

# #55 – When Gratitude is Hard with Eve Turek Final

**Donna Ferris:** [00:00:00] Welcome to Bounce Back Stronger, the podcast that explores ways to find peace and purpose no matter what happens.

I'm your host, Donna Ferris, and today we have award-winning photographer and gratitude advocate Eve Turek with us.

A little about Eve.

Eve says her calling is to see, listen, and express gratitude in every frame she captures.

In 2014, she won the gold medal for landscape photography in the World Photographic Cup with her stunning image of a tree line in fog, a powerful reminder that sometimes the greatest gifts come when we least expect them. Her work extends beyond photography. She has also shared her heartfelt insights in “Chicken Soup for the Soul” with a piece titled “The Gratitude List,” which explores the importance of appreciation, even in the face of life's challenges.

Eve, thank you so much for being on the podcast. It's so good to have the chance [00:01:00] to speak with you again.

**Eve Turek:** I'm very grateful and honored that you would consider having me here. So, thank you for the larger work you're doing in the world through the podcast.

**Donna Ferris:** Oh, thank you. Thank you. And we met after we were stalking your photography, my husband, and I.

Your work is in a storefront right near our house in Duck. And we've been coming into that shop quite a bit actually because there's several different pieces we've bought there and we were looking at this. What is the tree line fog picture?

**Eve Turek:** Meditation.

Yeah, Meditation and then what was funny. It just it's just one of those moments where like everything kind of aligned. We went there and were like, oh the

picture's gone that we were going to buy. And then we went to the artist's event that you were at and there was the picture and we're like, yeah!

And then we talked for a little bit with you and I was so impressed with how you think about your art [00:02:00] and life that you just seemed a perfect guest for the podcast.

Maybe let's talk a little bit about how you think about art and, in particular, the meditation photo.

Which photo just doesn't seem like it's strong enough of a word because it is just a beautiful, beautiful image.

**Eve Turek:** So that image in particular is a good illustration, I think, of my own photographic practice. I'd gotten up in the dark, arrived to this inland lake. It's a good 2 hours, 2 hours, 20 minutes away, something like that.

And a group of us photographers were going in the winter. It was a little photo club outing. And I was thrilled because this would be my 1st chance to be at the lake when the sun came up. There are only a couple of months a year when the sun or the moon rises behind that line of trees. [00:03:00] It's a stand of bald Cypress.

They're rooted in water. And so it's very picturesque on days when the water is still, when there's not much breeze. And happily enough, that was the condition that morning. So, we all drove out. I'm certain everyone else had my expectation, which was a glorious, vibrant, over-the-top winter sunrise. Oh, it would be orange. It would be pink. It would be purple.

No. Dense fog. It was dense, dense fog. And in fact, when we should have seen the sun break the horizon, there was no horizon. There was no sun. There was barely the shadow of a darker, foggy blob where the trees ought to be. In that moment, all I could feel, frankly, [00:04:00] was disappointment.

I'd gotten up early, made this great effort, and when was I going to have that chance to go again? And so we hung around there for a little bit, drove around a little bit, came back to the trees, and eventually, by mid-morning or so, the fog began to burn off a little. Now, we still didn't have what I would call color.

The sky was not blue. We were still shrouded in fog. But all of a sudden, what looked to be the obstacle, what looked to be the disappointment, became the

very means that we needed. of gift. The fog began to lift between the shoreline and the trees, but the lake beyond was wide, and so the fog lingered there.

You couldn't see the other side of the lake. The horizon had vanished, and there was [00:05:00] hardly any wind, just the least little ripple in the water, so the trees were reflected. And I've told this story over and over. You can imagine in the 11 years now it's been since I made the image, it was almost disorienting standing on the solid dock on shore and looking across and seeing these trees floating in space.

That's how it felt. That's how it looked. I couldn't get enough of the trees. Well, all that time that I was watching the trees, changing my lenses, making some images, there was a snarky little voice sort of off my left shoulder. We've all heard it. It's that discouraging voice. And snarky little voice lied to me.

It said, no one is going to care about these trees. You're not going to sell one single photograph of these trees at the beach. What [00:06:00] are you doing? You need to move along. And for once, I didn't answer with my head. The only real answer I had to Mr. Snarky was the answer from my heart, which was, I love them, so I stayed, and as you know, then that photograph went on to be honored in frankly astounding way. And it has become the best selling photograph in my portfolio, even before folks understand the award that it won.

It just draws people in.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah, it totally does. It's a beautiful image. And it's calming, actually. You know, it is. It's perfectly named.

