

# Starbucking

## Chapter Three Every Hero Needs a Villain

*“Is it in a photograph or a dashboard poet's song?”*

Just as I was late to the party when it came to coffee (as well as love, physical fitness, social consciousness, among other things), I did not develop a keen interest in music until I was nearly finished with high school. Oh, sure, I listened to music—I have memories of waking up on Saturday mornings and listening to Casey Kasem's *American Top 40* with my sister, but I did not begin *buying* music, at least on a regular basis, until my college years.

I cannot say why I did not pursue music at an earlier age, but my guess is that I was so deeply invested in comic book collecting and computer programming that I had neither the time nor the money for the former. That picture had changed by my fear year at university, as two summers of interning for Exxon, plus a full scholarship, had increased my disposable income, and on top of that, I had backed off the comics (slightly). Toss my first few credit cards into the mix, and I was soon an avid music collector. I purchased my first CDs and a player in the fall of 1990, and I spent the next decade looking forward to new releases and sales at Target or Walmart.<sup>1</sup>

By my third or fourth year at UT, I had amassed hundreds of CDs, and I was known as the go-to guy for borrowing music. I enjoyed creating my own mixes, initially on audio cassettes, and I was an early adopter of the Sony MiniDisc, a now-defunct technology that allowed me to cram a lot of music onto a small, lightweight disc. By the late 90s, music was such an integral

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<sup>1</sup> *Mariah Carey, I'm Your Baby Tonight*, and *Listen Without Prejudice Vol 1*. were among the first six CDs that I purchased.

part of my life that when I first visited Italy in 1998 on the spur of the moment, I made a point of packing plenty of MiniDiscs into my duffel bag. At a hostel in Rome, one of the guests expressed surprised and asked, “you brought all this music to Europe, but you didn't even bring a camera?”

The Apple iPod debuted in 2001, and I definitely wanted one, but I was drowning in debt by then, sinking money that I did not have into Starbucking, so I would not end up purchasing my first iPod until after my financial recovery. Owning an iPod spurred me to become a podcast addict, and since then I am almost never seen without official Apple earbuds in my ears, listening to podcasts or music.

I upgraded my iPod regularly, and when the 4<sup>th</sup> generation model debuted in 2007, I wasted no time in buying one. That was the first iPod to boast a camera, and given that I had been photographing Starbucks for nearly a decade, one would think I would have had a keen interest in testing out its picture quality, but for some reason I exhibited a remarkable blindness to that possibility. That oversight is more surprising when you consider that I had already racked up an impressive array of altercations with Starbucks partners or security guards over photography. Quite mysteriously, even though I was never without an iPod in my left jeans pocket, it simply did not occur to me that I could use that device to take surreptitious photographs. If it had, I likely would not have ended up threatened by a baton-wielding security guard, half a decade later outside a shopping centre in Madrid.

Followers of Starbucking might be surprised to learn that when I first began hunting down Starbucks locations in the summer of 1997, I took no photos—instead I merely updated a list of stores as I visited them. It was actually the manager of the Preston Park Village Starbucks (where I conceived of Starbucking) who suggested that I take photos, after I had fallen into the habit of returning from this or that trip and reporting how many new stores I had seen. Late in the summer of 1999, I finally decided that she was right and purchased my first digital camera, and I wasted no time in photographing nearby Starbucks every chance I got.

One afternoon, at a Starbucks in Addison, I experimented with the settings

and features of the camera by repeatedly going outside to take a few shots, then returning to my table to examine the images on my laptop. The thought that anybody would notice, let alone care, simply did not occur to me, and I was taken aback when I walked to the washroom and, as I passed by the bar, a barista asked (snidely, if I remember correctly) “*are you going to take pictures of the bathroom too?*”

Despite my surprise, I dismissed the remark and never once imagined that this newfound aspect of my project would soon turn into a problem. Sure enough, on my very next road trip, after an uneventful tour of the Starbucks in New Orleans, I arrived in South Florida on a rainy Sunday evening and woke up the next morning to skies that were deceptively sunny given the cloud of conflict that was about to cast a shadow over my project.

