

HORIZON NEWS #6

NEWS, THOUGHTS AND IMAGES FROM HORIZON PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS

From the first moment I handled my lens with tender ardor, and it has become to be a living thing, with voice and memory and creative energy...I longed to arrest all beauty that came before me, and at length the longing has been satisfied.

Julia Margeret Cameron (1815-1879)

STUDENT PHOTO: CLOSE-UP



Program Mode: an imperfect blessing. Today's cameras have mini-computers with mega-brains, so under astonishingly diverse situations the camera can determine the ideal exposure. If, now and again, the exposure is a little off the mark we can generally fix it in Photoshop or at the Kodak kiosk. Yes, it's wonderful to have a camera that does the exposure thinking for us, freeing us up to "be creative." But we've come to rely so much on the camera's brain that many of us have turned off our own. Many of us are stuck on auto-pilot and don't know how, or forgot how, to determine the proper exposure when the need arises.

Case in point: Carl Abrams and his portrait of fellow classmates. (Hey, Carl, you know we love and respect you, so you'll forgive our zeroing in, yes?)

Carl was determined to avoid the typical horizontal line-up seen in about 95% of all group shots. He chose an unusual location and gave some advance thought to how to place his fellow classmates. Then he rounded up the class and directed each person into position with enthusiasm and gentle authority. Everyone had fun, and the shot was perfect . . . except, alas, for the exposure.

The camera's program mode functions well when broad highlights are in the sky, but here the highlight—the grass beyond the tree—was right in the middle of the picture; that band was about 3 1/2 stops brighter than the light on the faces under the thick canopy of foliage. Result: Program mode yielded a shot about two stops under-exposed.

We spent over an hour in Photoshop brightening Carl's shot, reducing contrast, and color correcting. We "salvaged" the image and now proudly post it on our website. But the end result wasn't nearly as good as if the shot had been properly exposed in the first place. (Hey, Carl, we coulda used the hour for drinkin' & dancin'!!)

We saw Carl glance at the LCD screen as he was taking his series of shots; he knew the image would be dark. But with so many people posing, some in slightly awkward postures, and an instructor watching his every move, it can be tough to make quick adjustments. Bottom line: don't get stuck on "auto-pilot." Learn how to use the exposure compensation control, the manual meter, and related tools. And if you're shooting digitally, don't forget the most obvious thing you can do: before you bring everyone together for that big group portrait: take some test exposures, preferably using one or two stand-ins. Make exposure adjustments as needed. Then when the group is staring at you, you're Mr. Cool, not anxiously sweating over a too-dark LCD screen.

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QUICK TIPS



In a high contrast situation with a relatively clean horizon line, the graduated neutral density filter is often your salvation. A grad ND helps preserve detail in the bright (or dark) area of the image. This filter is used primarily in landscape and nature photography where horizon lines are often distinct, skies are often much brighter than foreground terrain, and there's time to use the filter with the needed care. There are occasionally other circumstances when the ND filter comes in handy, as in this architectural shot of the house at Elk Landing, a familiar location to Horizon students. The foreground rock wall was over three stops darker than the house so we used a two-stop ND; this made the rocks much brighter, but still natural looking. Try shooting without the ND and capturing detail in Photoshop!



photo by Steve Gottlieb
(creative input from John Hisken)

SNAPSHOTS

Diane (“Marketing Your Images”) **Shapiro** was the featured speaker at a recent meeting of the Professional Women Photographers, Inc. in New York City. The PWP is an organization of more than 200 photojournalists, fine art and commercial photographers.

Frank Van Riper’s Photojournalism Workshop has a slightly new spin. The workshop is held in the town Port Deposit which, as we noted in a recent newsletter, is a one street town with a quaint, colorful, and altogether unique flavor. Immediately above the town sits a 1,000 acre plateau where a vast, multi-year residential and commercial development has just received the formal go-ahead. That development—which includes the renovation of an abandoned prep school campus of Greek Revival architecture—and the development’s relationship to Port Deposit, will become the basis for an ongoing “story line” for students to develop. They can choose to focus on architecture, people, commercial activity, or whatever other aspect of the new development that interests them. In the future, we hope that student “documentarians” will exhibit their work in the town’s museum.

Horizon Director/Instructor **Steve Gottlieb** has just begun work on a new book: *Cecil County: A Personal Portrait*. (Cecil County is Horizon’s home.) Unlike Steve’s other books, this one will be self-published, which means that in addition to taking the pictures, Steve must spend extensive time on fund-raising, marketing, and other non-photography matters. He will share his latest experiences with those who attend his course, “Publish Your Photo Book.”

END FRAME



Horizon doesn’t offer animal photography workshops yet students still manage to capture great images of assorted critters. In these photos, our students really nailed their subjects: razor sharp focus (you can count the caterpillar’s whiskers and the pollen dust on the bee); interesting, colorful and contrasting backgrounds; thoughtful and tight composition, which we enhanced with a little cropping.) Photos: Dave Hilyard (l) and Kelsey Brawning (r)