**Eve Turek:** It was so peaceful that morning. Fog mutes color. It dims color. Well, it mutes sound, too. And [00:07:00] we were also there for winter waterfowl that come to the region and to that lake in particular by the thousands in the wintertime.

Well, we could hear them, But we couldn't see them unless they just flew into the frame. And so the whole experience was mystical, ethereal, truly.

**Donna Ferris:** It truly is. You have a unique way of looking when you take pictures of animals, too. Can you talk a little bit about that? I thought that was fascinating.

**Eve Turek:** Yes. And so one thing I'd like to say, I'm on a one woman mission to modify the lexicon of photography, because we photographers talk amongst

ourselves too about capturing. Sometimes even saying the word shoot, which can have a double entendre, of course. So I'm very sensitive [00:08:00] to the use of that word today, in today's world.

I'm trying not to use the word capture. Oh Eve, you captured that sunset. Oh my goodness, you captured that, that red wolf. No, my preference is to say, I received.

**Donna Ferris:** I love that.

**Eve Turek:** I'm trying to go out, not as a predator, that happens to be toting a lens. I'm trying to go out into their world and ask to be granted moments of connection through the lens, so that I can, just for those moments, share a little bit in understanding their wild lives. And then hopefully creating an image of beauty and, and purpose and connection that the viewer then [00:09:00] can be drawn into and perhaps care just a little bit more about stewardship and conservation and looking for the gifts that nature gives us, right?

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah.

**Eve Turek:** What do we say when we get gifts? If we've been brought up right.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah.

**Eve Turek:** So when I go into the field, I'm asking specifically, and I'll say this out loud sometimes in the car as I'm riding to my chosen spot. I'm asking for the images meant for me. I'm asking for the experiences that I'm meant to have today and then later share with others through the medium that photography is.

And it's an interesting medium because, at least for me, there are so many senses involved at once. When I'm photographing, whether I'm [00:10:00] aiming my lens at an ocean wave, or a flock of birds, or a bear foraging around in a bean field, I'm very aware of motion, so I'm engaged with my eyes. I am listening.

I'm feeling whatever the temperature, whatever the air is. Is it hot? Is it cold? Is the wind blowing? I have tactile memory because I'm holding this lens and I'm choosing my moment. I'm concentrating. I'm literally focused. Wonderful word. I've had a lens choice. Another nice phrase. What's my lens on this scene?

What's my lens on the world? What's my lens on the life?

My life. The life. And so I'm saying, typically, when I see a critter, what I've said since I was a toddler, [00:11:00] which is, I'm sure I'm on webcam somewhere on the Fish and Wildlife remote sensing cameras. They're all over the refuges here. "Hi, baby. I love you."

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah.

**Eve Turek:** "And thank you." And I have had experiences over and over, frankly, way too many to tell and fit in this podcast, where I have asked for an animal to come. Now, it's not a hundred percent. I don't want to imply that it is. But it's much better than 50%, where if I'm sensitive and I'm really listening with my heart, not just my ears, there have been times, many times, when I've asked an animal to come, when I have watched an animal be a little more reticent, maybe at the back edge of a field and a car roars up. And they disappear, [00:12:00] and then that car goes away, and they step back out.

And I've tried to say, in this moment, with me, right now, you are safe. And I will honor you. If you would allow me to have your portrait, your picture, I would love that. And I will honor you with it. So that's my approach.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah. And you're going to Africa. You've been there before. Maybe talk a little bit at why it's important to go there in particular to take pictures there.

**Eve Turek:** So when I went to Africa this was the fall of 22 my my first trip. A bucket list trip. And the timing was deliberate. It was running right up on the one-year anniversary of my husband's passing. Pete's passed in November of 2021. And so he left a big [00:13:00] hole. He was a big guy and had a big life.

And we had a good life together. He was older than I. We had more years together than we could have hoped for on the day we said, I do. But I knew coming up on that anniversary in particular, that I was going to need something to help fill that empty bucket.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah.

**Eve Turek:** So, I went to Africa on a photo safari photo workshop there.

And what was astounding to me is that in that reserve, animals did not view humans as predators. They really done a great job about restricting and sort of preventing in that region, at least, poaching, trophy hunting. There are other areas where hunting is allowed, but not in that area where we were, [00:14:00]

and so we weren't viewed as prey, and we weren't viewed as predators, long as we obeyed the rules, which was to stay put in the safari vehicle as we rode those roads.

We were mere yards away from all these magnificent animals who are used to seeing the vehicles. So, in that sense, they're habituated to traffic. They're habituated to folks pulling over and stopping and staring at them. They notice, but they don't care. It doesn't modify what they're going to be doing.

