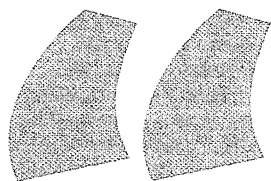


*'Taking pictures isn't something I feel I "ought" to do. You may legitimately query this observation'*

## A matter of opinion

If you have a tendency to procrastinate, at least do the most enjoyable thing first, says **Roger Hicks**



HARDENING of the categories is a terrible disease. Its most common form, but also the easiest to recognise and therefore to cure, is: 'I've always done it this way, so I'm always going to do it this way.'

Another form, more pernicious because it is harder to recognise, is: 'I don't really want to do A, but if I'm going to do A, I'll have to do B, too.' As often as not, A isn't obligatory to begin with, so if you don't do A, you won't have to do B, either. But because A is already decided, you press on with both A and B, without ever questioning the value of A.

A third and still more dangerous form, from which I have long suffered, is 'If I can't do this, I won't do anything.' This starts out with something I really ought to do, such as writing a letter to the taxman. Because I don't want to do it, I find all kinds of more-or-less legitimate displacement. The studio is cleaned and rearranged, the pictures on my desk put away, my boots polished. These are things I don't want to do, but which are less unpleasant than writing to the taxman. Besides, they are worthy things – things I 'ought' to do, even though they are not always very much use or could be done another time.

As a result, instead of doing what I really should do, or what I want to do, or even something that I've been putting off because I don't have time to do it, I end up doing none of them. This is despite the fact that I would have had plenty of time to do any one of them if I hadn't been so busy avoiding the thing I want to do least.

The application to photography is obvious. One of the great pleasures of my current house is that I have a huge studio. It is may be 10 metres (30ft) square, with a sloping roof that rises from around 10ft to around 15ft. It sounds much

grander than it is: it's basically three walls of a Renaissance or possibly mediaeval ruin, with a fourth wall of two-by-fours, plywood and shingles, and a corrugated asbestos roof. It's furnished with a lot of lights that I picked up over the past 20 years, an IFF studio stand, and a fair number of accessories to make life easier, such as Lastolite 'flags' and scrims.

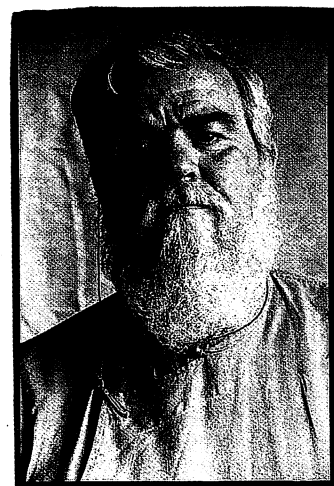
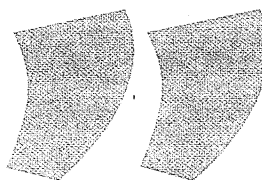
And I use it far less than I should. Part of this is because it's freezing cold in winter, thanks to stone walls 2ft thick and the virtual absence of draught-proofing, and it's horribly hot in summer because the black shingle-clad wall faces dead south. But most of it is because there is almost always something else I think I 'ought' to be doing instead.

When I do use it, I love it. Look at the digital still life gallery at [www.rogerandfrances.com](http://www.rogerandfrances.com), for example (just click on 'galleries' from the home page). I'm well pleased with several of those pictures, especially the old Swiss Army knife. For that matter, there's the portrait of Frances that appears on the 'About Us' page of the website.

But taking pictures isn't something I feel I 'ought' to do. You may legitimately query this observation. Surely, I have more reason to take pictures than most people. You are right. And here we run into the most pernicious of all versions of hardening of the categories: the belief that you are not supposed to enjoy yourself.

There is a vicious puritanism at work here. Job started it: 'Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble' (Chapter XIV. Verse i). We are raised with the expectation of more kicks than ha'pence; the Ninth Beatitude, according to my mother, is: 'Blessed is he who expecteth little, for he is seldom disappointed.'

Now, as the Lord Buddha himself pointed out, suffering is inevitable: we all get some. But that doesn't mean we have to go looking for it, nor that when we are enjoying ourselves, we should always suspect that misery is just around the corner. Let's take the opposite approach and be epicureans when we can, and stoics when we must be. And if there is a choice of two things you ought to do, both morally equal, you're a fool if you don't go for the one that's more enjoyable. **AP**



● Roger Hicks is a much-published author on photography. He has written more than three dozen books on the subject, many in partnership with his wife Frances Schultz. Roger started photography as a teenager in the 1960s and worked professionally in a London advertising studio in the mid-1970s. He has been a freelance photographer/writer since 1981, contributing to many photo magazines including *Shutterbug* in America. Visit his website at: [www.rogerandfrances.com](http://www.rogerandfrances.com)



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