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Established in 1944, the Victoria Camera Club is a group of people who share the love of photography. We come together to appreciate each other's images, to learn, both from the feedback on our own images and from the images of others, and to exchange tips on how and where to take effective photographs. Our focus is on continuous learning. Our media include both film and digital and our expertise ranges from novice to master.

Events

We hold a number of events including:

- Three meetings a month from September to April (excluding December)
- Field trips
- Workshops
- Special Interest Groups (SIGs)
- Competitions within the Club and externally

Meetings begin at 7:00 PM, all meetings, workshops and SIG's are currently on-line only.

Membership

Annual fees include all workshops (except studio shoots and special events), meetings and all field trips unless travel/accommodation is involved. Annual fees are: Individual, $70; Family, $107; Student, $36 until Feb 28th).

For current event information and locations please go to the website *victoriacameraclub.ca* where you can also read or download the colour version of *Close-Up*.

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For additional information: please contact:
Membership: *membership@victoriacameraclub.ca*
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What's Inside

The Victoria Camera Club is a member society of the Victoria Arts Council, Canadian Association for Photographic Arts (CAPA), and the Photographic Society of America (PSA).

Calendar

Our workshop and field trip program is too extensive to list in *Close-Up.* Please go to the calendar page on the website (*victoriacameraclub.ca)* for the latest details of all our workshops, field trips and meetings.

All meetings and workshops are on-line only until further notice. Please check the calendar for updates.

January 7th: Competition Night. November competitions results. The Theme for January is "Homage to the Group of Seven".

January 14th: Presentation Night. Mike O'Connor will present his approach to shooting his Bucket List images from around the world.

January 21st: Members' Night. Presentations of members' images, field trip slide shows, prints or short technical presentations.

Workshop Highlights: Intro to Lightroom, Image Review, How to Tell a Nature Story, Trusting and Honouring Your Vision from Capture to Print.

Field Trip Highlights: Steelwool Spinning at Witty's Lagoon (night photography).

Cover Image: "Skirting Time" by Lorna Scott. When I am creating a composite image, it starts out with one idea and, as I add components, it changes direction. This may happen many times over the construction of the image.

There are seven components in this image. I created a background layer and added fog to create the atmosphere, using blending modes. Then I added the forest and to make it more surreal; only a low opacity was used. I already had several clocks from another project so I had some already prepped for placing into images. They were added, transformed into the right sizes and adjusted to different levels of opacity.

Then came the crows, which I also had in my archives. Placing the crows at positions that I deemed effective took time and again, they were added at lowered opacity so they weren't overpowering in the scene. Lastly, I added the model (Madison Rice) and adjusted the lighting to fit within the scene. I had done a shoot with this model for the sole purpose of using her in composite images. I did the shoot in a bicycle storage room in a condo using a grey background for easy extraction of the model.

President's Message

Welcome back everyone to the second half of our 2020/21 season! I hope that you are all well rested after the break and ready to get out safely and photograph.

We have had quite the year so far and I would be remiss if I didn't point out that as a Club, we have adjusted incredibly well to the circumstances that we find ourselves in. If you had said to me this time last year that we would be in the middle of a pandemic a year from now I would have chuckled and said (under my breath of course) that you were a conspiracy nut. No chuckling from me now.

When everything shut down in March the Board made the decision to follow suit for the sake of our members. It was so hard for everyone but we needed to protect our most vulnerable members and their families.

The Club went two months without doing anything official but there were some members who stepped up and filled the void, keeping our creative juices going. To you I say a huge thank you!

We then had a Zoom meeting with North Shore Photographic Society and our Zoom committee was born. They did such a wonderful job in getting us up and running again, I will be eternally grateful to them for all of the hard work they did getting members trained and comfortable using the Zoom platform for our meetings and workshops.

So now we find ourselves having regular meetings in our pyjamas (at least I do, wink-wink), as well as workshops and special presentations with our fellow BC and Yukon camera clubs, all online. We will continue this way for the rest of this season and hope that we will soon be able to meet in person once again.

There is a survey that will be coming out to members shortly. It is not like the ones sent out over the last few years that only focused on certain activities of the Club. This survey will cover all Club activities. With the information that we collect we will be better able to determine what the current interests of our members are. This will allow us to continue to offer what our members need. I encourage you to take this survey and thank you in advance.

So, watch the website to see what new things will be coming out for our Club and please stay safe.

Teri VanWell, President

Tech Tips

by Richard James

Here are a few tips to help you along with your photography this year. Maybe some will even be relevant to the new toys you just acquired at Christmas.

F8 and be there: There are really two tips here. "F8", or f11, are at the sweet spot in the aperture range for most lenses. With your lens wide open you tend to get more optical aberrations as well as a very shallow depth-of-field. With the lens stopped down to its minimum aperture you get a deeper depth-of-field at the expense of lower resolution due to diffraction around the lens aperture edges. "Be there" really means if you're not there at the right time when the right things are going on you're going to miss them, so, plan your shoots and get out often.