I left my hostel early and drove to a few nearby Starbucks, then to the Aventura Mall. Unbeknownst to me, a manager at one of the early stores had noticed my taking photographs and decided to call other stores in the area to warn them. The mall had two Starbucks, and when I purchased my coffee at their food court location, I set my camera on the counter as I fished out some money. Then the barista, out of the blue, told me that photographs were not allowed.

*Please allow me to pause so that you can process what just occurred.*

I was a *customer* ordering coffee in a touristy area near Miami, and I had a simple point-and-shoot camera (not a DSLR) with me, perfectly normal. I was not taking any photographs, and she had no reason to think that I would, since I was just buying coffee. Yet, somehow, that partner thought it was a good idea to preemptively tell me that photography was not allowed. From a customer service perspective alone, that is horrible, terribly off-putting, but her words would soon pale in comparison to how the manager of the other store treated me.

I went upstairs, found the other Starbucks and bought a coffee, and then I went out into the hallway and kneeled to take the shot. Before I could compose the frame, the barista who had served me, who turned out to be the

manager, rushed out to deliberately block my frame and angrily told me that I could not take photos. I replied that I was not taking pictures inside the store, and that I was trying to visit all the Starbucks and needed a photo as proof. She was not hearing me, so I walked away, around a hallway to try and get a picture from a different angle, but she again got in my way and beckoned a nearby security guard. While the security guard was questioning me, she interjected and said that if I persisted, she would *call the police*.

At that point, I had not yet researched my rights, but I understood that I was on private property, and, even worse, *I did not have any identification, because I had lost my wallet earlier that morning*. I had no choice but to leave to take a crappy photo from outside, downstairs, capturing only the store's window, but no signage. A few years later, I encountered this same manager at another Starbucks in Sunrise, a Miami suburb, and she wasted no time in telling me that I could not take photos. This store was not in a mall, however, and I stated sharply that I planned to go outside, off Starbucks property, to take my photo. She replied that she would have to call the district manager.

“You go on ahead and do that,” I said and walked away.

The next two decades would bring countless similar encounters, but before it appears that I am placing attacking Starbucks employees for the way that they treated me, let me make it clear that the lion's share of the responsibility falls on the shoulders of the company itself. However their photo policy was phrased in company manuals, it is clear that they did a piss-poor job of conveying to their partners the understanding that we live in a free country, goddammit, and no company has any business telling people what they can or cannot do when not on company property. Not to mention that, freedom of expression aside, it's just bad business to antagonise customers unnecessarily, especially customers who are so passionate about Starbucks that are eager to document their experiences.

As jarring as these conflicts with Starbucks partners were, they never posed a physical threat to me, not even that coked-up barista at a store in Birmingham who noticed a documentary filmmaker recording my visit, from outside, and

was so worried that he might end up on film that he actually *chased our car* as we drove away<sup>2</sup>. The same cannot be said of shopping centre security or police officers, who do possess the power to threaten me with physical harm or arrest. Although to this day I have never been assaulted, I will never forget the image of that security guard at the La Gavia shopping centre in Madrid as he removed his baton from his belt, then slapped it against his other hand, menacingly, as he tried to goad me into a confrontation.

In the end, that guard heeded the warnings of his partner who shouted “*DAVID! DAVID!!*” because she understood that assaulting an American tourist would have consequences that she did not want to deal with. I was able to continue my retreat and walk briskly towards the nearby subway station, looking warily over my shoulder before breaking into a trot.

The incident left me quite angry at those guards, and also at the shopping centre's management for posting that misguided photo policy. I will have more to say on that topic later, but first, as I am a big proponent of personal responsibility, I must acknowledge that I share some of the blame for what happened, *because I had been careless*. I arrived at La Gavia in a rush, anxious to complete my visit and get back to the city, and in my haste I neglected to follow the precautions that I had spent over a decade devising, ever since that first incident in Florida.

