"…I've dedicated myself to noticing what everybody else is missing. I show people what the world *actually* looks like."

Originally from Omaha, Nebraska, Andre D. Wagner is a photographer living and working in Brooklyn. In 2010, he received a BFA from Buena Vista University where he studied social work and digital media. Andre now focuses on his passion, street and documentary-style photography, and aims to capture the human condition while recording everyday life.

Andre Wagner

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Describe your path to becoming a photographer.

I grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, and then went to Iowa for college. I was interested in social work, but my main focus was playing professional basketball. I had played basketball my whole life and received a partial scholarship for it.

When did you decide to stop pursuing basketball professionally?

Trying to play professional basketball is such a hard thing to do. I was playing Division III basketball, so I wasn't at a super high level. Once I started trying out and seeing other athletes from around the world who had been trying to play professionally for years, I thought, "Oh, shit." I tried out for the Iowa Energy, a D league team, and thought about getting an agent or trying to play overseas and move up from there, but it all fell apart. It was a lot to think about because I was the first person in my family to go to college. I liked social work and working with kids, but I had always imagined myself playing basketball. Basketball had been such a huge part of my life that it left a void once I stopped pursuing it professionally. That's when I picked up a camera. I was just trying to find something to do with my time.

Was there an "Aha!" moment when you realized you could or wanted to seriously pursue photography?

With basketball, I was married to a process: I worked out, traveled, went to the gym all the time, and played a game, which was like a performance piece. I was so used to being busy all the time and photography went hand-in-hand with that lifestyle. Once I was in New York, I started meeting more creatives and people with jobs that I didn't even know existed. I thought, "Oh, shit! People are making a living doing this?" That's when I started taking photography more seriously and realized that it could be more than a hobby.

During the summer break after my first year as a graduate student at Fordham, I got a job at fab.com. I was working in their photo studio, and I knew I wanted to take photography more seriously because it started to feel like there was something good happening. That's when I decided not to go back to school. I thought I'd stick with social work, but once I got into photography I realized that I could use my foundation in social work within photography, and that became appealing to me.
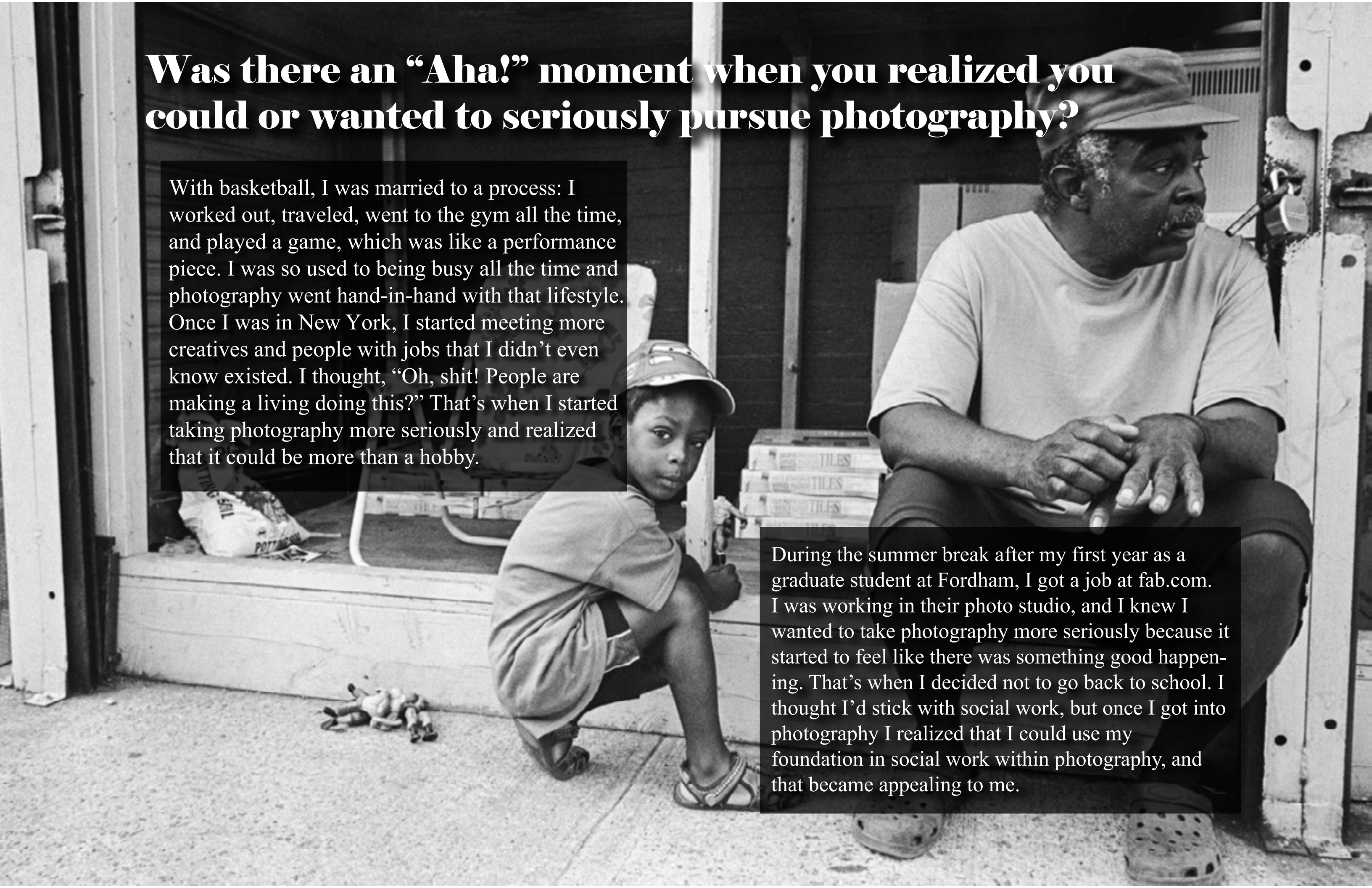
What advice would you give to a young person starting out?

Shoot and have fun. That's how I started. I wasn't always doing this—it took time to evolve. I was having fun and eventually started doing what I consider to be "real" work.

If you can't have fun, then you won't ever have what it takes to put in the work. Sometimes people ask me how many hours I work each day, but I believe that if you truly love what you're doing, then you're not going to be counting hours. There are times when I spend all day shooting, and sometimes I pull all-nighters printing in the darkroom. I never think about counting the hours I shoot or counting down the hours until I can end—I just do it because I love it. I tell people to love what they do and it'll figure itself out.

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