



All photographs by the author. This plate: Fruita, UT

## "The Dip" Can be Formidable: Here's How We Can Beat It

■ *Don Giannatti* | [www.dongiannatti.com](http://www.dongiannatti.com)

*Have you ever felt stuck in your photography career? Maybe you started off brimming with ideas and enthusiasm, but now you find yourself in a doldrum — wondering if you'll ever land consistent, high-paying clients. Hell, even a few low-paying gigs.*

*If this sounds familiar, you may be experiencing what marketing expert Seth Godin famously calls "The Dip." In essence, "The Dip" is that challenging middle stage between the honeymoon phase of starting something new and the eventual payoff of mastery. In photography, it can be the point where you question whether you*

*should press on or pack up your gear for good, and run the french fryer at Mickey D's.*

Fortunately, there's a way through this slump that can lead to deeper connections, higher-paying gigs, and a truly fulfilling career. In this rather longish post, I'll examine what "The Dip" looks like for emerging photographers, why perseverance is so crucial, and how to stay focused on your goals — even when the going gets tough. Really tough

## **Understanding "The Dip" in Photography**

In Seth Godin's book *The Dip: A Little Book That Teaches You When to Quit (and When to Stick)*, he points out that nearly every significant endeavor comes with a challenging phase that separates those who quit from those who become the best in their field.

For photographers, "The Dip" often manifests as a period of self-doubt and slow growth, when you're getting turned down more than accepted or not being paid what you're worth.

It's natural to feel discouraged when your schedule isn't filled up and your portfolio feels lackluster compared to your favorite shooters. However, Godin's key point is that "The Dip" isn't an obstacle — it's an opportunity.

It serves as a filter that weeds out the people who aren't fully committed. If you can push through, you'll emerge stronger, more skilled, and better connected than those who gave up too soon.



Ocotillos near the ranch, San Tan, AZ

## **Embrace the Hustle: My Personal Story**

When I started my photography adventure, I was willing to take on every damn job that came my way. It didn't matter if it was a lame commercial shoot, a model's portfolio, or a friend's corporate portrait — I said “yes.”

Sometimes, (way too often, if I remember correctly), I was paid little to nothing.

And frankly, it felt like the work wasn't leading anywhere. Every time I ran out of money, I wanted to quit.

Every time I had a week with nothing to do, I wanted to quit.

But for some reason, I kept going, day in and day out.