I may be slow on the uptake sometimes, and I am often bad at reading other people, but I think that I'm pretty darn good at learning from experience. The moment that I left Aventura, I started to think about how I could alter my photography routine, and if you examine the chronological catalog of the photographs on my website, you will notice that many of those early photos were taken from a distance, from odd angles, sometimes from behind obstructions like trees or signs. The reason obvious—to avoid detection by baristas or guards.

This technique was short-lived, however, because once I created my website and began to receive compliments from those who enjoyed my photographs, I committed to taking the best photos that I could, in order to create the

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<sup>2</sup> My use of the term *coked-up* is not meant to either assert nor imply that this barista was under the influence of cocaine.

definitive catalog of Starbucks photos. With this goal in mind, I developed a collection of other techniques designed to minimise photography-related conflict. When it came to stores outside of shopping centres (free-standing, or in retail plazas, or in buildings but having an exterior entrance), I quickly learned that introducing myself to partners and explaining what I was doing helped assuage their suspicions. In fact, when I began to receive publicity for Starbucking, I began to carry around a folder of articles to show the staff as I gave them my spiel.

While most Starbucks partners were receptive to my project, I did not try this approach with security guards because I understood that most of them would simply follow whatever instructions given by supervisors. During one of my early encounters, a guard informed me that I would need to obtain permission from mall management, and I was curious enough about what would happen to contact the management office. A representative explained that I would need to fill out a form, and when I received it in an email, I saw that the document demanded way too much information, including specifics that I simply could not provide—the dates and times during which the photos would be taken. Obtaining a photography permit for every building containing a Starbucks was an immediate nonstarter, because even just a few years into Starbucking, I knew that I'd have to move as quickly as possible to keep up, and even today it is almost impossible to predict when I will arrive at any given store.

Instead, I opted for stealth, using increasingly sophisticated tactics. Visting shopping centres early in the morning offered multiple advantages—fewer guards, fewer patrons to get in the way of my photos, and greater ease in identifying any guards that might be nearby as I tried to take a photo. Spotting the guards was important, for in a crowded mall, they were easy to miss. Later, I began to conduct surveillance—I would walk around the mall until I spotted the security guards, and I would note how fast they moved then estimate how long I'd have for my photos. Once I began to use a DSLR, rather than a point-and-shoot, I felt quite conspicuous with a device that appeared professional around my neck, so I kept it around my shoulder instead, often behind me. This reduced the chances that I would catch the eye of a guard while walking through the mall, but the downside was that in the

few seconds that it took to position the camera for a photo, a passerby might enter the frame, and I was often noticed by guards while standing in front of the store, holding the camera, as I waited for some lollygagger to move. To mitigate that issue, I started bringing a backpack with me into shopping centres in order to conceal the camera, and after ordering my coffee I would select a seat near the store's window (or in the seating area, if the store was a kiosk) and place the camera on the table. Once I saw that my intended frame was about to clear, I would grab the camera and rush to take the photo, then immediately retreat back into the store.

Sometimes I would be in a hurry and skip some steps, and that was often when I would run into trouble, like on my first trip to a Starbucks in Scotland, at the Centrewest shopping centre in Glasgow. Hoping to get in and out within the fifteen-minute grace period in the car park, I left my backpack and walked in with my camera around my shoulder. The year was 2009, and although it was common to see people taking photos with their phones, prosumer DSLRs still attracted attention. Upon leaving the Starbucks with my sample, I was about to set it down on a bench and take a photo when I spotted a man walking my way, staring at me as he walked passed and entered a passageway. Although he was not in a guard uniform, he had still been looking out for anything amiss, and, unbeknownst to me, he had radioed the security office. A few minutes later, after I had taken the photograph and started walking up the escalator to the car park, trying to hurry without spilling my coffee, two guards came running down the hallway, shouting, and quickly caught up to me.

