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BEGINNER

# The Art of Giving Back:

## Professional Photographer Sandro Makes it a Priority

*Featuring* **NIKON AMBASSADOR SANDRO MILLER**

**A**n incredibly engaged professional whose work takes him round the globe, photographer/cinematographer and Nikon Ambassador Sandro has always made time to give back in ways that benefit worthwhile causes. He has helped dozens of groups and causes.

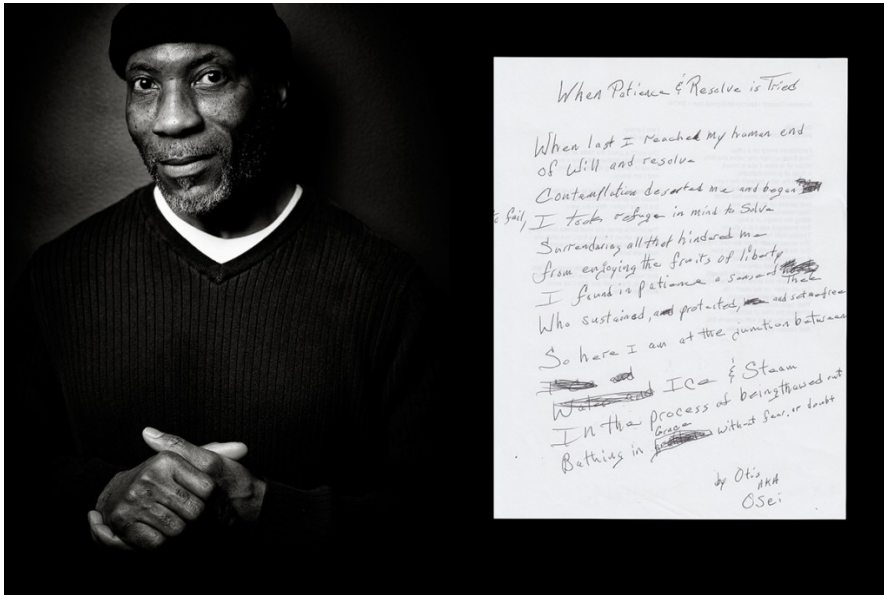
For the American Heart Association (AHA) donations drive, he traveled to New York to photograph eight heart transplant recipients. Over the course of six years, Sandro donated his time and talent by capturing dance imagery destined to grace promotional materials for the AIDS organization Dance for Life. And for Food Depository of Chicago, a cause that feeds the homeless, he directed numerous hours toward the production of a video that helps solicit funding.

“Donating your talent over money is the ultimate gift to a foundation or charity,” asserts Sandro. “Your talent is worth much more than many of us can give out of pocket; your image is worth a thousand words. Donating art prints to charities is also a wonderful gift—capable of raising hundreds or thousands of dollars.”

Sandro most recently completed photographing more than 60 former inmates whose lives have changed through poetry. Each of his images stands aside prose penned by its author within Finding Freedom: Poetry and Portraits of Former Inmates. Initiated by community volunteer and advertising copywriter Brandon Crockett, this campaign is seeking to raise awareness and funding to help individuals readjust into society following release from prison. Crockett contacted Sandro via letter and included samples of the poems. Immensely moved by their words, Sandro reveals he could only imagine what these individuals were going through.

# Donating is a Priority

“Donate your time and talent. Make it a priority,” Sandro emphatically states. “I cannot stress enough the importance of giving back to amazing efforts such as this—whether it’s a project in your own backyard or one that touches the entire planet. As photographers we create and share very powerful messages through our work. Help a community or association. Pick pro bono projects that make sense for you.” With a nod to many of the famed photographers of the past, Sandro reminds us that a portrait photographer can inspire thoughts and motives into action.



© Sandro Miller

Finding Freedom - "Otis".

## Tell the Truth

Over the course of a year Sandro visited the Grace House and St. Leonard’s Halfway House—locations where the former inmates reside. He photographed more than 60 residents during five separate photo shoots. Relying on sparse set-ups and backgrounds that he had designed, Sandro recalls the intent: to simply tell the truth; to reveal an authentic persona to each subject.

Black and white interpretation was the hands down choice. Photographs were created minus filters and beauty lights. “I wished to portray the subjects as they were,” mentions Sandro, sharing that for the most part these individuals had never been on the front side of a professional photographer’s camera. “Admittedly there was a bit of fear and reserve. We would spend the first five to ten minutes simply talking. This helped build confidence.”

Having read the contributors’ poems before each session, Sandro was incredibly moved. “I could see the scars, both physical and emotional, that each carried. I could feel the heartbreak and understand why these individuals did not always

trust.” When they gazed into my camera their eyes had a history of pain. It was beautiful when I captured a little smile from each. I knew then that they trusted me and were willing to give me the little secret about themselves that would make a powerful portrait.”

## His Takeaway is Giving Back

Without a doubt, the act of giving back returns far more than altruistic rewards. Sandro points out there are often other rewards. Non-profit and/or charity organizations seeking assistance may welcome additional input with art direction, graphics, layout and more. “Some projects bring expanded opportunity for expression and creative freedom. I have had opportunities where I have been invited to create the look, the style and feel of a campaign for a charity. This is also a great time to try something you have always wanted to try, to experiment, to make it something special.”

*Finding Freedom* is a book about pain, challenge, loss and life experienced by adults who have been incarcerated. Sandro produced every image within the edition. “I feel so good about the process. I have walked away from this project having gained much more than I ever imagined,” he notes. That time was poignant, tearful and enriching. “Countless times I simply wanted to reach out and give my subjects a hug, to tell them things would be OK.”

*Finding Freedom: Poetry and Portraits of Former Inmates* is printed by Blanchette Press.

Learn more about Sandro and the project Finding Freedom by visiting the website: [www.sandrofilm.com](http://www.sandrofilm.com) and the [Kickstarter](#) project.



*Featuring*

**SANDRO MILLER**



**NIKON AMBASSADOR**  
UNITED STATES

Sandro has been photographing people for over 30 years. He has worked on many award-winning projects for a long list of clients. Throughout Sandro's career, each year he has contributed his talents to both community based and national charitable organizations by creating powerful imagery and compelling campaigns. Visit his website at [www.sandrofilm.com](http://www.sandrofilm.com) and [ambassador page](#).

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