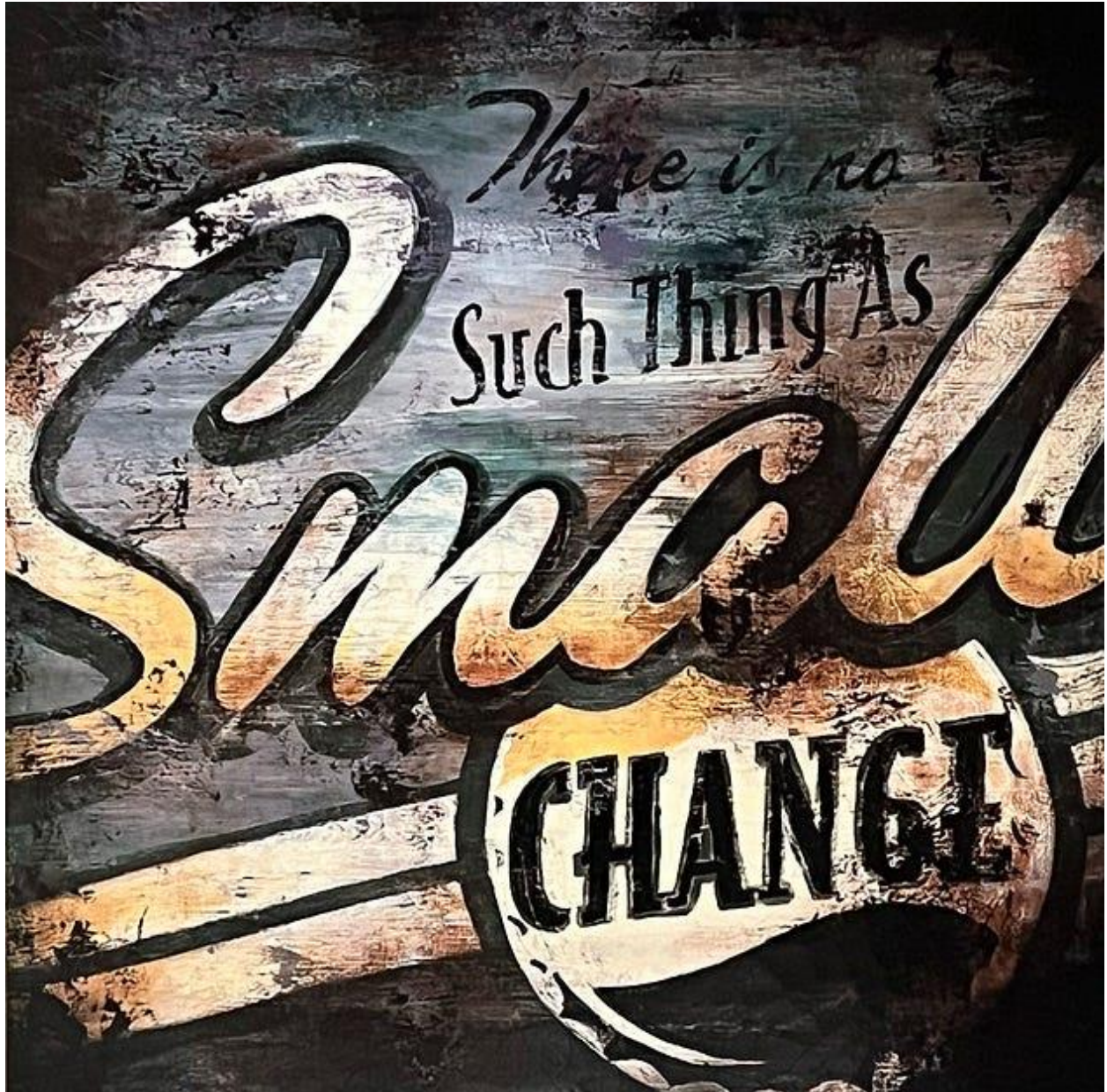
It seemed like I was spinning my wheels without any real progress.

In hindsight, this was an invaluable phase of relationship-building. The small clients I worked with were also on their own growth paths — some were junior art directors, some were local business owners just starting out in their own adventures.

As they moved up their ladders and their projects got bigger, they remembered the photographer who worked hard for them when many times no one else would.

And so, as they rose, I got brought up right along with them. The assignments improved, the fees increased, and I gained the reputation of someone who consistently delivers quality work.

***At Some Point, You are Going to Want to Quit (Substack)***



Painted panel: Williams, AZ

This was the first of several “Dips” I have weathered. Once you see it in action, you can more easily combat the negative trends.

This is the essence of sticking it out through “The Dip.” There is no such thing as overnight success; it’s about planting seeds that may not

bloom for months — or even years. But when they do, they can bloom in spectacular ways, and provide a wonderful base for growing more.

## **Finding Purpose in the Dip**

### **1. Clarify Your “Why”**

One of the best ways to stay motivated when you’re struggling is to remember why you got into photography in the first place. Was it the thrill of capturing a fleeting moment in perfect light? Was it the gratification of telling someone’s story visually?

Whatever your reason, keep that spark alive. Print your favorite photos, display them in your workspace, or write down a short mantra about why this craft matters to you. If you lose sight of your “why,” it’s all too easy to give up.

### **2. Focus on Skill-Building**

If you’re in a slow season for bookings, that doesn’t mean you have to press pause on your growth. It’s the perfect time to hone your technical and creative abilities. Challenge yourself to shoot a personal project that stretches your comfort zone.

Experiment with different lighting setups, locations, or subjects. By investing in skill-building, you’re essentially stockpiling quality work

for your portfolio — and showing potential clients that you aren't just sitting around playing *Call to Duty*, or doom-scrolling Facebook, you are actively creating more value.

