

## **A Darkroom Life**

**Preface:** The author wishes to thank his father for constructing a darkroom in the basement of his house as he was growing up and to thank his two older brothers for showing him how to use it.

### **Developer:**

I was born in an enlarger. Under the soft red glow of the globe hanging above me, a sudden flash of bright light passed through a negative, spilling down upon an ovum of silver gelatin.

My negative was Black; I am White. As I was forming, an invisible hand blurred the sharp edges around me, erasing the details of what might have been imprinted on me. Unlike the pictures of so many others I have seen, there was no poverty, ignorance, war, or famine in my life. I was well composed and balanced—the center of attention.

After my carefully timed photonic conception, I was taken from the enlarger and placed by tongs in a bath that washed away everything that wasn't me. Gently agitated in its oily waters, my features slowly emerged and came into focus.

### **Stop:**

But there has to be an end to development.

If one keeps cramming in more and more detail, one ends up as a black hole where light can enter but nothing is reflected back.

[There were several points in the author's life where he might have been stopped from developing. He might have died in a crash while in a car driven by his drunken parents. He might have been standing a few inches to the left when his brothers were shooting their shotguns while hunting rattlesnakes on his grandfather's ranch in Texas. He might have slipped and fallen when he was perched on top of the narrow pediment of a Hellenistic temple in Lindos, Rhodes, trying to take a photograph of the ephemeral traces of a stoa below.]

But no such disasters befell me. Instead, the tongs lifted me into the next bath, whose sour lemon waters halted the darkening of my soul.

### **Fixer:**

But I was still not quite done. The tongs put me into a third bath whose basic waters would set the features I would carry for the rest of my life.

And there I was, ready to be dried, mounted, and framed.

Still, there was the nagging existential question everyone has to face: “Is this all there is to life?”

**Epilogue:**

Nothing lasts forever.

So I spent many years in a gilt frame on the mantelpiece, doted on by loving parents and grandparents, mocked at by teasing brothers, a source of embarrassment to older versions of myself who tried to keep girlfriends from looking at my childish features.

But those days eventually came to an end. I was placed in a cardboard box where I stayed in darkness from one move to another. Occasionally I would be taken out, looked at by faces that grew increasingly quizzical over time, and then placed back in another cardboard box.

And even though I have fancy acid-free matting, I can feel myself slowly breaking down. My edges have already yellowed, and it won't be long until the oxidation comes on and everything goes dark.