

Keeping the Morning
SACRED

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS
BY JOY SUSSMAN



If you had told me when I was 25 years old that someday I would be a morning person, I would have laughed, long and hard. From my early 20s to my early 30s, I lived in various tiny apartments in New York City, rightly called “the city that never sleeps.” My most creative hours were long after midnight and, clearly, I wasn’t alone. Once I was coming home from a very late night at work and my next-door neighbor, another 20-something creative who played in a grunge band, was just heading out of his apartment for a 2 a.m. gig. New York is rife with night owls, and I soared right along with them.

I’m no longer in New York, and I’m no longer a night owl. Somewhere along the way, I became an early bird. I think it had something to do with getting married, moving to the suburbs, and having children, although a sneaky little thing called “getting older” probably figured into it! In any case, I’m now at the point where my best creative work happens before noon — without fail.

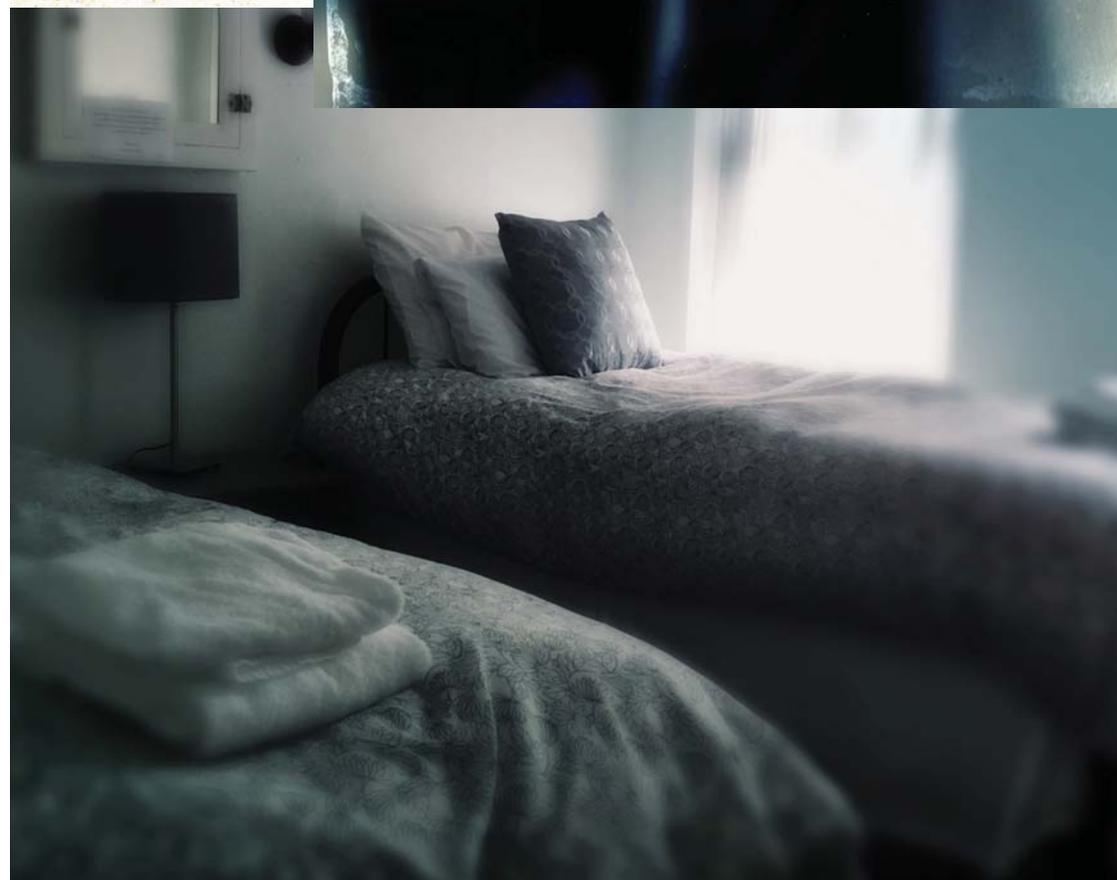
I’ve made a practice of what I call “keeping the morning sacred.” While walking my velvety-eared dog, Delilah, I snap pictures in the golden light of the new day. Before savoring breakfast (instead of mindlessly wolfing it down), I light some candles, which are delightful and decadent in the early morning hours. I don’t schedule any appointments or run any errands before noon; the mornings are strictly for my creative work. It’s my solitary time, my time to reflect.

