

HORIZON NEWS #62

IMAGES, THOUGHTS AND NEWS FROM HORIZON PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS

“All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware.”

Martin Buber

Workshop Memories....and What They Reveal

Steve Gottlieb

As I charge the batteries for my camera and flash in preparation for the sixth annual “Western Adventure”—this year we’re headed to the eastern Sierras and Yosemite—I’ve taken some time to reflect on past trips...to South Dakota...northern Arizona... northern New Mexico...western Montana...and southern California/western Arizona. I’d like to share a handful of memories, not so much as an exercise in nostalgia, but more like a divining rod that points to what, for me, makes a travel photography experience that resonates.

Driving 20 miles an hour in Glacier Park, MT, we roused a grizzly bear that had been snoozing in the middle of the road; he proceeded to run parallel to our convoy for more than a hundred yards. Shooting out passenger-side windows (of different cars), two photographers got shots with three bear feet off the ground. [Photo: **Bill Daniel**]



During a pre-workshop scout in which I was joined by several students, one of them urged me to stop at a pull-off in a state park to get a closer look at a “bar-calounger” (aka la-z-boy recliner) that someone had dumped. Frankly, I didn’t see the point, but I decided to humor him. What followed were no great photos, but a joyous, laughter-filled hour photographing that ugly, decomposing piece of junk—sometimes with one of us posing in it. [Photo: **Ray Hull**]



One student complained about the run-down quality of the bedrooms where we staying—an experimental architectural site in the Arizona desert. His complaint was justified—the rooms were indeed sub-par...but that’s what made it possible for him to take what I consider one of his most striking and creative shots: yellowed tiles of an old shower stall. [Photo: **David Herman**]



A small grove of birch trees by the road did not appear to be a fruitful photo location, especially compared to other places we had already been and were going to, but I thought it was worth checking out anyway. Looking up was visual magic, made all the more potent because it was so unexpected. [Photo by **Steve Gottlieb**]

Longhorns were grazing in a field, too far away to get good pictures. I approached a man standing in a nearby driveway. “You wouldn’t happen to know who owns those longhorns? We’re hoping to get closer for some photos.” I was surprised when he said, “How close do you want to get?” “Well, how close can we get?” Next thing we knew we were petting and feeding them. Someone took a shot of me making friends with one; the shot captured absolute spontaneous joy on my face; I used this as my “publicity photo” for some time afterward. [Photo by **Margaret Verhey**]



My “Western Adventure” memory trove is filled with moments of human interaction. Sometimes those contacts were fleeting, as when **Esther Steffans** captured a candid shot of a stranger in Jerome, AZ. Sometimes the contact was extended, as when the South Dakota couple invited our entire group to their farm for a three hour lunch. (I had first met the husband when he caught me trespassing on his property.) Who will ever forget their unusual home, engaging stories, or unique fence posts, each one topped off with a cow skull?

Other moments where we connected, photographically and otherwise, with our fellow man:

> Migrant workers swarming in a field of green peppers in the hot, lush, irrigated Imperial Valley of California.

> The handsome cowboy who invited us to his New Mexico ranch to watch him strut his stuff; during our evening critique, it was obvious that our female photographers thought his best stuff was a firm butt tucked snugly into Wrangler jeans.

> The SUBWAY sandwich maker who had tattooed the SUBWAY logo on his arm and proudly let us photograph it. [Note: Culinary quality is not an objective of our trips, but we patronize SUBWAY only under duress.]

> Finally, and most important, the ongoing interactions and friendships developed among members of our group. These trips appeal to a certain kind of people—those who share a love of photography and a pleasure in positive human connectedness. So long as people want to join me in these adventures, I will continue to lead them.

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Every person who has attended a “Western Adventure” loves to see and photograph the spectacular natural wonders that we visit; that’s why we’re all willing to travel so far from home in the first place. But it is revealing that my most lucid and lasting recollections—witness the previous anecdotes and images—are not of those places. Rather, they are of locations that are not part of the official itinerary. And unexpected happenings. Spontaneous moments. Friendships nurtured. Laughter shared. Students inspired. I’m not surprised that my shot of the group framed by the tunnel, which was so much fun to shoot, stirs more vivid memories than the fine shot I took that same morning of Mount Rushmore, which was at the opposite end of this tunnel. The other group shots on this page were also memorable for me.

Another observation seeping out of these memories: most of my favorite photos, both those of my students and my own—the ones I consider most creative, distinctive and enduring—were taken in places that are not the official “blockbuster destinations.” Those destinations determine our route but don’t define our experience. This is why I consider itineraries as guideposts rather than goals. I am wary of tightly planned trips and well-defined pre-conceptions; these can actually close the door to meaningful experiences. Photographic (and much other) magic so often happens not where you expect it and not where you plan for it but where you somehow stumble upon it...or generate it on your own.



If you take time to reflect about your own trips as I have done here—with some visual help from your photos—you might ask yourself which experiences mattered most to you, which touched your soul, which stayed with you, which made you feel most alive. The answer might surprise you. I believe that is why Martin Buber said, “All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware.” With the benefit of hindsight, when some memories fade while others abide, you may come to see that in your travels you have explored some secret destinations inside yourself.



[Group photos (3) by Steve Gottlieb]

So what’s in store for me and my companions in the eastern Sierras this month? That’s for us not to know, but to find out.



Upcoming Horizon Workshops

- June 22-29: Eastern Sierras & Yosemite
- August 10-17 Ireland: Landscapes & Locals (Wait List Only)
- August 23: Creative “i”: Shooting with the iPhone
- September 6: Abandoned Factory (Yorklyn, DE)
- September 13-14: Flash Magic: Indoors & Outside
- October 18-19: Washington DC: Icons w/ a Creative Eye
- October 31-Nov 2: Chesapeake City thru Nat Geo Eyes
- November 8-9: Creative Vision: 2 Day
- November 15: Abandoned Factory (Yorklyn, DE)