They peppered me with questions, and when I asked why they had reacted so extremely, they replied that the centre had a problem with thieves breaking into storefronts, and they worried I might be there to case the joint. They finally bought my Starbucking explanation and asked if I was finished (not so much a question as a directive), and they let me go without any further action. The incident taught me two different things—always drink the sample from a shopping centre immediately so that I can move more quickly, or even run, if I have to; *and keep that camera in my bag!*

In Madrid I *did* have my backpack (I always do when abroad, if using public

transportation), *but* I was in a hurry, so I forgot to scan for guards, and *that* is why she noticed me. Madrid also turned out worse than Glasgow because the guard insisted that I delete my photo, and my noncompliance as I walked off the property was what angered her and her partner David to the point that he threatened to club me.

Other guards have instructed me to delete photos over the years, and I was even asked to do so by a police officer in Mexico city because the Starbucks that I happened to be photographing was the site of a shooting, but after I showed him my American passport, he said “*esta bien.*” Mexico, Glasgow, Madrid, and other incidents, in Texas, Knoxville, Manchester, to name a few, maintain fresh in my mind the possibility that I might one day be forced to give up a precious photo.

If one researches the topic of what rights a person has when it comes to photography, any number of articles will explain that a guard has no right to try to take one's camera, or even touch a person (that is assault, possibly felonious if the camera is expensive), but those rules might only apply in the United States. When in another country, there is no telling what a guard might be able to get away with. Moreover, when dealing with police, anywhere in the world, all bets are off.

In New York City's Pennsylvania Station, for example, I had just taken a photo of one of the Starbucks, and then I sat down next to a column to examine the picture and decide if I wanted to try for a better one. At that moment, a group of NYPD officers walked by, and one of them noticed me and said “no photos—we'll confiscate your camera.” I packed up and left, not wanting to push it, not given NYPD's reputation, especially after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, when authorities all over the world grew concerned about anything involving photographs of infrastructure like stations, bridges, etc. In fact, police and guards were sometimes so overzealous that even explicit permission was not enough to spare a photographer from arrest, as in the 2010 case of Duane P. Kerzic, who was taking a photo of an arriving train at that same Penn Station, *as part of a photo contest sponsored by Amtrak!*

Yes, Amtrak itself sponsored a contest that asked people to submit photos of



trains, and then Amtrak police arrested Kerzic when he refused to delete his photos. Kerzic would later go on to sue and win a five-figure settlement, but that case oft comes to mind when I photograph inside buildings, especially near public transport. In my career as an IT contractor, I typically interview for jobs every one or two years, and many employers run background checks, especially the ones in defense. Risking arrest to make a point about my rights is not an option, and one solution that eventually occurred to me was to take a simple photo with a smaller device before pulling out my DSLR.

During my 2008 trip abroad, I arrived at the airport in Dublin and quickly found the first Starbucks. When I reached into my backpack for my camera, I could not find it and assumed that I had left it in my car during my rush to pack, so I went to the nearest shopping centre and bought a Nikon point-and-shoot, small enough to fit in my back pocket. Later, at the Starbucks in the Borders bookstore, I was stunned to discover my camera at the bottom of my backpack, and to this day I am amazed at how I could possible “lose” a fairly large DSLR inside of a fairly small backpack. Regardless, the shop owner would not allow me to return the point-and-shoot, so I began to use it for surreptitious photos inside buildings. That small camera only lasted a year, unfortunately, because towards the end of my next trip abroad, when my bag was heavy with gifts and souvenirs, I included the camera in a package that I shipped to Houston to lighten my load, and the box was opened and ransacked, the camera stolen.