### **3. Cultivate Meaningful Connections**

Too often, *networking* seems to be a dirty word with photographers.

In the photography community, building authentic relationships is just as important as having an eye for composition, or understanding the Inverse Square Law. It's a law, and it has the word "Inverse" in it...  
what?????

While social media sometimes be effective, consider attending workshops, industry events, or even smaller meetups to get to know other creatives in your area.

These connections aren't necessarily potential job leads — they're people you can learn from, collaborate with, and lean on for support when you're in "The Dip."

It was my deeper connections to art directors and clients that eventually brought me along as they climbed the ranks.

### **Persevering in a Competitive Market**

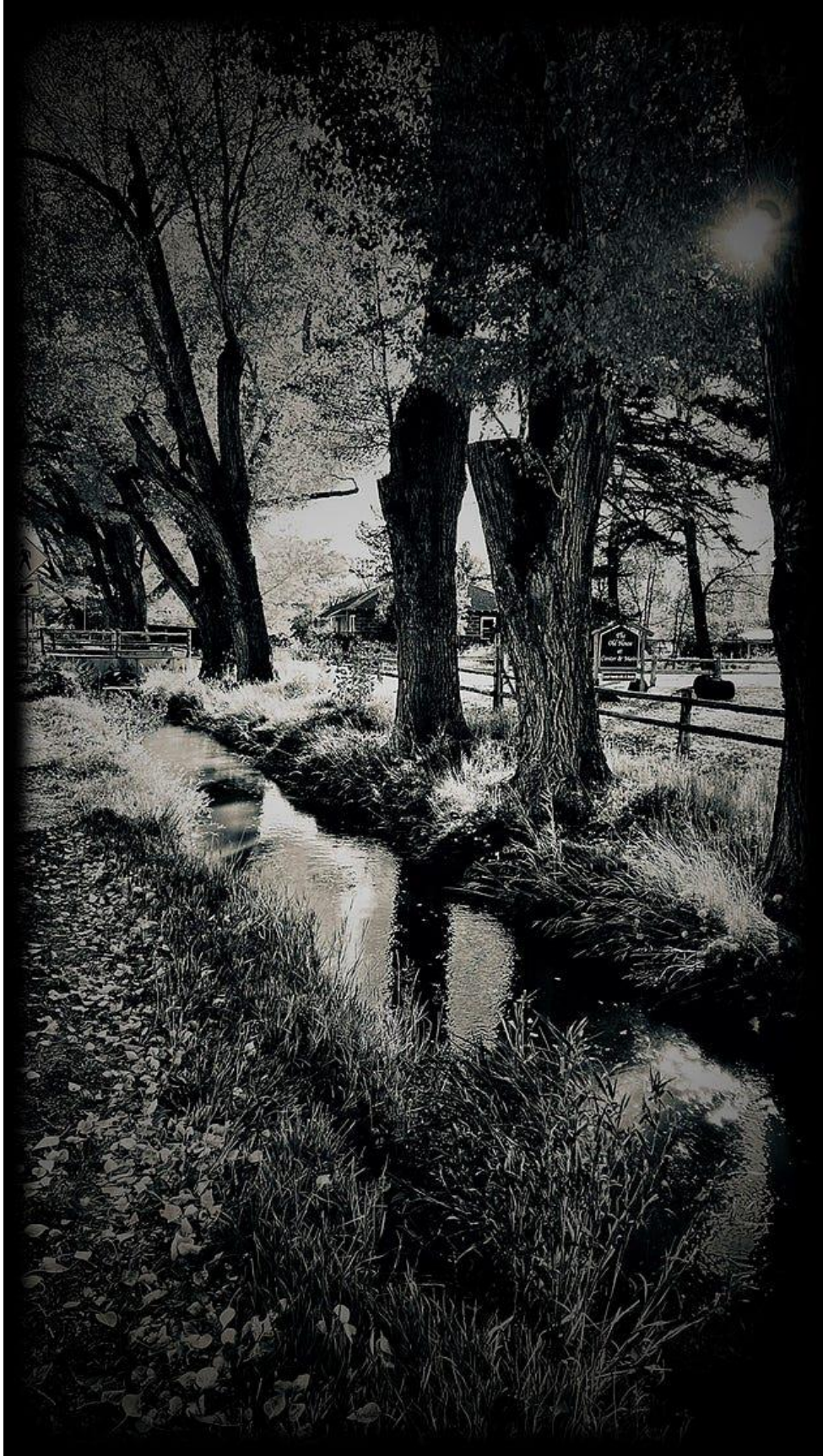
Photography is a saturated market.