Optimal Shutter Speed: There are several factors that go into this decision including subject movement, light intensity, and camera shake. If your subject is moving, you need a high enough shutter speed to freeze the movement unless you are going to pan with the subject, in which case the background and foreground will show movement blur. Light intensity gets you into the relationship between aperture, shutter speed and your choice of ISO setting. Aperture controls depth of field, shutter speed controls movement blur and ISO has an impact on digital noise and the dynamic range that can be recorded in the image.

Optimal ISO: In a nutshell, the ISO setting giving the best balance between the image brightness and least noise in the image is the "base ISO" specified for your camera. This may be ISO 64, 100 or on a few cameras 200. If you go above this setting then you increase the noise, especially in the dark areas of the image and reduce the range of brightness values that can be recorded (dynamic range).

Hold it steady: Sure, the vibration reduction mechanisms (VR/IS)in your lens or camera body minimizes the effect of a shaky hand. However, for optimal sharpness, you really need to use a sturdy tripod that has a load capacity matching your camera and lens. So, whenever possible use a tripod or monopod as the firmest possible camera support. Some things just don't work from a tripod so that's when you need to turn vibration reduction on and hold steady. The other aspect of using the tripod is it allows you to take much more time over your shots, time to set them up carefully, get the framing exactly right (maximize the usable pixels without cropping), check the exposure and focus etc. before you start shooting.

Raw versus JPEG: Yes, I know you've heard this before, but I'll say it again, you get the maximum detail and image quality if you shoot in raw which allows you to optimize the image in post-processing. If you do decide to shoot in JPEG only, then remember there are a number of camera settings that really benefit from optimizing for each shooting scenario.

Image processing: Choose your image processing software and learn it thoroughly! The Club offers numerous workshops on Lightroom and Photoshop and there's a lot of material available online for these and other processing options.

Subject lighting: Much can be said about lighting. In the days of film, Kodak used to say, "Shoot with the sun over your shoulder". While this ensures that the subject is "well lit" compared to the background, it is often not the most effective lighting. A really simple lighting concept is noted in Stephen Ban's article on page 6, "45 degrees above and to the side". This gives you good surface detail without excessive shadows. For landscape and some wildlife photography, the "Golden Hour" at sunset/sunrise often produces stunning results. But with the wide dynamic range of digital sensors, far exceeding that of film, you should not be afraid of shooting even at midday. You just have to be careful that the lighting does justice to the subject and deal with dark shadows in post-processing.

January 2021

Basic Lighting

by Stephen Ban

Many photographers have a sort of psychological barrier about using artificial lighting. Some see themselves as "purists" and will refuse to use anything but natural light. Others just find the idea of learning how to use yet another device too intimidating. To the former, I would say: Learning how artificial lighting works will not only enhance your mastery of natural light it might even tempt you to start using artificial light for those instances when the natural light isn't cooperating. To the latter, I would say that living in the era of digital cameras with instant feedback makes the learning process quick, painless, and free (once you have the gear, at least).

While it is possible to get some great pictures with on-camera flash I'm not going to talk about that in this article, because in my experience, on-camera flash is much more frustrating and less satisfying than off-camera flash.

The only things that you need to get started are a camera with full manual control (so that you can control the shutter speed and aperture independently) and a flash (commonly called a speedlight) that you can take off-camera. This need not be expensive; something brand-agnostic like the Godox TT-600 can be had new for as little as $75. This will work with all camera brands except Sony. (There's a different model made just for Sony cameras).

Now for triggering the flash off-camera you have a few options. You can use a cable (this may require an adapter, depending on your camera and hotshoe setup), you can use optical triggering (if your camera has a built-in flash), or you can use a radio or infrared trigger. My personal recommendation would be to use a radio trigger. The flash unit I mentioned above has a built-in radio-receiver which means that you will need to buy a matching transmitter that is specific to your camera brand. The Godox X2T or X1 (the older version) are both options here; If you already have a flash but not a trigger you can go with something like the Neewer 3-in-1 ($30). The other items you might want are a basic light stand (around $30) and a cold-shoe adapter to hold the flash to the light stand and simultaneously hold an umbrella. This means that the final item you will probably want to get is a shoot-through umbrella. These are available in a variety of sizes and configurations but the most versatile is a 3-in-1 that you can use as a shoot-through or white/silver reflective light modifier.

I'm going to skip the how-to for getting your transmitter and receiver to talk to each other because that's specific to your equipment and well, you can read instructions, right? So, let's get on to some important pointers about flash in general and how it interacts with your camera. First, remember that with one exception shutter speed doesn't matter when it comes to flash exposure. The flash duration is so short that the amount of light that falls onto your sensor will be exactly the same whether you're shooting at 1/60th second or 1/4000th of a second. However, there is something called the flash sync speed which is typically either 1/200th or 1/250th second. This is more of an issue with old-fashioned mechanical shutters than with electronic shutters, but what happens here is that at high shutter speeds, the burst of light from the flash actually catches one of your shutter blades in motion, leaving a black bar in your frame. The way to overcome this is to use something called high speed sync (HSS). High speed sync extends the effective duration of the flash so that you can use as high a shutter speed as you want. The trade-off is that the flash power is reduced relative to normal sync. However, this also means that you can adjust the ambient light levels, even in broad daylight, to be as dark as you want enabling you to take shots during the daytime that look as if they were taken at night!