I opted not to buy another point-and-shoot for my 2011 trip around the world, and instead I relied on stealth to avoid trouble. All the while, I was overlooking the obvious, the fact that *I was already carrying a second camera everywhere I went, in the form of my iPod!!!*<sup>3</sup> To this day, I am still amazed that I carried around a small camera for at least *six years* (2007 to 2013) without realising that it offered a way to mitigate some of the conflicts that I encountered over photography. It took that close call in Madrid to wake me up, and shortly after that, I began using my iPod (and later my smartphone) whenever I was inside a building. Most of the time I still use my DSLR, because it is a much better camera, but having the iPod is quite useful in situations when pulling out the bigger device is too risky, or when

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<sup>3</sup> Later that year I would purchase my first smartphone, which also had a camera, and it still did not occur to me to use it for Starbucks photographs.

traveling on a basic economy fare (which does not allow overhead bin use) and need to keep my backpack as light as possible.

My desire to avoid conflict aside, I have always been quite serious about my Starbucks photographs, and I prefer to use the better camera whenever possible, especially in the United States and Canada. I still try to avoid being noticed, because despite my introducing myself, some managers or baristas misinterpret Starbucks policy and have a real stick up their butt about photographs. I can never let my guard down, because I never know who might challenge my right to take photos.

Sometimes the adversary is a security guard overstepping their authority, which does not extend beyond the boundaries of a property, like a Starbucks attached to an office building in downtown Dallas. Sometimes my opponent is just an employee, like the attendant of a laundromat in Hollywood that happened to have a Starbucks attached. I had no interest in the laundromat, but he still came out to the parking lot to inform me that “bro you can't be taking pictures here.” Other times I did not know whether the villain of my story was a guard, employee, or just a random crazy person, like that man in Chicago who followed me out of the shopping centre and down the sidewalk, filming me with his phone for a minute or two before turning back.

Random encounters like that one in Chicago were actually more alarming than the immediate physical threat posed by that guard in Madrid, simply because they could be unpredictable. Unlike a security guard, a police officer, or a Starbucks partner, when a random person on the street takes issue with my photography, I have no idea who that person is nor what they are capable of. Take the gentleman standing near me at an intersection in Washington, D.C., not long after September 11<sup>th</sup>. Noticing my photographing the Starbucks across the street, he turned and said “can I ask why you are taking photos?”

“Uh, no,” I replied.

He walked off when the light changed, but for all I know, he could have reported me to a police officer or some government agency, and the next

thing I know I'd be carted off in an unmarked van. Okay, that's unlikely, but I never know when an incident might escalate, especially if I happen to be in a less-than-diplomatic mood. Like in the summer of 2020, after a series of well-publicised incidents of White people questioning People of Color who were simply going about their business, on top of a seemingly-endless series of police killings of POCs. I was out of patience with that nonsense, and not of a mind to be polite.

I was photographing a new Starbucks in Springfield, OR, which I am told is a fairly Red part of the state, and I was already a bit frustrated that I was not going to be able to take a clean photo, because of the cars waiting for the drive-thru. After settling for a mediocre photo, I walked back towards the store to retrieve my coffee and phone, and some dude in the drive-thru line leaned out of the window to ask if I worked for Starbucks and why I was taking photographs. Well, I'd had it with White privilege, and I sharply told him to mind his own business and stop being a Karen, which led to his photographing my license plate and telling me “I've got your plate. I'm going to get my buddies, and if we see you on this side of town again, we'll take care of you.”<sup>4</sup>

We continued to exchange words until he pulled forward, and the altercation seemed to alarm the lady in the next car and even prompted the store supervisor to come out to cool things down, although by that point it was clear that the man was not actually willing to get out of his car and attack me, not by himself, and I was already finished and ready to go anyway.

Other than Madrid, that was the only incident that really felt like it could turn into an assault, but my list of more minor encounters is long. It's just a matter of numbers—I had photographed nearly *sixteen thousand* Starbucks as of 2020, and it was almost inevitable that tense encounters would occur. Fortunately, unlike that Oregonian, most people are unwilling to actually issue a threat—I'm sure that kid in California was just showing off for his homies when he leaned out the window of their van and shouted “don't take pictures of me or I'll fuck you up!” Similarly, that indigent man in Vancouver was just venting when he screamed across the street “STOP TAKING

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4 In all fairness, he might have meant that they would treat me to spa day at the local salon.

