

HORIZON NEWS #53

IMAGES, THOUGHTS AND NEWS FROM HORIZON PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS

The Salton Sea has been variously called a natural wonder, a national embarrassment, paradise, and the ecological equivalent of the Chernobyl disaster.

Matt Simon, *Wired* magazine

California Dreaming Workshop



South Dakota. Then Arizona. New Mexico next. Followed by Montana. Every year, Horizon's "Western Adventure" explores a different region of the breathtaking, fascinating and diverse western U.S. This year we went to the desert — southern California, plus a dollop of western Arizona and southern Nevada. The group generated so many strong, revealing and provocative photos it will take several newsletters just to cover the highlights. This issue will start with...

...the Salton Sea and its environs, an otherworldly place of extreme contrasts and contradictions. This "sea" — actually a lake — is the largest inland body of water in California. Unlike most lakes, it is salty, 50% saltier than the Pacific Ocean. The weather is generally hot and dry; browns and greys are the predominant colors. Adjacent irrigated areas are as green as a rainforest, including hundreds of acres of cultivated fields and forests of majestic palm trees. The sea is surrounded by flat-as-a-pancake plains mixed with high, rugged mountains.

Short decades ago, the lake was a hugely popular vacation destination. For a variety of reasons — a rapidly receding shoreline and thousands of dying fish causing odors and unsightliness, among others — the boom went bust. Half the homes and stores are now abandoned; piers no longer reach the lake. The whole place seems to be on life support. Ironically, this makes for great photographic raw material. An added plus: the lake is among the world's most active avian habitats, so there are birds galore.

On this page and the next, a brief photo essay on the Salton Sea. Following that, photos of migrant workers in nearby irrigated fields (this is the western edge of the famed Imperial Valley).

Photos: **Ray Hull** (top); **Colleen Kennealy** (anchor in the lake); **Roger Singley** (bottom)



A warm, sunny spring day, yet we didn't see a soul on any Salton Sea beaches. There were no photographers in sight, either (other than us), so we had the numerous pelicans, cormorants and other bird life all to ourselves. If ever there were a Paradise Lost, this is it.

Margaret Verhey (top) shot the edge of a crumbling concrete pier; the lake has receded so far that it's now a couple hundred feet from the pier's edge (the parched mud of what once was lakebed is visible).

Roger Singley handheld his 500 mm lens — no problem on a bright day shutter since speeds of 1/500 of a second are routine) — to get the full wingspan — tack sharp — of a pelican taking off.

Sherm Levine took full advantage of his easy to handle, compact Panasonic Lumix zoomed to (we assume) the full 600 mm to follow the pelicans take off; a fast shutter speed and smooth camera movement freezes the action nicely.

Pelicans, we discovered, calmly stay still until you get to within about 200 feet; at that point, one takes off and most others, like sheep, immediately follow.



Imagine yourself working in a field when three cars pull off on the shoulder. A mass of people get out and everyone points cameras — with large lenses — right at you! Off-putting, wouldn't you think? But these migrant workers uniformly greeted us with friendly looks and comfortable smiles. Thankfully, no farm management-types came out to harass us, so we shot a ton, capturing a variety of perspectives.

Maggie Smith (right) recorded the large number of picked peppers that were either damaged or dropped; it looked like someone — Hansel & Gretel style — had left a trail to follow.

In **Roger Singley's** energetic portrait of a worker in action, you can feel the delicate yet secure balance of the bucket. The workers in the background clarify what's happening. Note how the brown tones in the background (a mountain) make the peppers in the bucket more visible than would a green background.

Esther Steffans found a perfect situation for a panoramic viewpoint. Check out the diversity of body language!

Despite the 90+ heat, workers wear scarves, hats, pants and long-sleeve shirts; this must be for protection from the sun. The heat would also explain why work stops at 3:00 PM.

With all the intense debate over immigration reform, watching these workers work brings greater concreteness to the issue.

Since all three photographers were using basically the same equipment and shooting at the same time and place, why the significantly different shades of green in each picture? Three possibilities: each camera interpreted sunny day white balance differently; AWB (auto white balance) settings adjusted differently for the greens; some applied hue/saturation in processing.



Unblock Creative Block



Near the beginning of our California trip, **Colleen Kennealy** confessed to me: “I just don’t feel inspired,” or words to that effect. I’ve heard that before. Everyone engaged in the creative process, amateur and professional alike, suffers from some form of creative block at one time or another. The sources of blockage are many and there are many ways to overcome it.