Whether it's a lion lazily sleeping or stretching or on the hunt, whether it's a pack of wild dogs trotting off after a zebra herd, whether it's elephants browsing, and we got to witness and watch all of [00:15:00] this life happening all around us in an atmosphere where the animals weren't afraid of humans. And so one of the things I like to say is I've become increasingly fascinated with the Eden story. My name is Eve, right? And so

**Donna Ferris:** That's a natural.

**Eve Turek:** What I like to say about that is, however, you approach that story, whether you approach it as literal fact, or you approach it as metaphor, or you approach it as a teaching tale.

How I approach the story is I view it as a blueprint. What was the original intention? What was the original blueprint?

Pete was a builder, a master builder. He always had a blueprint. Sometimes it might start out as a rough sketch. He might have to [00:16:00] modify as he saw the landscape, but he always had a blueprint. in mind. A grand design, if you will.

So, what was the grand design? Well, frankly, the grand design was connection. The grand design was love. The grand design was harmony. We're told in the story as it goes along that Adam, Eve, humanity, walked in peace with one another, horizontally, with the animals that apparently were tame because Adam named them.

Vertically, our connection with God, with Source, with the Divine, there was unity and harmony and connection. And so, at bottom, what I'm doing when I go out is I'm asking for glimpses [00:17:00] of Eden. What might that have been like? And so there are moments, because we're not there.

But I take hope and inspiration from what I believe was the original intention, what the design was. And I might be crazy, but I'm going to align, as best a human can, my words, my thoughts, my life, my work, my purpose, with that commitment. Peace to harmony. I came back from Africa and made a choice to no longer eat meat or poultry.

I just couldn't do it. Now, I will say, I'm not vegan. I'm still drinking milk. I'm still eating eggs. [00:18:00] And this has been an emotional struggle, but for the last year I've been also eating wild caught seafood. I don't feel good about that choice emotionally. My body seemed to need more than I was able to give it purely plant-based.

I have some other food sensitivities that were making that diet very difficult.

**Donna Ferris:** Okay.

**Eve Turek:** So one of the things I try to remember is the Native American practice. of saying thank you. And so that's how I pray. My little doggie hears me every night. Thank you to this fish that gave away. Thank you to the farmers.

To the growers, to the reapers, to the grocery store stockers, to the factory workers. I'm sure she's like, yeah, mom. Yeah, mom. Come on. I want to lick the bowl. But I want to remember when I sit at a meal, the whole food chain, [00:19:00] everything that went into my being nourished, my life. So that's just a little example of how I try to be mindful that everything that has come to me, really, I'm receiving, it's gift. And it's at someone else's cost. It might be the cost of a salmon. It might be the cost of a fisherman going out in rough conditions to catch that fish or to harvest those crops. I try to remember that. I try not to take it for granted.

You know, we say don't take it for granted. It is granted. I am trying to literally take those gifts as granted and then live a life that is worthy of all that sacrifice.

**Donna Ferris:** And a [00:20:00] couple questions come to mind here. I guess the first is, how is that in this world that we live in? How does that feel trying to walk that path in this world?

**Eve Turek:** It's a challenge. It's a true challenge. I'm a human, so do I flare? Do I get impatient? Do I worry? Absolutely. And for me, it's a constant swinging back to the path. I ask to be course-corrected. And so one of the things my

photography does, frankly, is it brings me back to center. It brings me back to the moment.

It brings me back to making a connection. It might be to a particular hawk that I know where that hawk's territory is within the refuge on one of the main roads. Oh my gosh. Every time I see it, my heart swells. And I will stop. Doesn't matter if I've made a thousand images of that hawk. I'll make one [00:21:00] more.

I've never even printed one. But I love that bird. And I'm always saying, "Oh my gosh, I'm so glad to see you. You got through the winter okay. Thank you." It's that connecting feeling.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah. I was going through a really rough time at work, and it was this last winter, and there was a heron that was on my walk, and every day I had that heron, and I had to go away for a week for work, and I was like, I'm so sad I have to leave my heron because it made such a difference.

I can totally relate to your hawk.

**Eve Turek:** And then one other practice, many years ago now. There was a death in the extended family that really was not an unexpected death, but it was quick. And so there wasn't much time to prepare emotionally, and it threw the family into much turmoil and widened rifts that had already been there. It was an [00:22:00] awful time. And at the time I was talking almost daily with a good friend who knew the family and I was telling her the same story, same speech, different day, how awful everything was, and she said to me, "Eve, tonight, I want you to take some paper. And the next time you go out, I want you to buy a little notebook, and I want you to write down 10 things out of today, today's lived experience, that you're grateful for."