During this sacred time, I listen to my own inner voice, leading me to what’s next. Sometimes that inner voice comes to me when I’m arranging a still life for my Instagram page. Sometimes it’s through writing my weekly blog post or journaling. On days when my own thoughts are stuck, I read books that are inspirational to me, such as those by Henry David Thoreau and Thich Nhat Hanh, and creative magazines, including the one you’re reading now. They give me the jump-start I need. »

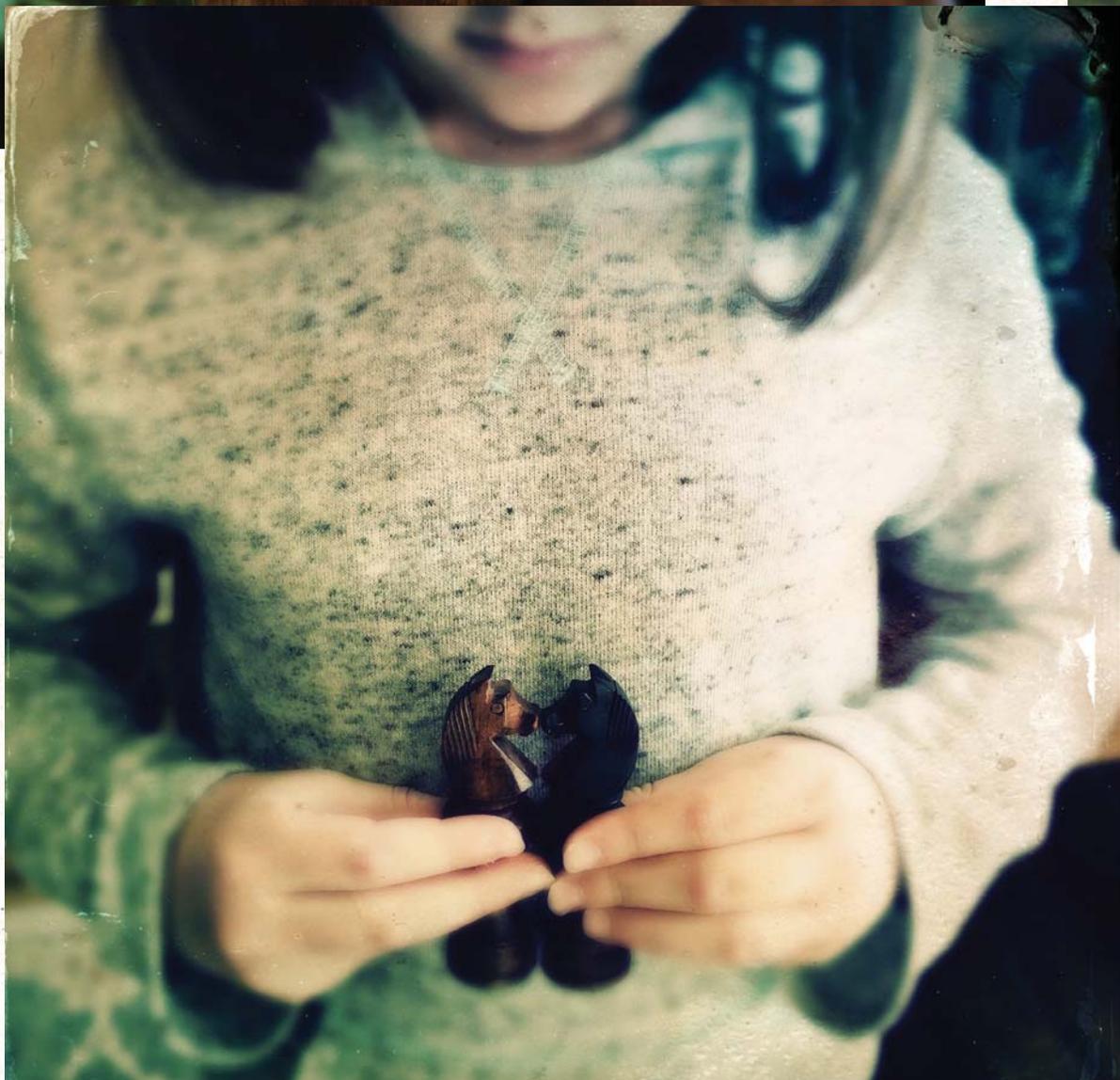
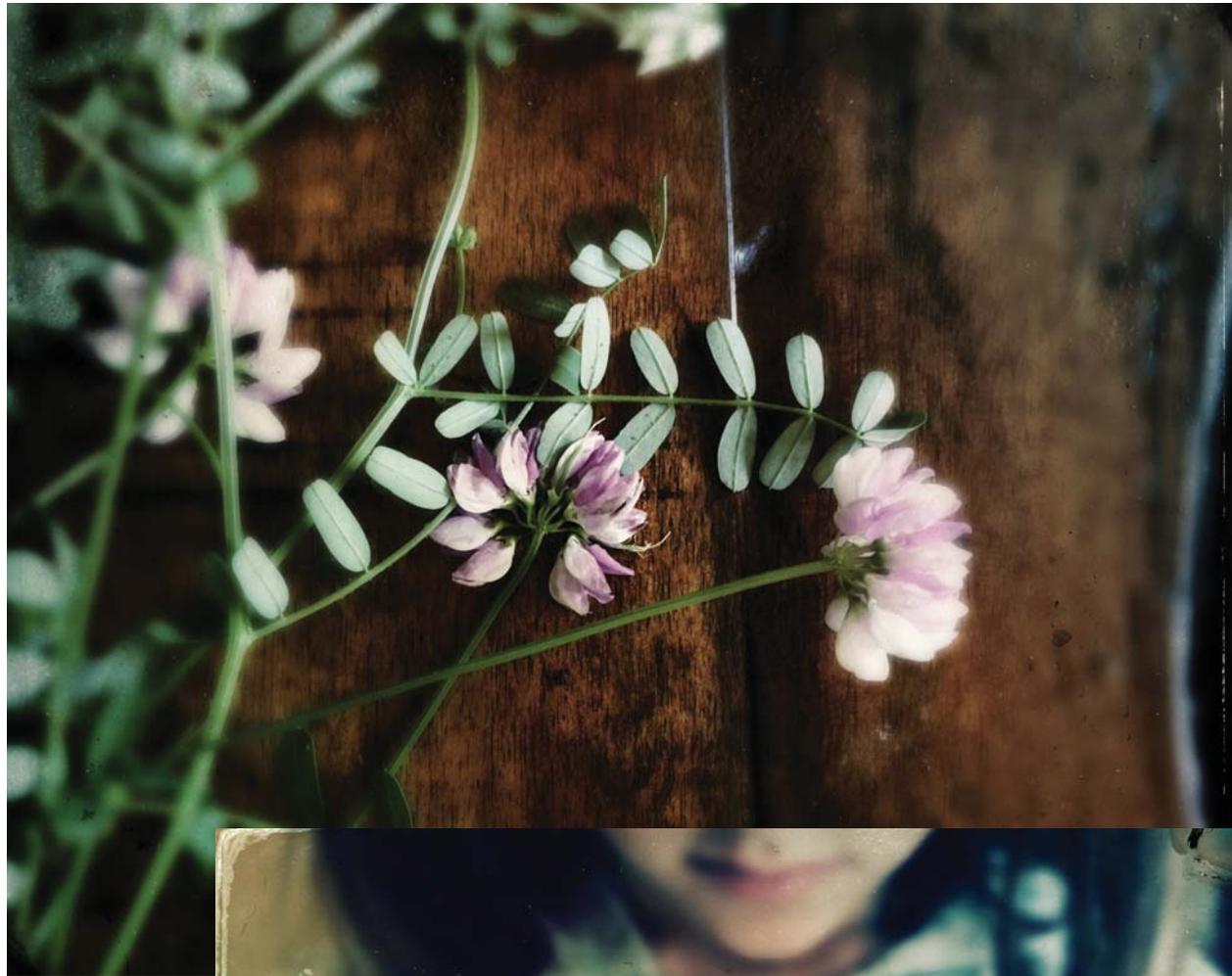