PICTURES OF ME!!!”—I don't think that he would have attacked me.

Some of those who noticed me just stared and said nothing—I can recall dozens or hundreds of those. Others just shouted from passing cars, or made passing comments, like the German who exclaimed “*was ist los!*” as he nearly bumped into me (or I him—can't remember). Although the style that I adopted early on was to take photographs as free of cars and people as possible, I cannot always wait for everyone to leave, and occasionally some will turn away, or walk inside the store, or even offer to move (with the expectation that I will retake the photo). In one case, though, a British gentleman at the far end of a small London street got it into his head that I was photographing *him* and walked over to demand to see my camera.

I declined.

He walked away.

The possibility of a physical assault over my photographing Starbucks is concerning, no doubt, but the incidents that bother me the most, the ones that stick with me for years, are not those involving random people nor security guards. Instead, my encounters with aggressive Starbucks managers and partners are the ones that leave me most unsettled. The reason is simple—I am not out there trying to harm the company. On the contrary, I am constantly posting about interesting store designs, products, souvenirs, highlighting just how successful the company has been, and my Starbucking, although sometimes tedious after more than two decades, is usually perfused with an excitement and enthusiasm for the company. Moreover, Starbucks is *supposed* to excel at customer service—partners are trained to smile and be attentive to the customer, and the company even has a “just say yes” policy. In that context, to experience countless managers and baristas effectively saying “I don't care that you've put in the time and effort to travel all the way to see this Starbucks—I'm going to give you a hard time anyway”—well, that strikes me as not only absurd but borderline hurtful, quite the opposite of what a service-oriented company should do.

Most managers were not as villainous as the one that I encountered—twice—

in Florida, but many were just as aggressive, like the one in Berkeley who walked outside to shout at me *from across the intersection* and even threatened a lawsuit. Most, however, seemed to not really care one way or the other but felt compelled to follow their interpretation of instructions passed down from higher-ups, managers who had misinterpreted the policy coming down from Seattle.

That's the thing about harassment coming from Starbucks partners themselves—*they were acting contrary to what company policy stated*. After the Aventura incident, I called Starbucks and was told by a customer care representative that individuals are indeed allowed to take photographs for personal use. Later, on at least two occasions, I would obtain emails from Starbucks explaining the same. Unfortunately, even quoting Starbucks policy did not always help, because, as a general rule, employees of any business, especially those who take their authority too seriously, do not like being contradicted by customers. That was the case in Lynn, MA, where I experienced my single worst photography-related altercation.

*The thing of it is, she was rather friendly at first.*

When I walked in and explained my project, she seemed interested and, like most partners, obliged my request for a sample coffee. Her tone seemed to shift when I asked some questions about unusual features of the store, including the artwork, and by the time she saw me outside taking photos, her mood had done a one-eighty. I was genuinely surprised, given how kind she had been earlier, and I was not at all prepared for her reaction when I calmly explained, as I had done to other partners, that the corporate policy allows photos for personal use. She replied quite bluntly that she did not care about the policy and insisted that at her store, photos were not allowed. The rest of the interaction is a blur, but what sticks out in my mind is that she rebuffed everything that I said to try and deescalate the situation, and she seemed to become more aggressive. Even when I said “it's not a problem, I'm leaving anyway”, she turned my remarks around and accused me of yelling at her.

The altercation was so extreme that it caused other customers to stare, and I myself was so shaken up by her unexpected aggression (I think she cared less

about the photography than she did my contradicting her) that I forgot my coffee sample and left without it. That meant that I could not check that store off my list until I was able to return, many months later.