"Flash as Main Light"

This picture was taken in broad daylight. Using high speed sync, I reduced the ambient light exposure to the point where it looks like it was taken at night. Another flash was placed behind the model to illuminate the fog.

To get started you will want to determine what your ambient exposure should be first. To do this, take a picture

with your flash turned off, and see if you like how the background (not your subject) looks in terms of exposure. If it's too bright, adjust your exposure (shutter speed, ISO, or aperture) accordingly. Remember to not set your shutter speed faster than your flash sync speed (unless you have an HSS trigger and capable flash). Then, adjust only the power of your flash so that your subject is exposed properly. A very basic form of this is using fill flash to properly expose a back-lit subject, the "*Fill Flash*" image. Keep in mind that flash exposure is affected primarily by your aperture, the smaller your aperture; the higher the power your flash will need to be set to.

"Fill Flash for Backlit Subject"

One of the important things to remember about light is the inverse-square law. What this means is that the power (intensity) of light diminishes with the square of the distance between the source and subject. If you move your light source twice as far away, it will be one-quarter as bright. Another consequence of the inverse-square law is that the way light falls off also changes with distance. What this means is that the transition from light to shadow (e.g., from the lit side of their face to the unlit side) will be much more distinct and rapid when your subject is closer to a light source than when they are far away. The second thing to remember is the difference between hard light and soft light. Hard light is contrasty, producing sharp, well-defined shadows. Soft light has a gradual fall-off between light and shadow, with feathery edges at the transition. A light source that appears large to your subject will produce soft light. Conversely, a light that appears small to your subject will produce hard light. Think of the sun at noon on a cloudless day. Although the sun is a very large light source, it's also very far away and will produce hard light. While sometimes

that is the desired effect, more often in portrait photography you will be looking for soft light. Think of a cloudy day where the light is diffuse and seemingly coming from every direction.

There are two main ways to alter the hardness/softness of light: by using a modifier and by changing the apparent size of a light source moving it closer or further away. Light modifiers, however, can only do so much. For the most part, no matter what you strap onto the front of a speedlight (short of, say, an umbrella), there is nothing that will make soft light from a regular speedlight. This is why one trick that photographers, stuck with an on-camera flash, use is to bounce their flash off of a wall or ceiling. This has the effect of turning the entire wall (or ceiling) into a diffuse light source. The key drawbacks of this approach, however, are that you have little or no control over the direction of the light or its colour since the reflected light will take on the hue of whatever surface you are bouncing it off of.

On the other hand, if you place your small flash inside an umbrella and place it very close to your subject, you will end up with soft and diffuse lighting as well as complete control over its direction and colour.

Where you place the light is up to you so I would encourage you to experiment and see what you get. A good place to start is to place the light 45 degrees off to one side of your subject and 45 degrees above them (example below). Remember, it costs nothing to shoot frames so experiment to your heart's content and see how many looks you can create with a single flash and modifier!

"45/45 Lights with a Small Octobox"

Workshops: Finding Your Muse

by Jim Fowler

Usually this article is about up-coming workshops but with the holiday season fast approaching and with Club offerings appropriately reduced, this month I will talk about some of the more obscure benefits of past workshops and guest speaker events. The opinions expressed are strictly my own.

On November 2, 2020, Adam Gibbs treated us to a preview of his photos from his fall trip in the Rockies. As we followed along with him in his canoe, gliding over glacial waters of a pastel shade somewhere between cerulean blue and phthalo green, threading our way between the white trunks of a partially submerged aspen grove, I wondered how is he going to hold a canoe still enough to take a long exposure photo? Before I could ask, he kindly explained. He had to get out of the canoe and stand in the glacial water for his long exposure, making the water just as smooth as silk; and, secondly, he took one photo with a quick shutter to capture the leaves without movement blur! Thank you, Adam, for sharing your technique and for showing us a beautiful location I have never seen before.

Sometimes the benefit of listening to external speakers is subtle and, at the same time, more fundamental. If you are one of the approximately one quarter of our members who enters competitions, have you ever found yourself searching through your photographs for possible entries and it begins to seem a bit like a treadmill? Maybe your real goal should be to take pictures that please you.

There is a book called *Photographers A – Z.* This little volume, in its 640 pages, has assembled every influential photographer of the twentieth century. Most get two pages for a brief biography and sample photos though a few of the really important photographers get four pages. That makes about 300 photographers. What was striking, though, was that while there were some photographers of architecture, landscape and wildlife, by far the majority of photographers photographed people, famous people, ordinary people, beautiful people, strange people, people naked, people clothed, people working, people playing, people, people, people!

