

# Images of Life: Artsy Shark Interview



*Photographer Steve Paxton has a thriving business taking wedding and portrait photos. He also maintains a separate website for his other photographic pursuits, including a project called “The Least of These”, an [Urban Portraits](#) portfolio featuring amazing images of the homeless in Seattle. His website contains stories about his subjects, information and tips about photography and approaching the homeless in conversation, videos and much more.*

*Take note of how Steve’s professional presentation, commitment to his work and his following establish him as an expert and a great resource for clients, as well as other photographers and artists. He shows a spirit of generosity in sharing his expertise through Q&A and tutorials, featuring the work of other photographers and promoting excellence. Steve is an outstanding model for emerging artists. He agreed to speak about his Urban Portraits portfolio and other projects.*



**AS:** *What prompted you to start on your Urban Portraits project? What will you do with it?*

**SP:** The project began in 2007 after I started searching for something different and unique to photograph. I was slowly burning out and needed to approach photography from a different angle. As a portrait photographer, I had always wanted to capture photographs of individuals living on the street. Capturing “urban portraits” started out as something that I thought I would try once or twice just a break from the sometimes routine nature of regular portrait photography. As time went on and as I began making connections with people living on the street, I realized that it was more than

just capturing photographs. Each person I met had a different life story and most were eager to share it with me. The stories help to bring my images to life. Now each year I make time to periodically head out to Seattle to reach out to the homeless living on the streets. I occasionally bump into homeless folks that I met a year or two earlier. It's fascinating to hear about what they have been up to.



***AS: On your site, you show your urban portfolio with stories of your subjects. What have you learned about the homeless people you photographed?***

**SP:** I think about this quite a bit as I walk up and down the alleys making contact with the less fortunate. As you might guess, I mostly run into older men living on the street. Occasionally I meet a homeless woman, but they are almost always with a man. The city can be a dangerous place at night so you don't find many young teens or women running around alone. I found that many of the men I meet on the street are dealing with one or more of the following issues:

- (1) Addicted to alcohol and/or drugs
- (2) Have a mental health issue, or
- (3) Lost their spouse to death or divorce.

The last one really surprised me. Losing a spouse can be terribly difficult for someone. For many men, their wife is what helped keep them stabilized and grounded. It's really sad to see a man living on the streets openly weep about losing his wife. Stepping back for a moment, imagine if you are dealing with several of these issues at once. It's a situation that can go from bad to worse very quickly. A middle aged man loses his wife which in turn sends him into depression. This causes him to drink which leads to him missing work. This causes him to lose his job and eventually his house. One thing leads to another and he quickly finds himself living on the street or out of his car. The most striking thing about this is that it could happen to any one of us.



**AS:** *The quality of your photographs are amazing. Are you using any special techniques to achieve the look?*

**SP:** I use various techniques in Photoshop to create the distinctive “look” in each of my urban portraits. I prefer muted, dark, edgy urban images. I choose to apply this type of processing because I believe it suits the subject matter very well. I also like the style.

Going decades back, street photography was traditionally shot with high contrast black and white film. This creates the dark, urban feel that most of us expect to see in street photography. I have chosen to vary this just a bit by allowing some of color to show through while still maintaining a high contrast, desaturated feel common in urban scenes. Not everyone is going to like the look and feel of my images, but I am OK with that.



**AS:** *Please tell us about your other work and how you earn a living.*

**SP:** I have been a wedding and portrait photographer in the Seattle area for over 15 years. I am absolutely passionate about making close connections with people and I love the beauty and magic of weddings! I view every wedding as a unique challenge and opportunity to create special images that will endure the test of time. I love working with high school seniors to create images that reflect their individual style. Senior portrait sessions take place in grungy alleys, around old buildings, and in beautiful outdoor locations! You can check out what I am up to at [www.PaxtonPortraits.com](http://www.PaxtonPortraits.com) and [www.ExpectSomethingRemarkable.com](http://www.ExpectSomethingRemarkable.com). My urban portrait work can be found at [www.PaxtonPrints.com](http://www.PaxtonPrints.com).