

“Our feelings - that vast range of fear, joy, grief, sorrow, rage, you name it - are incoherent in the immediacy of the moment. It is only with distance that we are able to turn our powers of observation on ourselves, thus fashioning stories in which we are characters. There is no immediate gratification in this. No great digital crowd is “liking” what we do. We don’t experience the Pavlovian, addictive click and response of posting something that momentarily relieves the pressure inside of us, then being showered with emoticons. The gratification we memoirists do experience is infinitely deeper and more bittersweet. It is the complicated, abiding pleasure, to paraphrase Ralph Waldo Emerson, of finding the universal thread that connects us to the rest of humanity, and, by doing so, turns our small, personal sorrows and individual tragedies into art.”

- From *A memoir is not a status update*, an essay by Dani Shapiro in the *New Yorker*.

I think everyone has a thing in their life that they ‘have’ to do. Not the thing others tell us to do, but something that follows our instincts, our cravings and longings. For me, this project was something like that. When I first blurted out the idea, in September 2015, I wasn’t serious. Was I really going to give up my job, my house, my life to travel around to trade my photography skills for food and a roof over my head?

But the more I started thinking about it, the more it stuck with me. I have always admired people who foolishly (foolish in the eyes of others, at least) follow their dreams, no matter what, no matter the obstacles. Because they must, because they believe it’s something they and the world need. People have always told me that life can never be as fun or interesting as you want it to be, and that you should accept that sometimes work is dull and life is boring. But I didn’t want to believe that. Especially since I was slowly mentally dying from office jobs that weren’t for me.

So by October 2015 the idea had become stuck in my head. Mainly it would be a great opportunity to become a better photographer, because I could focus on one thing and keep photographing for as long as I could find people who wanted to trade with me. Also life would never be dull, because I would be moving from one place to the next. Furthermore, as a photographer I believed the opportunity is in context, not content. Just like the music industry, the future is less about owning the end product, more about the process and the experience of creating. I wanted to bring back the story behind the images, and create series that go together. Furthermore, photography is about people, so living with them would enable me to get close and get behind the “facade”.

So... I made a website and Fools With Dreams was officially born.

Why did I call it that? Well, a lot of people called me a fool for thinking I could actually do this and I decided to take it as a compliment. But more importantly, the people I wanted to trade with would have to be fools as well. Interesting people who stood for doing things differently, who challenged the status quo and made their own dreams come true or supported others in reaching theirs.

On the 24th of November 2015 the interview I did with Charlie Magazine was published on their website. From then on, the project was undeniably real. People started contacting me for trades, I started making a calendar, I had to research lots of stuff and in short do everything necessary to start this crazy project.

Mid-January 2016 I finally left my job. From then on I had two weeks for the very final preparations and to clear out my apartment because I was going to start with the first trade on February 1st. I also decided I would give most of the things I owed away, and just store the essentials in the basement of friends.

After that it all went fast. The start of a year full of new experiences, of taking a lot(!) of photographs

and also, of organizing. To keep the trades lined up one after another took a lot of discipline and a lot of time. But I even managed to trade with people in France, Italy, Slovenia, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and The UK. I met a lot of interesting people, I discovered my strengths and weaknesses (in photography and in life) and found out that almost everyone owns a bath mat by IKEA among other things.

Exactly one year after I started Fools With Dreams, I ended the project. After that it took me a month and a half to recover (physically and mentally) and to become a real member of society once again. Someone who cooks his own food, has his own place, pays his own bills.

Since then I’ve been working hard to make it as a photographer. And at creating this book.

When you take a large amount of photos, it is difficult to edit down to your best shots to include in a series, exhibition, or book with a limited amount of space. During the Fools With Dreams project I took more than 200.000 pictures. Getting this down to a reasonable number was a major exercise. I had advice from several people whose opinion I respected, but this only got me more confused.

So I asked myself what the project was really about, and that answer was far clearer: it was about the stories of the 62 fools in this book. So in the end, the Fools With Dreams book is not a collection of my best pictures, it’s a collection of these stories. This way it also embodies much of the appeal of photography itself: the sense of time unfolding, a durable trace of movement through space. A journey of me and of 62 other fools.

- Maarten

"A question I got a lot was "what do you carry along during your project"? Especially when people saw me arrive with nothing more than a backpack and a small suitcase. A lot of thought went into finding the best bags and what to leave behind. But, I think I succeeded in gathering everything I needed to cover almost every scenario I would encounter (heat, cold, rain, snow, ...). Even better, I don't think I've missed one thing along the way.

1. F-Stop Guru. Perfect camera bag that doesn't look like a camera bag. Waterproof, pockets and straps everywhere to store and attach stuff, and most important you can access your camera and lenses from the back.
2. Pacsafe Toursafe EXP21. Hand luggage size, big wheels and sturdy.