Elizabeth Gray recently presented a workshop to the Club on street photography which more often than not includes people. In her two-part presentation, Elizabeth didn't just talk at us and share her photographs, she engaged the participants in discussion groups, each group discussing a different photo by a distinguished street pho-

tographer. Then, we all shared our thoughts and views as a group. What did that do for the participants, you ask? She engaged us in seeing and thinking in the world of street photography. We began to look at the photographic record as part of the story of people. At the beginning, I confess, I wondered whether it was "okay" not to worry excessively about sharpness and depth of field, or composition but, as I participated, I came to see that there is room for a different kind of approach to photography. There is room for the quirks and oddities of a unique time and place that can make a street photograph a curious record of a moment in time. Maybe story can be more important than technique.

Elizabeth told us that to successfully tell a story in our street photography, our photograph should answer at least some of the five "W" questions: Who is the story about? What is happening? Where is it happening? When did it happen? And why are the subjects doing what they are doing? Elizabeth did talk about the technical and practical aspects of street photography but to me, what she really gave the participants was a chance to experience street photography on her level. It was eye-opening. She also very kindly provided the Club with her written notes which are available to members on our website: see Resources>Downloads>Workshops> "Street Photography" and "Street Photography Part 2".

Equally eye-opening, though not presented by the workshop committee but rather by the Presenter's Night Committee and the Creative SIG, were the two (unrelated) presentations by Richard Lawrence. In his Presenter's night presentation, he took us on a journey from his architectural past to his evolution as a photographer who zooms in to capture the graphic design details which he then embellishes with colour and contrast without regard to the original appearance of the subject. Addressing the Creative SIG, he referenced his favourite influences in both art and psychology. He quoted the artist Paul Klee who once said, "Art is a memory of age-old things." He talked about why he takes photographs and described how certain things like stairways, doors, chairs, or the moon are like portals to a place in his emotional memory. In essence, Rick was sharing freely his innermost creative impulses, allowing us a glimpse of himself as he continues along his personal photographic journey.

Maybe instead of trying to fit a round photo into a square hole, we should be searching for our portals to enable us to tell our stories. Adam Gibbs' aspens reminded me of the trembling aspens at Dragon Lake where I camped in the bush as a free miner fifty years ago. Richard Lawrence and Elizabeth Gray showed by example what can happen when you follow your own muse. I thank them all.

VCC's Members' Night

by Clive Townley and Bob Law

This night is an opportunity for VCC members to showcase their photographic creations, skills, and travels.

As a regular feature, Members' Night takes place on the third Thursday of each month at Norway House, from September through April, except for December. During this "COVID" time Members' Night is online through Zoom (sorry, no cookies). Go to the Members Only section of the website for Zoom meeting access.

At this meeting, members have the opportunity to share their images, travels, photographic techniques and knowledge, and to ask questions. One of the special benefits of our Club programme is multiple opportunities for members to share with other members. There is a great deal of talent and photographic skill in our Club and every Members' Night is a window into that talent.

Over the years our presenters have taken us around the world to all the continents and shown us many nooks and crannies of faraway places. Houses filled with sand and sand disciplined in Japanese gardens. We have seen five Havanas from five refreshing perspectives. Outer space does not seem to be a limit either, nor some of our highest peaks or the bowels of our earth.

Not all presentations are about faraway places. There are many beautiful locations, special events, and fascinating wildlife around Victoria, Vancouver Island and BC, that are often subjects for our members' presentations.

We cannot forget the brilliance of the coral reefs, the sensitivity of dreams, and blunt edges to our world. There were dancers who float and monks who meditate, rescued horses, working horses, rodeo horses and horses pounding through the surf. As well as

"Welcome to Members Night"

Snowy owls coming right at you, dragonflies doing the unmentionable, the serenity of the cheetah and her cubs at dusk and elephants, a lot of elephants.

Members' presentations have touched on poignant social issues ranging from housing to indigenous issues, abandoned villages to industries that have passed into history, and the acceptance of alternative lifestyles and gender issues. We have learned many useful camera and processing techniques. We have all looked through our lens in reverse but who would have thought to put the lens on the camera backwards and get very acceptable macro images. Techniques including handling colour, filing your images, working raw images and of course, Darktable.

Presentations of new techniques and hardware are always welcome. With all the new software and updates of existing software, opportunities to share these new techniques with other club members are many. There is a high level of creativity in the Club as demonstrated at the Creative SIG. These ideas and techniques can be shared with all members through Members Night.

Slideshows and videos should be about four to eight minutes long and other presentations can be up to 15 minutes long, although its a good idea to include time for members' questions and feedback. Although we like to keep to these time limits, the content is completely up to you. Be creative.

Entering the CAPA A/V annual competition is a challenge and running your trial show on Member's Night is an opportunity to get feedback.

Preferred formats for slideshows are mpg, mov, m4V and wmv. PowerPoint is well suited if a live speaker needs to control the flow of images.

If you need assistance or guidance, please contact us. If we don't know the answer, we can usually pass you onto a member who has the experience to get you on track.

Please contact the Members' Night Committee Chairs at *membersnight@victoriacameraclub.ca* if you have a presentation for our members or to make your suggestions on topics for consideration. Presentations can be slideshows, videos, or verbal presentations.

