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# Finding Your Purpose & The Wellness Habits to Sustain It

*A Sit Down with Photographer Duo – Ben & Trudie Larrabee – and their Advice on Well-Being, Business, Creativity, Photography & Loving Relationships*

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By [Jessamy Little](#), Consultant to CEOs/Founders/Senior Leaders |  
[jessamy@jessamylittle.com](mailto:jessamy@jessamylittle.com) |



Sailing, Virgin Islands, 2008

# The Warhol Factory?

Upon meeting Ben and Trudie Larrabee you might think they are right out of Andy Warhol's Factory. Like that of Warhol, Ben is both enterprising and artistic. His work struck a chord with his audience propelling his iconic shots into the homes of wealthy families across the country, as well as in the permanent collection of the MOMA in New York City and The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. His business savvy landed him partnerships with publishers and business owners that gave him exposure to large audiences he would not have found in small artistic shows. His wife, Trudie, is his Jackie/Marilyn/ Brigitte combined as well as his masterful business partner.

## Career Beginnings

Ben started his career in the very proper fashion studying photography and graphic design at the elite institutions of Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and Yale. This was followed by a 25-year career in graphic design before he found his true calling. In that way Larrabee sits aside artists/ entrepreneurs who came into their brilliance later in life, such as Van Gogh, Mark Twain, and Vera Wang to name a few.



# Finding Life's Purpose

Ben's life had a radical shift when a vision during his daily meditation showed him that his life's purpose on this planet was to share his gift for photography with others. (Ben has practiced Transcendental Meditation for 45 years, and it is a fundamental part of his daily wellness routine). It was such a profound experience, he left the world of graphic design and started his own business as a photographer.

## Mastering the Business Side of Things as Well as the Art

Starting off it was a small enterprise. Trudie maintained her job in the corporate world and was the primary bread winner for the family.

Ben was not afraid of hard work and landed an extensive project with a church in town that paved the way for him to build a key relationship with the town's paper editor.

He was also adept at the business side of things. He identified a target market of families with young kids, and he would go to the local schools and hand out flyers to parents as they waited in the car pool line at the end of the school day.

In addition, he secured relationships with some of the mainstay stores in town that had bare walls dying for art work, for example hanging pictures in the local Starbucks where foot traffic was extremely high and his work would be noticed.



Alice in Wonderland, Connecticut, 2009

## Business Turning Point

The turning point for the business was during a meeting with a Gallery Owner in which she told Ben that he was heavily underpricing his work, after which he revised it. This changed everything. He could suddenly do things, pay for things, and bring on Trudie as a Business Partner and collaborator.

The addition of Trudie to the team fueled the business to greater heights, as Ben could now spend more time on the art and Trudie on the business side, both enabling them to focus on their strengths and grow the business all the more.



# What Sets the Work Apart from the Crowd?

What sets Ben's work apart from the crowd is his ability to capture not only the outer beauty of people but their soul/inner energy. His meditation has deepened his ability to see people in a different light and connect with his subject on a spiritual level, thus drawing out their inner essence and beauty.

The experience itself is radical. It has no inkling of a family portrait one might have experienced as a child—posing stiffly for hours and pulled out at family reunions in horror. Instead, the session is spent playing around the house while Ben and Trudie come with you on the journey...everyone gets to be at ease and enjoy themselves, which draws out their natural beauty.



Skinny Dipping, Nantucket, 2013

# Joy, Love, and Sex

Their joy for life and love is very apparent when you meet Ben and Trudie. They have a deep love and respect for what each other brings to their partnership in work and life.

As I sit with them in their home, they are completely at ease sharing how their sex life is very much a part of their wellness routine, one that helps to nurture and maintain their strong love for one another, their respect for one another's talents, and cultivate the artistic spirit in them.

In fact, they make a point to set aside time in their calendar 3x a week for 'wellness time' which includes making love, marijuana, sharing feelings, and so on. They appreciate that love/sex can happen spontaneously but also know that life can get in the way and that scheduling this commitment to one another is a way of honoring their relationship. This subsequently enhances their personal and professional relationship, as well as their art.



Trudie Floating, Ausable Lake, 2001

# Drugs and Adventures

In true artistic fashion, Ben and Trudie also share how marijuana and travel are muses for their artistic creativity. They discuss how marijuana helps deepen connection to each other as well as the world around them.

While traveling, they make a conscious effort to disconnect. They love one particular destination in the Grenadines where they stay in a cottage on a bluff overlooking the ocean—this bluff is a vortex, a high point of rising energy—and there is no internet, tv, or phones. They are really able to ‘unplug’ from the world.



Skinny Kitty Tea House, Burning Man, 2017

# Evolution in the Digital Age

When I ask about the rise of Instagram and everyone now being an amateur photographer or the rise of digital photography and printed photo albums being thing of the past, Ben and Trudie are self-assured discussing how they've evolved the business over the years.

Two major changes they've made to the business are to expand their business services beyond the photography and to offer digital files of their work for the family.

Families needed help choosing places in their home to feature the work, frame it, light it etc., so they now offer these options as part of their services.

Clients also asked for digital versions of the pictures so they started offering clients digital files and smaller prints. Although they do anchor me back to what sets their work apart, which is refreshing. The work that they produce is more a family heirloom, not a common photo you slap in a 4×6 on your nightstand.

## Tips for Aspiring Photographers

When asked what tips Ben has for those aspiring to improve their photography, he recommends the following:

1. **Study Shots you take** = look back at your shots, study them, figure out what excites you/moves you and what doesn't, which ones give you a physical/emotional reaction, and try to articulate to yourself why
2. **Apply what you've learned** = now take pictures with that in mind, incorporating parts you like and reducing the parts you don't
3. **Practice** = repeat this process over and over, and invest time in this iterative process
4. **Trust your instincts** = don't follow the rules or pay attention to anything you read, trust your instincts and anchor back to those when going on this learning journey



# Asked what Ben Would Have Done if his Business had Never Taken Off?

Without a moment's hesitation he says that he would have kept on working. To him, it is and has never been about success/money, it is about following his life's purpose on this planet of sharing his photography with others to bring them joy, and the money will follow. He is part of the enlightened school of thinkers/entrepreneurs in this respect.

## Wellness Weaved into the Journey

Of course, I can't help but observe how wellness is woven into the fabric of their art and life, and has been a foundation to their success...

- **Meditation** = Ben and Trudie's consistent practice of meditation
- **Spirituality/Love/Joy/Beauty** = these are all very much a part of the experience of Ben and Trudie's work and the time they spend photographing a family
- **Sex/Love** = the consistent commitment Ben and Trudie have to their loving relationship with a healthy sex life being a part of that
- **Drugs/Adventure** = marijuana and travel are a part of their creative experimentation that inform their art and life, and expands the boundaries of their artistic expression
- **Therapy** = a consistent practice of inner reflection and therapy
- **Activity** = morning sun salutations/yoga, calisthenics in their home, walks outside...movement is weaved throughout their day rather than at one specific time, and has a strong connection to nature and the changes of the season
- **Healthy Food** = during the beginning and at the end of the interview we share recipes and foods that we love—sardines a shared favourite, and Barefoot Contessa although just a smidge healthier J

To learn more about Ben and Trudie you can see their work and reach out via their website: [www.BenLarrabee.com](http://www.BenLarrabee.com).



## *Ben Larrabee Photography*

Darien, Connecticut

203.656.3807

[trudie@benlarrabee.com](mailto:trudie@benlarrabee.com)

[www.benlarrabee.com](http://www.benlarrabee.com)