BAG 1 (F-Stop Guru): This bag is mainly for all technology and other small camera related items I need to have quick access to.

3. MeFOTO Globetrotter travel tripod. Lightweight, folds almost completely flat and can be used as a monopod.
4. F-Stop Medium Internal Camera Unit (ICU). They sell these in different sizes and they fit in all F-Stop backpacks, so you can mix and match them to suit your needs, or remove them when you need the whole backpack.
5. Nikon 85mm 1.4G lens. Can you say Bokehhhhhh?
6. Nikon 24mm 2.8 lens.
7. Nikon 50mm 1.4G lens. This is what was on my camera most of the time.
8. Nikon D800 camera.
9. Kenko macro extension tubes. Perfect for jewelry shots.
10. Nikon SB900 flash. For when you need a splash of light.
11. Nikon charger for the camera batteries.
12. WD My Passport 2TB external HD for all images. I always carried 2 around that are a mirror of each other as backup, and tried to separate them as much as possible (the other one was in the other bag). Even with 2TB of space I had to buy a new pair every 100 days on average.
13. Protective case for my external HD.
14. Hotshoe mount for my GoPro, to film what I was shooting.
15. Gopro Session 4.
16. Spare battery for my camera. Best. Investment. Ever.
17. HAMA USB3 card reader. Eats up every time of card you throw at it (not really).
18. LensPen I always carry around in my bag. Small and light, but gets dust and fingerprints of my lenses when needed.
19. Sennheiser earbuds. I have to buy a new pair almost every year because I really (ab)use them, but they are awesome. Perfect to keep noise out also, and put on some rain sounds when trying to sleep.
20. Hoya Circular Polarizer.
21. Passport.

22. Sunglasses.
23. Eagle Creek Pack-It cube for all small USB cables and general stuff like tape, GoPro accessories, ...
24. Toilet bag.
25. ASUS Zenbook laptop. Lightweight but powerfull.
26. Deodorant.
27. Candle. Got this from a good friend when I left, to use when I wanted to feel a little bit at home away from home.
28. Microfibre cloth to clean my glasses and lenses.
29. Kevin Murphy hair clay, to keep my hair stylish.
30. A lock to attach the bag to almost everything, for example in the train when you're sleeping.
31. Gloves. Because you can't take pictures with frozen hands.

BAG 2 (Pacsafe Toursafe): Here you'll find mostly clothing and other practical stuff. I really like the Pack-it cubes as it enabled me to grab everything I needed without making a mess all the time. Pretty important when you're on the move the whole time

32. Eagle Creek Pack-it cube with everything pants related: 6 boxer shorts, a jeans and 2 (swim) shorts.
33. Another Eagle Creek Pack-it cube for my shoes.
34. And another Eagle Creek Pack-it cube with T-shirts.
35. You guessed it, an Eagle Creek Pack-it cube for socks.
36. Laundry sack. As I often threw my laundry in the washing machine together with others, it made it easy to keep my stuff separate this way.
37. Sleeping mask. You have no idea how many people don't have blinds.

Not on the image: As I was wearing clothes when I took these photos (phew!), some items are not on the lists above.

38. Marmot PreCip rain jacket.
39. Wool sweater that got me through the cold days and when I needed to be stylish.
40. Chrome Industries Merino Hoodie. Warm, practical and provides extra street cred in the hoods.
41. Black jeans.
42. Gray T-shirt.
43. Nike sneakers. Red.
44. Bank and other similar cards.
45. The smartphone I made the picture with.



Fool 1 - BITCHPLEASE

Actually fool 0 would have been more appropriate. At the time this trade took place I was only considering the idea of trading full time. So when designer Anouk asked me to photograph the first collection of her sweater label BITCHPLEASE I proposed a trade as a test run. This would also provide the people who would visit the project website I was building with an example before I really started. I didn't stay over at her house because I still had my own place, but instead she designed a logo for the project. So we found ourselves at a cactus plantation a few days later amid sharp needles everywhere. Safe to say we got stung a few times, but the result was worth it ...

month 0, location Rumst (BE),
duration 0 nights, season winter,
images 16



Mémoire.

It's impossible to predict how a project like this will go. You can prepare all you want, but when it's starting you just have to jump out of the plane and trust your preparations. Before I left, my mom had already asked me every possible question you could ever have about this project. So in that way she gave me the best preparation possible.

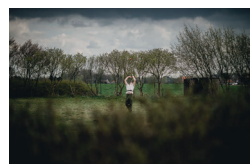
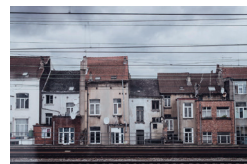
The night before my first real trade, I was suddenly quite nervous. Up until then I didn't have time for freakouts, because I was too busy preparing everything, but that night ... I was nervous. Where would I end up during my adventure, who would I stay with, would I be taking photos I'd be proud of?