We welcome your input and suggestions as we endeavour to provide a good experience and make the meetings as effective as possible, even on Zoom.

Mark your calendar, the third Thursday of the month!! "Be there or be sq…."

February Theme

by Bob Barlow

How often have we heard professional photographers ask, "What is the story of this image?" February's theme "You Gotta Love It" will tell a story by capturing the emotion of the moment.

For this theme, you must capture a subject's expression that would say, if there were words spoken, "You gotta love it." There are numerous examples of pictures that leave you breathless or exclaiming "Wow!"

However, in this competition, the emotion must be expressed by the subject in the image and not just felt by the viewer. A scene that elicits joy only from the viewer is not on-theme and would not qualify for February's theme competition.

The subject or subjects can be a person or animal in action or rest. The idea is to catch a subject conveying a feeling of joy, admiration and/or intense positive emotion. It may be a spontaneous reaction that you happen to capture at just that right moment.

Animals can portray this expression, e.g. your dog fetching a stick or your cat splayed out in a beam of sunshine, even in the most unlikely of spots. Animals can be amphibians or birds, as expressed in the image of these two crows.

"My Hero" by Jill Turyk

Your image can be a composite or post-processed without any restrictions. As always, the image must be suitable for family viewing. An Internet search of "expressions of joy in photography" will result in many more ideas.

Be a goodwill ambassador utilizing your photographic skills and creative talent to capture and reflect the emotional expressions of the subject of your image.

Competitions

by Jill Turyk, Rilla Ballantyne and Leah Gray

The Club has been experiencing low submissions in the Novice competitions. We invite all of you to participate. I had the opportunity to talk to one of our prominent Novice competitors, Rilla Ballantyne, about her experience in competitions. Rilla has been competing since January 2015. Her enjoyment is evident in her comments. "It is always exciting to see what is said about my images. When I get good comments or am lucky enough to get a placed image, it gives me more confidence to keep on entering".

Rilla says that she has found that entering the competitions has been educational and helped her photography overall. "I thought that my images were not as good as most of those that I was seeing in the competitions. I wanted to hear what the judges said about my images to know how I could improve. Competing encourages me to think how to get a better image. When choosing images to enter in competitions I pick images I really like, and I think about things such as composition, lighting, subject matter, the rule of thirds and other guidelines that I have learned over the years".

When I asked Rilla for her advice to those who have not yet competed, she said, "If you have not yet competed you should seriously think about doing so. Don't be afraid, as nobody is going to ridicule you or make fun of your images. The judges' remarks are always very helpful." Thank you, Rilla, for sharing your time and your thoughts on your competition experience. We wish you continued success.

We have six external Club competitions in January. We will compete in three Open (Jan. 15th (two) and 29th), two Creative (Jan. 8th and 29th) and one Nature (Jan. 29th) competition. One of the Open competitions (Jan. 15th) is the annual Eastwood vs VCC competition. This friendly competition between the Eastwood Photographic Society of Glasgow, Scotland and the Victoria Camera Club celebrates its 15th anniversary in 2021.

Each club submits 30 images, 15 by novice/intermediate members and 15 by advanced members These will be evaluated by two judges, one from each club. The judges assign a mark out of 20 for each image and, as an added bonus, the judges comment on all sixty images.

This has always been a very high-level competition. It's a "no-holds-barred" competition, which means that anything goes. Submit two of your best images to one of our most important external competitions of the year.

Portfolio: Alison Poole

I have enjoyed photography for as long as I can remember. As a young child I spent hours pouring through old family albums. I would never complain when dad brought out the slide projector to show the latest family excursion. My first camera was a Kodak Pocket Instamatic. Later, dad passed on his vintage Voigtlander which I hauled around Europe, capturing memorable moments. I still treasure that little camera with its bellows.

How I ended up with a digital SLR and really started photography as a hobby is somewhat memorable. In the summer of 2008 my brother from Ottawa borrowed my Triumph motorcycle for a trip with my husband through BC. When he asked if there was something that I wanted but never bought for myself I mentioned an SLR camera. I was fed up with missing all the action shots. Off to the camera shop we went and returned home with the Nikon D60 kit.

Today I still shoot with Nikon gear, a D7000 and D600. My favourite lenses include the Nikkor 24-70 mm f2.8, Nikkor 70-200 mm f2.8 and the great little Tokina 11-16 mm f2.8. Hopefully, by the time this goes to print, a new iPhone 12 Pro Max will be part of my kit. After all, the best camera is the one you have with you.

I enjoy photographing a variety of subjects from vibrant city life to forgotten rural abandoned memories, indoor "objets d'art" to outdoor scenes and activity, brilliant colours to subdued black and white or sepia. The desire to capture a feeling or spark an emotion for the viewer is typically my goal. Lighting is often a key factor in addition to a solid composition. When I am on a roll, a title will present itself to really seal the deal on a photo.

