

HORIZON NEWS #57

IMAGES, THOUGHTS AND NEWS FROM HORIZON PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS

“The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt.” — Sylvia Plath

Inside One Photographer—Author’s Head

At a recent camera club presentation, I spoke about my upcoming book, *FLUSH: Celebrating Bathrooms Past & Present*. Someone from the audience approached me afterward and asked, in a sincere and concerned voice, “Steve, do you really think anyone will actually *buy* your book?” My answer was as direct as her question: “I don’t know. I sure hope so.”

Over the two+ years I’ve worked on *FLUSH*, I awoke many mornings with troubled thoughts: “Despite my best efforts, and all the time and money invested, no one will buy it. And to make things worse, the subject matter will make people snicker. Is it any wonder that no one else has done a book like this?” Many other mornings, I awoke with the polar opposite thought: “This is the best book idea I’ve ever had. *Everyone* will want a copy. *FLUSH* will outsell all my other books combined.”

Only time will tell if either voice inside me was right. Reality will probably lie somewhere between my two recurrent thoughts. In any event, I experienced the truth in Sylvia Plath’s words. I have applied whatever creative powers I possess to *FLUSH*, but there have been many days where self-doubt almost made me abandon what I’d started.

Now that *FLUSH* is done and I look back, I can pinpoint two critical moments that kept my pessimism in check, that reduced (but didn’t eliminate) my troubled morning thoughts, and that kept me plugging away.

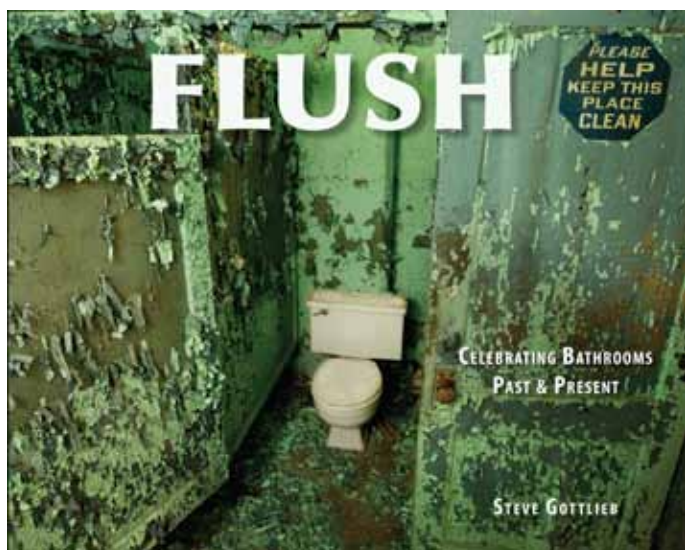
The first moment came when I was about half-way through. I showed my work to my son, Jason, a graphic

designer, artist and teacher. He has a sophisticated sense of what makes illustrated books work, along with the ability to clearly translate his visual reactions into words. His felt that my (tentative) cover photo, cover design, some interior photos, and book organization all missed the mark.

That critique wasn’t easy to absorb, but it was clear I needed to abandon my cover, delete some photos, and make other changes. His advice also helped point me in a better direction for completing the book. Self-doubt might be the *worst* enemy of creativity, but another enemy is an attitude—springing from vanity, stubbornness, training or whatever—that to be creative, photographers, designers, etc., must operate purely on their own. Creative people, I believe, should be open to advice and changing direction... assuming the changes are consistent with one’s personal vision. Every judgment, every idea, every technique doesn’t need to always spring from one’s own mind.

The second key moment that increased my inner peace came about three months ago. I sensed I’d reached a point of no return—I had gone too far, taken too many pictures, invested too much time, driven too many miles, spent too many dollars...told too many people, to call it quits. At that point, internal defense mechanisms effectively quell (not dispel) my worst fears. Approaching the finish line and rushing to finish the book so copies would be available for a 2014 International Toilet Symposium, I became a man possessed. The digital files were sent to the printer this week, so now it’s time to return to the world of the living.

— Steve Gottlieb



Abandoned Factories



I took these three images in the two Delaware factories we've visited—the textile mill and the paper mill. The pictures are different in almost every sense, but they share one important quality: each involves juxtaposing a human element with an object found in the plant—in one case, the human element was boots and gloves carefully positioned to create “phantoms.”

I hope we'll have opportunity to visit the factories again in 2014.

December 10th is the deadline for submitting your images for Horizon's Abandoned Factory Photo Contest. If you haven't already entered, here are the ground rules:

Email up to THREE low res images (less than 2 mb) to info@horizonworkshops.com. Subject line: Abandoned Factory Photo Contest

- First Prize: \$150 + \$150 Horizon Gift Certificate
- Second Prize: \$100 + \$100 Gift Certificate
- Third Prize: \$50 + \$50 Gift Certificate
- 10 Honorable Mentions: \$50 Gift Certificate

Winners will be announced by Jan. 10, 2014. Winning images will appear in the next issue of Horizonews.

To be eligible for prizes, winners must make a 12" x 16" print of their winning image(s). We will frame all winning prints and exhibit them at the factory office or environs.



Photos by Steve Gottlieb