And I thought, are you out of your mind? Have you not been listening? It's awful! And she went on to say, you're going to struggle to find 10 things at first.

But I promise you You've gone nose blind. Remember that commercial years back?

**Donna Ferris:** Yes.

**Eve Turek:** You've gone nose blind to the joys that are around you, still. And she was so correct. And I began that [00:23:00] practice that very evening. It was 2004. So 20 years ago now. 20 years. And so every night I have a little



notebook in the top door of my nightstand and that is the last thing I do before I turn out the light.

I write down the ten things out of today. And they aren't always big-ticket things like a roof over my head. Unless, of course, we've had a hurricane.

**Donna Ferris:** And it's a question, which we just did.

**Eve Turek:** Just did. Yeah, so I try to be very specific about whatever happened that day, and that became almost a game in the beginning.

I knew I had to write things down that night. So, all day long, instead of focusing on everything going wrong. I was looking for things to put on my list. I was seeking those things to be grateful for. [00:24:00] And that has been a practice that truly changed the focus, back to a photography word, of my larger life.

**Donna Ferris:** And I wonder, since the image, when did you take it? Take the image of the tree line and fog?

**Eve Turek:** January 2013.

**Donna Ferris:** So I wonder if that would have been possible without the gratitude list.

**Eve Turek:** Perhaps not. Because my attitude would have been totally different. I could see myself climbing in the car and going home.

**Donna Ferris:** The snarky voice would have won maybe.

**Eve Turek:** The snarky voice undoubtedly would have won.

**Donna Ferris:** It's just amazing how that little twist of gratitude can make a huge difference for us. And people, you know, can be kind of snarky about that. They're snarky about the gratitude idea, but it really does change us. It allows us to see beyond the end of our nose, to your point.

**Eve Turek:** [00:25:00] Well, and for me, so again, here I am, I'm a widow. Seven months after Pete died, the man who will be the closest I'll ever have to a brother, fellow photographer, died suddenly.

**Donna Ferris:** Oh, no.

**Eve Turek:** And so I began to realize in practicality that expressing gratitude didn't diminish the loss. It didn't devalue the grief, right?

This wasn't a practice of la la la, get over it, move on. It was a both and, not an either or. So that I could hold, and still do, hold tremendous sorrow. And I could still have capacity for delight and joy and gratitude is the, the path that let me see that, [00:26:00] that both were possible. It's not that I was going to leave grief behind, but we would walk together, my grief and I, into the new day, but with gratitude.

**Donna Ferris:** That's tremendous. And it is exactly that. It is an *and* world, if you can find it. If you can find that and hold them both. As we are coming to the end of our time together, which I am just so sad about. What did I miss? What should have I asked? Or what do you want to share? You've been so amazing in sharing how you've moved beyond those difficult times.

And I love the idea of going to Africa, like doing something on your bucket list on that one-year anniversary. That's a great and courageous way to remember them at that loss.

**Eve Turek:** It really was transformative for me, and it helped me understand. I think that that's what [00:27:00] photography can do.

It certainly helped me that trip. But some of those images, I watch meditation and some of the others, particularly where they've been those special moments. Whether it's the land itself and the light, or whether it's a bird or a critter, those special moments of connection. I watch visitors get drawn to and get riveted by those very images.

That opens the door for me to ask if you would like to know the backstory? Obviously, I own the gallery, so sales are important. But it's very important to me that visitors breathe when they come, and that they receive what they are meant to receive by coming in. And for many, it's just a story. It's not taking the image home.

It's taking it home in their mind and in their heart, but it's not [00:28:00] the image itself. Interestingly enough, not too long ago, within this last calendar year, I journal in the morning. We haven't even gotten to that, but I read "The Artist's Way" in 2002 and heard practice of three long hand pages early in the morning, first thing before your day really gets going. Well, I began to be a

habitual instead of a sporadic journaler after I read her book and followed that practice through the duration of the 12-week read.

And I've done that ever since as well. It's a rare day that I don't sit down with my morning journal before I do anything else. And that might mean getting up at four o'clock, so I can journal before I climb in the car, still in the dark, to go off and be somewhere for sunrise. And so that practice has turned into dialogue. I pray [00:29:00] on paper. I bore out, profound or petty, doesn't matter, goes on the page. I need to do my laundry today. I can't believe I forgot dog food yesterday. I only have one day left. Whatever the next thought is, it goes on the page. And then here will come this answering gentle wisdom to a dilemma that I've rant rant ranting about.