In the early days of my photographic journey, I found the website Flickr to be a wonderful source of inspiration and friends. Living in Edmonton at the time, I joined some of my new friends on many excursions throughout the city. Soon we began to navigate our way through the countryside and many abandoned homesteads, often those of Ukrainian settlers. Surrounding myself with photographers who know way more than I do is how I have learned and why I joined the Victoria Camera Club in September 2019. Perhaps a slideshow of the rural genre will be coming to a future VCC Members' Night.

What is the best photographic advice I have received? Well "f8 and be there" has served me well when I didn't have time to think, this from retired Times Colonist photojournalist, John MacKay, Flickr and personal friend since the spring of 2010.

"Timeless"

This handless pocket watch once belonged to my great-grandfather. With such exquisite engraving it truly is a piece of art whether it is working or not. For weeks I struggled with the logistics of how to photograph it exactly the way I had envisioned it, front and back both visible and in focus, a challenge indeed. The watch itself is considerably more polished on the backside. f16, 1 second, ISO 200, 70 mm with two focus-stacked exposures.

This is a wee slice of my favourite wall on Cockburn Street in Edinburgh, Scotland. Wicked iron points keep the pedestrians from resting and the mosses healthy. The wall itself is not all that spectacular but the opportunities to snap interesting segments are plentiful. Many photographic subjects present themselves along the Royal Mile in Old Town Edinburgh and beyond. f2.8, 1/100th second, ISO 640, 70 mm.
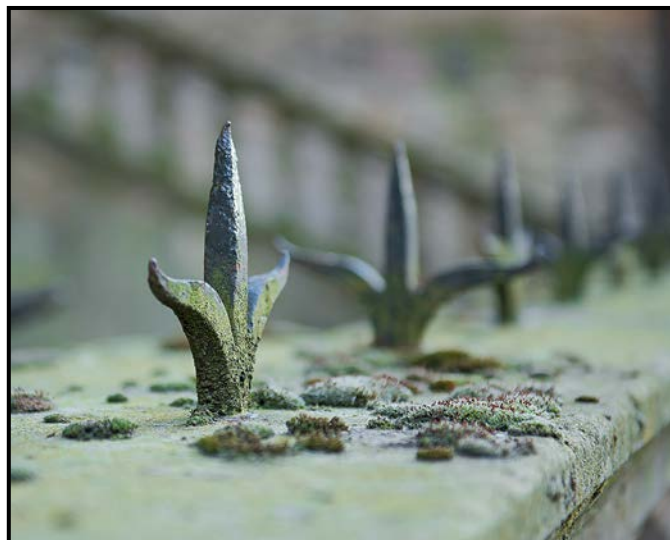
"Have a Seat"

"Twisted"

This photo was taken on a brilliant winter's day in sunny Alberta with winds whipping the clouds into a magical formation. A quality wide-angle lens is a valuable tool. Especially good at making interesting cloud formations outstanding. The shack was first seen from a window on the second floor of a house. A tattered bed is next to me with two straw dolls. A large portion of the floor, only a few feet away, is now resting one floor below. This genre of photography is not without inherent risks. f7.1, 1/250th second, ISO 100, 11 mm.

Gibson, our five-year-old Airedale Terrier, loves to play with all dogs. Often a little thievery is involved if toys are in play and the chase is on. Fortunately, he does not play "keep away" if we need to get it back. Photographed at Gonzales Bay beach. Dogs, and pets in general, are a marvellous and often readily available subject for photography. f5, 1/4000th second, ISO 800 190 mm.

"Missed the Train"

In the beginning of my photographic hobby, many of my photos were very bright and colourful. This image was from Edmonton's Bay/Enterprise Square light rail transit (LRT) station. Normally dull floors were shined up using Nik software's Color Efex Pro. f8, 1/6th second, ISO 1000, 10.5 mm.

Natural lighting from the kitchen window was a blessing for this favourite photo of mine. The calendar on the wall was dated July 1961. My photo was taken in 2011, 50 years after it was vacated. I visited this homestead on many occasions and once left behind a Nikkor 105 mm macro lens. Weeks later, after checking multiple shoot-

"Ball Thief"

"Dinner's Over"

ing locations, I realized that I must return and check for it. In blizzard conditions I borrowed an AWD vehicle, and returned. Thankfully it was sitting on the battered couch just as I left it. Lesson learned. Bigger camera bag purchased. As always, only photos and memories are taken from these relics of our past. f3.5 1/40th second, ISO 1000, 11 mm.

"Basking Heron"

I'll be the first to admit that wildlife is not my strongest genre. I'm happy to have any Club pros provide me with a few tips and tricks. This heron was kind enough to stand still and let me snap off a few shots with the incredible back-lighting. f5.6, 1/250th second, ISO 100, 300 mm.

"Brightburn"

This image and associated title are somewhat synonymous with the start of my photographic journey. A rounded version is my profile picture on Flickr and Brightburn is my profile name. I am a big fan of colour and this packs a nice punch of it. Taken at the Blethering Place Collector Car Festival. f9, 1/320th second, ISO 100, 40 mm.