I know that not everybody can block off mornings for creative work, and if you're one of those people, I highly recommend finding your own sacred time, perhaps in the evening or on the weekend. It doesn't matter when — it just matters that you keep it sacred as much as you possibly can. Carve out a block of time that's just for you and your creative pursuits, nothing else.

After many sacred mornings of labor, my blog, Joyfully Green, was born on an early morning in the summer of 2012. It took a lot of soul-searching to decide what I wanted to do next with my life — something that would work well for me while being a mom of two small children (then 8 and 5 years old), something I could do at home, and definitely something that stretched my creative muscles.



My soul-searching involved opening a sketchpad each morning and pouring my thoughts and drawings onto the page. It happened right after the kids went off to school: before, during, and a few hours after breakfast. I wrote in my sketchpad: “What do I want to put out there?” I made a lot of one-word notes: nature, creative, mindful, meaningful, kind, beautiful, inspirational, etc. In capital letters, I wrote the word “photography.” »





I didn't know immediately that I wanted to have a blog, but I knew what made me feel happy and inspired. One of those things was my early morning visits to a beautiful blog by Alicia Paulson called *Posie Gets Cozy*. Each of her posts begins with a large and thoroughly charming collection of photographs from her everyday life in Portland, Oregon. I'd visit *Posie Gets Cozy* from the opposite coast in the morning, and for the rest of the day I'd feel lighter. Alicia Paulson inspired me to take that first step into blogging. She was like an unofficial mentor to me, although we've never met. Our blogs are very different, but I like to think that visits to *Joyfully Green* leave my readers feeling similarly lighter, happier, and more mindful of all the everyday things that make life beautiful.

When I wanted to move to the next step with my blog — monetization — I found the answers in the morning as well. I'm never without a camera (DSLR or iPhone), so when I heard about an online photography course running in the summer of 2013 called *Everyday Magic* from blogger Tammy Strobel at rowdykittens.com, I signed up. It was my first e-course, and I loved connecting with like-minded creatives from around the world, all capturing the extraordinary beauty of the new day.

The supportive atmosphere and flexibility of Tammy's course had me thinking: "What can I teach to people online?" Overwhelmingly, the comments I was receiving at *Joyfully Green* were about my nature photos. I decided to create a course, *How to Take Better Photos of Nature and the World around You*, and launched it in March of 2014. I made sure that my course was different from Tammy's; I even let her read the course description because it was important to me not to impinge on the creative territory of anybody else, particularly somebody who had been so helpful to me. Now, three years later, after creating my fifth e-course, I find it interesting to note how many students from around the world Tammy and I have shared in our different online classrooms. That's another lesson I've learned: The blogosphere is a big community — there's plenty of room to support each other!

For me, my biggest creative moments happened first thing in the morning. I have to catch my Morning Muse early. She keeps strict office hours in my house, and before I know it, she'll slip away until tomorrow.

*Joy Sussman is a photographer, online instructor, and blogger who writes about nature, mindfulness, creativity, and the little surprises of everyday life with her family. She has lived all over the northeastern U.S. and is currently at home in New Jersey, which is much more peaceful than reality TV shows would like you to believe! Never without a camera, she now teaches five online courses and writes a monthly newsletter about photography called *Writing with Light*. To learn more, visit her blog at joyfullygreen.com and follow her on Instagram (@joy_sussman). She welcomes email at joyfullygreen@gmail.com.*