Let me say that again.

Photography is a saturated market.

It's too easy to feel overshadowed by more established names or by the continuous influx of new photographers entering the market. And yet, the truly successful photographers aren't necessarily the ones who entered the market first or had the fanciest gear — ***they're the ones who refused to quit.***





Evening in Torrey, UT

## **1. Set Realistic Goals**

It's super tempting, and occasionally addicting, to dream big, and you absolutely should.

But it may be best to break those large-scale visions into smaller, manageable goals. For example, instead of aiming to be the go-to photographer for *every* magazine in your market, focus on pitching to three or four well-targeted publications per quarter. Setting achievable milestones helps you measure progress, stay motivated, and eventually build up to larger goals without burning out.

## **[“A Numbers Game” – Understanding What it Takes to Find and Keep Clients](#)**

## **2. Learn to Say “No” Strategically**

When you're just starting out, you might say “yes” to every opportunity as I did, and I can tell you that it works. Over time, however, you'll learn the value of setting boundaries.

Not every gig is going to move you closer to your goals, and sometimes an unreasonably low-paying job can undervalue the entire industry. You won't lose credibility by politely declining work that doesn't serve your long-term vision. Thoughtful “no's” can protect your energy and ensure that when you do say “yes,” you show up as your best, most creative self.

The power of understanding when to say yes, and when to emphatically say no, is one that takes time and experience to master. But you gotta do it. Know that you will screw up a few times. That is simply life.

### **3. Celebrate Small Wins**

In a competitive field, it's easy to compare yourself to others and feel like you're falling behind. Instead, celebrate the little victories that dot your path — whether it's booking your first cool editorial, upgrading a piece of gear, or receiving positive feedback from a client.

Every small win confirms that you're on the right track and that your efforts are paying off, even if the bigger milestones still lie ahead.

PRO TIP: There are always bigger milestones ahead. In photography, in relationships, and life. Buckle up. It's a 4-wheeler sort of journey.

### **Your Breakthrough Is Coming**

Emerging photographers often wonder if they're wasting their time or if they've made a mistake by choosing a competitive career. Don't say you never did... we all did. And do. The Dip is a constantly rolling algorithm, folks, it isn't a one-off coaster ride at the state fair.

The god's honest truth is, there's no rule that says success in photography should be swift or straightforward.

In fact, many of the most respected photographers took years to gain the recognition and client base they enjoy today.

Some took decades.

That awkward, uncertain stage — when you're unsure if you're spinning your wheels or laying the foundation for something amazing — is precisely what Seth Godin refers to as “The Dip.”

And if you truly love what you do, if you're absolutely willing to press on and refine your craft, you'll outlast the photographers who quit too soon.

I watched many photographers, some excellent shooters, drop out and start another career. For a vast amount of reasons, they simply moved on.



Fence and tree, Florence, AZ

As you power through your dip, remember these key points:

- **Have a clear “why.”** Know why photography matters to you on a personal level.
- **Stay focused on skill-building.** Let slower periods become training grounds for new techniques.
- **Build authentic relationships.** Your network can lift you as it grows.
- **Never give up on your passion.** The ones who stay the course are the ones who ultimately thrive.
- **Be kind to yourself.** Facing the struggles and possible disappointments of persevering through your own dip can take a toll if you let it.

Keep shooting, keep learning, and keep connecting.

You may not see massive changes overnight, but each day you dedicate yourself to your craft is another step toward emerging on the other side of “The Dip” — ready to take on the best clients and projects of your career. Your breakthrough is closer than you think.

“The Dip” is available at Amazon on Kindle, in print, and Audiobook