"Unhinged"

No longer holding a door, this old shed can still hide its contents in the midday sun. Minimalism, spare and stripped to its essentials, is a great thing. Simple yet effective. f5.3, 1/500th second, ISO 320, 90 mm.

"Hitched"

A monochrome presentation was in order for this knotty shot taken while strolling the docks at Oak Bay Marina. Processed in Silver Efex Pro. f11, 1/250th second, ISO 200, 145 mm.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the members of our competition committee who have taken the time to provide very helpful critiques on my novice photos in the past year. Also, a special thank you to workshop presenters. Your sharing of knowledge has been a gift. Finally, a special thank you to Richard James who has taken my words and photos and made them look presentable in multiple issues of *Close-Up* Magazine over the past year.

Portfolio: Steve Smith

Thursday's child has far to go. By the age of seven I had twice crossed the equator and travelled from England halfway round the world and back again. This happened because my parents emigrated to New Zealand and then returned to live in England. It made me believe that the entire world was naturally available for examination.

Consequently, as a fresh-faced-youth, I travelled; at first on foot through the Chiltern Hills. Next on a bike throughout South-western England. A motor bike took me to Wales. Eventually, hitch-hiking brought travel by automobiles (driven by complete strangers) to Scotland, France, Switzerland and Italy. The reason for much of this travel was rock climbing and alpine climbing. Since my hitch-hiking years I have lived or worked in the UK, US, India, SE Asia and Canada (BC, Ontario, Yukon, North West Territories). Recent recreational travel has included Africa, Europe and Australia.

So, what does all this wandering about have to do with photography? Purely on its own absolutely nothing! Yet it has everything to do with how I see the world as an amazing place. In fact, trying to show others how I see the world has everything to do with my photography. To paraphrase the writer Brooks Jensen, the technology of photography is seductive. It's even fun! Yet, if we hope to make art with our tools our main issue should not be technology. Our attention should be focused on the issues of wonderment, mystery and depth. I want my photography to show others my world.

"Running Side by Side"

A photographic portfolio is often a set of related images. I have chosen to present a set of animal and bird images. The first image is of two zebras in Tanzania. In the Serengeti we came across a large herd of zebras in a shallow lake. There were a few hippos lurking in the water. When a hippo moved the herd would often break into a fast run. The zebras ran together in family groups within the apparently chaotic herd and each group ran with grace, purpose and coherence.

The next image is also from Tanzania, inside the Ngorogoro Crater. The crater's floor is about 1700 metres elevation rising to about 2300 metres at its rim. There are no giraffes in the crater because they cannot traverse high elevations. Giraffes have twice the blood pressure that humans do in order to get blood up that long neck. Perhaps the increase in blood pressure at higher elevations is too much for a giraffe.

"Lion Chasing Guinea Fowl"

The floor of the crater is largely open grassland. For over an hour we had been watching a pride of lions at a buffalo kill. They then started to leave the kill, crossing in front of us into sloping grassland. As we turned to watch we noticed a flock of guinea fowl in front of the lions. A few of the lions began to chase the guinea fowl. It seemed like a game to the lions. The shot above captures the game.

In the 1730's when Louis XV ruled France and French Canada, a certain Captain La Verandrye journeyed from the Great Lakes to Western Canada. In 1738 his men built Fort Rouge at the junction of the Red River and the Assiniboine. This was the first European occupation of the site of the city of Winnipeg and was the beginning of the unique prairie society that developed in the 18th and early 19th centuries. This society with its informal laws and customs influenced the future path for the people of Western Canada. Things worked out well for the Europeans but much less well for the indigenous people.

In 1738 grizzlies were found across the prairies. Now only a few are found in Northern Manitoba and effectively none in Saskatchewan. In BC grizzlies remain a part of the landscape. For a unique view of grizzly bears, the stories of Clayton Mack as told in the book "*White Guys and Grizzly Bears*" are a must read. The next four images are of grizzlies in the Chilcotin where the Chilko River runs out from Chilko Lake.

Grizzly bear cubs stay with their mother for two or three years. The following image shows a sow with two big third-year cubs. These three bears have just come

down the hillside to the river. They are looking about to see if any other bears are close by.

"Look There"

The next grizzly bear image shows a lone adult male bear about to have a confrontation with a sow and her two cubs. Grizzly bears generally keep their distance from each other and from us. The sow and her two small cubs were near to the male along the same stretch of riverbank but hidden from each other's view by a small point. Then, both adult bears were out in the river fishing, saw one another and began making aggressive gestures. The male started to run at the female and cubs and made a bluff charge. The female stood her ground and he backed down, each keeping a wary distance from the other.

"Looking for Trouble"

The next image shows the two cubs after the stand down between the male and female adults. These first-year cubs are glaring bravely in the general direction of the male while their mother stands behind them.

"We are Very Fierce"

As grizzly cubs grow older, they engage in play fighting which to me, looks very similar to the fist fights that we used to have in elementary school. Vigorous, with feeling and animosity and some hurt but without the physical strength to do lasting damage. The next image shows two grizzly siblings engaged in a play fight. They appear to be second-year cubs.