And because it's on paper, it's not just in my head. It's not just me laying in bed at night thinking, thinking, thinking. I have a record. I can go back to those pages. And so often, I'll find myself writing something down, and I'll think, Wait a minute. Wait a minute. I've written this before. I remember this, and I'll go look and get amplified instruction sometimes just from that ability to go back.

So I can't recommend morning pages highly [00:30:00] enough and the morning pages in the morning. And then my gratitude in the evening. So, in my morning pages several months ago, I got clear instruction that said, You're doing really well on gratitude. Your joy meter could use some work. And I said, Mm hmm. God, I think my joy meter is broken.

And so the instruction I got was at the end of my gratitude list, just to make a notation of any experience during the day of upwelling spontaneous joy. What was that? What brought me that instantaneous feeling, emotion of joy and delight? What made my heart sing that day? And some days there's five or six things, and some days I really have to think.

But I'll think, yes, that did. I had that moment. [00:31:00] And the instruction was, the more you write that down and you start to be aware of that during the day, the more that will grow.

**Donna Ferris:** And you'll find it.

**Eve Turek:** Exactly. Joy will come back to my life.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah, there's a Maria Sirois idea - she's the person's retreat I went to on the anniversary of a loved one's death.

That was my way to remember. And she talks about the pond. And the swamp, so that life is filled with both, right? And when we lose somebody, we tend to feel like everything's a swamp, and it's important to remember that every day has pond in it, too. And so she, that's kind of her practice, is to find the joy in those pond moments.

And she recommends that people actually every day write down a pond moment. Like what is, what is my joyful takeaway from the day and then it causes you to find it, [00:32:00] because otherwise you wouldn't.

**Eve Turek:** Yes. Otherwise it passes on by, it doesn't rivet, it doesn't attach.

**Donna Ferris:** No, and it can be mundane, right? Like for me sometimes it's just... my daughter's 22 and I have her home now and it's nice to watch tv with her. Because I know when she was in college, I didn't have that and someday I won't have that again.

So, those can be completely mundane moments.

**Eve Turek:** Oh my gosh. I have a feral kitty. I've had him now several years. I feed several kitties They're all spayed and neutered and they're my loves. And this one feral began to purr.

**Donna Ferris:** Aw.

**Eve Turek:** Ferals will never purr. This kitty purrs, and now he comes mostly for pets and rubs, and then he wants to be fed.

But he wants his pets and rubs first. And so many times what I'm writing down is my spontaneous upwelling of joy because I reach down to him and instead of him running in fear or [00:33:00] swatting and hissing in fear, He leans in and he purrs.

**Donna Ferris:** It's a gift.

**Eve Turek:** It's a gift.

**Donna Ferris:** It's a gift. And I bet if you hadn't had that gratitude practice, you never would have found that.

I think animals are so, so sensitive. They can, they can totally tell our energy.

**Eve Turek:** I think they can. I really do believe, back to that earlier point about asking an animal to come. Or move into a different spot, you know, come out from behind that clump of grass just three feet over, and I can tell you it worked in Africa too.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah, so you're going soon, right?

**Eve Turek:** Yes, fly out October 22nd, be home middle of November. So it's a long trip, but I'm excited. We'll be in Botswana for about a week and then South Africa.

**Donna Ferris:** I can't wait to hear about it when you get back.

**Eve Turek:** Yeah.

**Donna Ferris:** Thank you. Thank you so, so very [00:34:00] much for speaking with me and being on the podcast and for all your work.

I love your gallery. Can you, can you mention your gallery's name so so people can find it?

**Eve Turek:** So there are two names. There's a much longer story than we have time for, for why that is two rooms adjoining. I own both. So there's Sea Dragon Gallery and Yellow House Gallery, both in Duck on the Boardwalk.

**Donna Ferris:** And it's usually open after sunset. So if you're going to watch sunset on that dock by Blue Point please go visit the gallery. It's a beautiful gallery,

**Eve Turek:** We're in a beautiful setting for sure.

**Donna Ferris:** Oh, it's beautiful there. Thank you so, so much.

**Eve Turek:** Thank you.

**Donna Ferris:** If you want to learn more about Eve's work and her galleries, those links will be in the show notes. Thank you so much for listening. I hope this episode was helpful. If it was, please subscribe, drop a review, or share it with your friends and family.

That's the best way to get it in the hands of those who may benefit. [00:35:00]  
And if my daughters, Sienna and Sylvie are listening, I want you to know how proud I am of you. And I love you so much.

Bye now.