the shore, taking photographs of his Olcott neighbors’ houses and sending them Christmas cards with their homes on the cover.

“It’s a great way to build a friendship. I’ve met a lot of neighbors that way,” he said, noting that the cards and photo prints are surprisingly inexpensive.

Taheri, now in his second year as an amateur photographer, says his Nikon DS-80 digital is a grade below the professional level, but works just fine for his purposes.

The hobby is a nice relationship builder with his son, Erik, 15, who uploads, enhances and prints his images. “It’s great for father-son activities,” Taheri said.

The gift that keeps on giving

Freedman enjoys sharing his travels with others by sending note cards featuring his photographs. He also donates his prints to nonprofits for fundraising events or to hang in their offices, such as those that hang in the AIDS Community Services headquarters.

Taheri plans to hang a few of his photographs at M&T Bank’s Evans Street branch in Williamsville. Both he and Murray have had their photographs published in area newspapers.

All three have had exhibits — Freedman at the Jewish Community Center, and Murray and Taheri at the College Street Gallery — but say those events are few and far between because of the amount of work it takes to put one on.

Murray said he’s working on appreciating different vantage points, while Taheri is advancing to more abstract perspectives. Taheri, who says photography is the door to other art forms, thanks watercolor artist and teacher Jen Kursten for helping him understand composition.

“I think you have to start off with trees and leaves, but then you start to take some risks,” Taheri said. “I want to get out of representational art to abstract.”

Drawing the line

Photography can quickly become a part-time gig, the lawyers say.

After Freedman took photographs at a fundraiser for Sen. Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign, the senator’s office called to ask if he would shoot at another event where former President Bill Clinton would be speaking.

“It was fun and exciting to do that, but it’s just a hobby for me, nothing that I do

for money,” he said.

Murray will soon shoot his first wedding.

“I’m as apprehensive as I was for my first trial 25 years ago. I don’t know which would be worse: letting an innocent man go to jail or screwing up a bride’s wedding photos,” he said.

Taheri said he’s not available “for hire.”

“I don’t want to ruin it,” he said. “I want to enjoy it as a hobby that enhances people’s lives.”

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