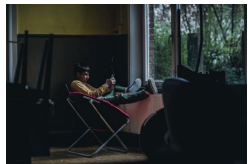
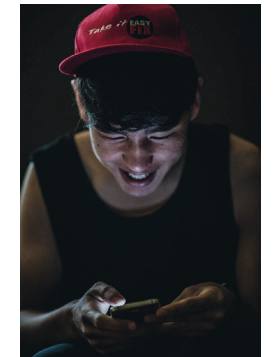
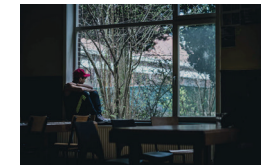
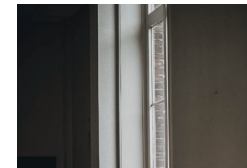
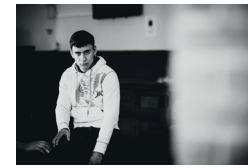
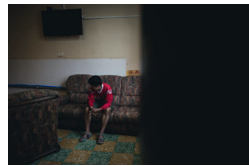
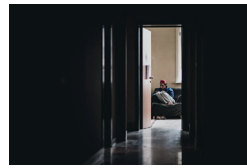
That Sunday night I was staying with friends, because I gave up my job and my apartment of course. I had a stressy night, got up in the morning, took the tram to Radio 2 and just ... started.

Fool 15 - Refugee Centre Knesselare

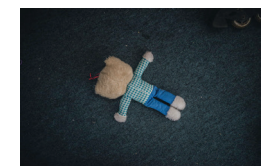
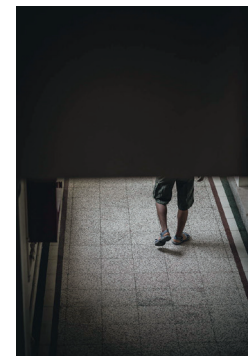
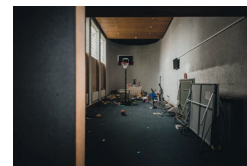
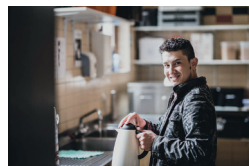
My next trade was a very special one. I was invited by Barnabé, the director of the reception centre for asylum seekers in Knesselare. The residents are mostly minors, coming from Iraq and Pakistan. Barnabé wanted two things: to show people on the outside what life is really like living inside a centre and to provide some kind of interesting entertainment for the kids because life inside a centre can be very boring. The supervisors do their best to entertain everyone, but there aren't that many options. It was a fascinating environment, I really enjoyed taking the boys' pictures. They gave me complete freedom to roam around and photograph.

month 3, location Knesselare (BE),
duration 4 nights, season spring,
images 54





The boys in the centre really have a place in my heart. On the one hand they are like any other teenage boy: they play cricket and soccer and joke around with each other. They were pretty vain and loved to have their photograph taken. I went on little trips with them, went shopping for clothes with them, very normal things. On the other hand they are glued to their smartphones, hoping to receive some news from their families. It's easy to forget that they are here alone and that they have a lot of worries too.



Fools With Dreams was a social project from the beginning. This culminated in a Kickstarter campaign where 118 people came together to bring this book to life.

kickstarter.com/projects/595452217/book-fools-with-dreams

Sarah Van Looy
Lore Lavens
Judith Clijsters
Lauren Kosten
Nathalie & Nicolas Bosschaerts
Kristof & Angélique Roelandts-Baert
Château Valcreuse, Caroline en Alexander Siera
Rosario
Marijke Winters
Bert Van Wassenhove & Els De Deken
Will & Claire
Sanne This & Albert Wieck Davidsen
Johan De Keyser
Hera Aerts
Vincent & Karlien Van Dingenen
Ellen van den Adel en Hans Blom
Barbara Luypaert
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Gilles De Clerck
Kolonel Koffie
Cathy & Andries
Julie & Olivier
Tom Gillo
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Kirsten, Joke, Sam en Lies
Daisy & Eric
Liesbeth Van der Jonckheyd
Linda Van Lint
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Vincent Buyskens
Carline Develter
Mariette Gryson
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Kato Allaert
Winfried Casters
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Oded Hartman & Melissa Vandeputte
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Memo Olguin
Peter Bertels
Raymond
Where's Wally?
Renaldi Diombo
Mark Wainger
Pieter Van Hecke
Matthijs De Block
Elliot Briden
Dieter (CityCubes)
Sofie Mordyck
Colton Kravanek
Hannelore Durnez
Stijn & Lotte
Dries & Dorien
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