As I drove away, I called a nearby Starbucks to try and obtain a phone number for newer store's general manager, but the manager with whom I spoke told me that Lynn's manager was on maternity leave. He seemed like he wanted to help and said he would reach out to the district manager, but as happens all too often, I never heard back. Generally speaking, I've had better things to do with my time than report every unfortunate encounter with a Starbucks partner, but this one upset me so much that I called Customer Care to report what had happened. A week later, I was informed that they were looking into the issue and contacting the district manager. Later still, I ended up receiving a personal email from the supervisor herself. In the email, she apologised for having misinterpreted the policy and for her actions that left me feeling so unsettled.

I felt much better after receiving her email, although I do wish that her apology had not been, to this day, the only one that I have ever received from a Starbucks partner regarding the way that I was treated, whether the incident had to do with photography or something else.<sup>5</sup>

In my experience, corporations—American ones, at least—tend to be averse to apologies. Part of the reason for this is legal—they do not wish to admit liability—but the other part is likely rooted in the human reluctance to own up to mistakes or accept responsibility. In the case of the shopping centre management at La Gavia in Madrid, whom I called the next day to report what had happened, the tone of that representative's voice indicated that she simply did not want to deal with the matter at all—no apology.

I am sure that every person reading this understands what it feels like to want an apology and never receive one, and that alone would be enough to create no small measure of resentment over my two decades of conflict at Starbucks, but in truth, what bothers me the most about all these incidents is that they run counter to my philosophy of a better world.

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<sup>5</sup> In subsequent chapters, you will read about incidents that were even worse, involving police.

One of the key principles of my philosophy is that a society should strive to minimise conflict. All prohibitions—photograph included—create a potential for unnecessary conflict. While it is true that in order to maintain order and safety, some things, like building a nuclear reactor in one's backyard, must be prohibited. Such prohibitions must be minimised, however, because every time that something is banned, there exists a potential for conflict who wish to do that very thing. For that reason, prohibitions should be limited to only what is necessary, and it is by no means necessary for a mall to prohibit photography, a common activity that brings customers enjoyment (recording memories of their visit, sometimes even creating art) but is unlikely to cause harm.

It is worth noting that during my thousands of visits to Starbucks in shopping centres, I have tried to make note of whether the signage on the door includes a prohibition on photography, and I have noticed that such prohibitions are by no means ubiquitous. In fact, I would guess that these rules are haphazard, crafted according to the whims of someone in management, without much think through.

Misguided rules are not the only reason that I have been harassed so often—many altercations are rooted in people's suspicions regarding my behaviour. Humans possess an inherent distrust of that which they do not recognise or understand, and it is easy to see how such a trait conferred an evolutionary advantage. This trait leads some people to observe my photography and wonder if I am planning an act of terrorism or robbery, or if I am photographing them with some ill intent, like surveillance or stalking.

These suspicions could be allayed by another principle of my philosophy, that of maximising transparency. For most of the history of humanity, there was little to mitigate humanity's intrinsically suspicious nature. That picture has changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for we finally have the technology to eliminate distrust altogether, yet we are reluctant to use it. That is what bothers me so much about all the grief that I have received from those distrustful of my photography—modern technology could eliminate that distrust and the conflicts that ensue.

If I were able to wear electronic identification, a bracelet perhaps, that broadcast my profile to any suitable device, then any person wondering what I am doing with that camera could pull out a tablet, click on the icon representing me, and immediately see a profile page describing who I am and offering relevant details about me, like my profession and notable activities.

*Winter is renowned for documenting coffeeshouses around the world.*

My profile would also contain alerts related to any threats that I might pose, in general, and to that person specifically. Since I have no criminal record, no arrests, no serious complaints against me (that I know of), my profile would boldly state, in bright green...

## **NOT A THREAT**

Any person who might have been concerned about my behaviour could relax, fears allayed, and any potential conflict could be averted. Sadly, our society is not yet ready for the great paradigm shift necessary to manifest public support for the use of such a technology, and as a result, I must continue to be vigilant as I continue to document Starbucks, for the next person to take issue with my activities might be the one who tries to take my camera or comes at me with fists raised.