In Colleen’s case, the problem wasn’t lack of material; great visual stuff was everywhere. It’s possible that that might have been her problem. Too many possibilities can overwhelm the creative circuitry. My suggestion to Colleen: “Why not find something at each location to serve as a great setting for a portrait and then get a fellow student to pose?” This would give Colleen a specific direction — not to the exclusion of other options but as a starting point to get the creative juices flowing.

As is evident from the top three images on this page (of Maggie, Ray and Margaret), Colleen succeeded in getting unblocked. 1. The body language is natural, even when the person is posing; 2. There’s a thoughtful connectedness between subject and setting; 3. Each person displays some “energy and attitude;” 4. The juxtaposition of the window behind Maggie’s head inside the blue door frame...*perfection!*

Steve Gottlieb



Two other fine portraits to help us remember the workshop: a shot of Sherm by wife **Rhoda Levine** (left) uses out-of-focus foreground elements to frame the subject and point the eye to him; this framing device also gives the shot a feeling of spontaneity. **Margaret Verhey’s** shot of Rhoda takes advantage of an unusual and amusing environment; the body language in this setting makes for a fun picture.



California Dreaming: Instructor Photos



The last lifeguard manning this spot could have been 50 years ago. I drove the entire circumference of the huge Salton Sea, but I didn't see a single swimmer. Simple signage can reveal more than the message that's on it.



Tilapia are the only fish that survive the lake's extreme salinity. Thousands wash up on shore each year, their carcasses piled atop one another along a narrow band, turning portions of the beaches into an eerie—and, in summer, odiferous—graveyard.



Pelicans, cormorants, egrets and more sun themselves on remnants of defunct piers, pipes and anchors. The Salton Sea is one of the nation's most significant flyways; nature lovers are understandably concerned about the impact on the birds as the lake continues its dramatic retreat. The Salton Sea was formed primarily as the result of a break in a Colorado River canal decades ago. Since then, there is little rain or river water each year to replenish the water that evaporates.



Two candidates for my upcoming photo book, FLUSH, about bathrooms of all kinds. On the left, two rest rooms on a barren Salton Sea beach. This shot captures some of the area's topographical contrast — a huge lake surrounded by tumbleweed-dry plains alternating with jagged mountains. On the right, port-a-potties (surely one of the greatest low-tech inventions since the wheel) in a field of green peppers. Given my objective, I focused my lens on the port-a-potties, not the port-a-potty patrons.

Want to take pictures in an abandoned factory?

Horizon Director Steve Gottlieb leads groups of 10-20 in a century-old textile factory. You can sign up for a class on the dates below OR set up a special date for your camera club/meetup group, etc. During your visit, Steve will offer flash and other instruction.

Upcoming Workshops

In Chesapeake City Unless Otherwise Indicated

- May 24: Camera Basics
- May 25-27: Creative Vision (3 Day)
- June 30: Abandoned Factory (1/2 day)
- July 13: The Creative "i": Shooting with iPhone
- July 27: Glamour & Beauty
- Aug. 2: Camera Basics
- Aug. 18: Abandoned Factory (1/2 day)
- Aug. 3-4: Creative Vision: 2 Day
- Sept. 14-15: Real People, Real Places
- Sept. 28-29: Flash Magic: Indoors & Outside
- Oct. 5: Adobe Lightroom
- Oct. 6: Photoshop Elements
- Oct. 11: Camera Basics
- Oct. 12-13: Creative Vision: 2 Day
- Oct. 19-20: Washington DC: Icons w/ a Creative Eye
- Oct. 25-27: Chesapeake City thru Nat'l Geo Eyes
- Nov. 2: Abandoned Factory (1/2 day)



Photo in Abandoned Factory
by: Steve Gottlieb

END FRAME

In our social media era, pictures of ourselves receive vastly more viewings than ever before. With so many eyeballs eyeballing you, why not shun the traditional, boring headshot or snapshot. I'm always on the lookout for interesting situations for new "self-portraits." I frequently set up a shot and say to one of my students — here it was **Esther Steffans** — "take my picture."

I use these shots not just for Facebook, etc., but as my "speaker's photo" when I make presentations to camera clubs, etc. Last year, I used a shot of me laughing at a longhorn cow taken by **Margaret Verhey**. This year I'll use Esther's shot. Frankly, my hope is that the image will get attention and convey a creative bent. Whether this picture succeeds is for each viewer to decide.

—Steve Gottlieb