"Unfriendly"

When we raise our eyes up to the treetops and beyond, we see birds. Guess what? Birds in their natural habitats are fascinating. At the top of the next page, we see a young bald eagle landing on a rocky islet.

As we know, birds are at their most graceful when in flight. Individual wingbeats provide a spectrum of possible images. The aim of in-flight bird shots is to show graceful wing form, the play of light across the wing and the plumage.

Below the eagle is an image of a trio of Pintail ducks in flight at Esquimalt Lagoon. As they often do, the three Pintails are flying in close formation. Their wing position shows us their very dapper plumage as they stretch

"Young Eagle Landing"

their necks out into the flight path over the waters of the lagoon. This image tries to show the precise nature of their beauty.

"Three Pintails"

Hummingbirds are like tiny, feathered jewels and one often wants to freeze their incredibly furious wingbeats. Yet hummers are very delicate birds whose presence is ethereal and fleeting. To capture the next image, I experimented with shutter speed to give a three-dimensional, transparent feel to the wings. To further give a

"Into the Light"

lighter feel to the image I placed a silver reflector beneath the bird to light the bird from below. The result, with its intentionally blown whites, is not a textbook version of a hummingbird.

Sometimes photography requires some sleuthing. At a lodge in Southern Madagascar, I noticed white egrets flying to and fro. They seemed to fly from different directions to the same central location somewhere in the forest. I decided to explore and see if I could find where that location was. Keeping my eyes on the sky I wandered through the bush and eventually could see the egrets converging on some place ahead. Soon my nose and ears told me that I was near a large nesting site.

Sure enough, I came upon two large trees that contained a crowd of nesting egrets. Rejoicing in this time alone with the birds I spent over an hour just watching these graceful white birds. I was partly hidden under the trees and the birds hardly noticed me. I took a few photos but in the thick vegetation my view was restricted. The image below shows an egret returning to the nest with some building material.

"Egret Returning to the Nest"

Natural systems include humans and are defined by their endless changes. These eternal changes, the dynamic inter-relationships between all the ecosystem parts, the relentless struggle for survival and ongoing natural selection mean that the state of nature, as seen at any point in time, is unique. Just as today is different from the past, in future times nature will necessarily be different from today. It is my great pleasure to enjoy nature in my time as I continue to travel through it and make my images.

The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit,
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.
----- Omar Khayyam (translation by E. Fitzgerald)

Dramatic Colour Photography

by Don Piper

You might be stuck in a photographic rut or looking for some creative photographic ideas, especially since Covid 19 paid us a visit. Well, our Tuesday Group co-ordinator, Deb Thurlbeck, found an interesting subject. "Neon-like" photography using polarized light is an easy and fun project you can do at home. You will come up with great artsy pictures and give your creativity a boost.

All you need to play with this artistic side of photography are some clear plastic objects, a polarizing filter and a source of polarized light. Light sources such as the sun, incandescent bulbs, LEDs and flashguns do not emit polarized light. The LCD screens of your computer, tablet or cellphone all emit light polarized in one plane. You can verify this by looking at the screen through a polarizing filter: then observing how it turns darker and then solid black as you rotate the polarizer.

By rotating the polarizer, you are changing the angle of the plane of polarization of the light it passes. This blocks an increasing amount of light from the source. At 90 degrees the polarizer has suppressed all the light. To photograph the colourful fringe patterns of plastic objects when back-lit, I prefer to use my laptop screen. I can have the monitor flat on a table and arrange objects on top of it, or I can place it vertically behind the objects.

"Dolphin"

Any camera will work including phone/tablet cameras. If you cannot mount the polarizing filter on the camera, holding the filter in front of the lens works. I prefer to work with the camera on a tripod and in manual mode to have consistent exposure throughout the photo session. If the objects are displayed directly on the monitor, I try to shoot with the widest aperture possible (f2.8 or sim-

ilar) to minimize the depth-of-field and blur the screen pixels as much as I can. I set up a full-screen white image by going into Photoshop and creating a new file at default size (with white background) and press +++ to fill the screen. Save this file to re-use it later.

Plastic is a very generic term so I can't tell you exactly which kinds will work, and which will not. Grab every semi-transparent or clear plastic object you can find and try them. Some of the materials I have used are filter cases, plastic glasses and food containers, bottles, cutlery, etc. Each object will give you a different effect.

"Starfish"

Rigid plastic containers like DVD, CD and filter cases, work well. If you look at them against your computer screen, you might see a faint fringe pattern with the naked eye. Those objects are usually made of polypropylene material, a much denser and crystalline plastic than Polyethylene terephthalate. Sometimes you can see what kind of plastic an object is made of from the recycle symbol. Clear plastic material like cutlery, glasses and straws look stunning. A classic glass gets much more photogenic with this lighting.

Do not limit yourself to only using material made of hard plastic. Plastic wrap and sandwich bags can give amazing results creating compelling abstract images. A plastic bag crumpled up looks like a gemstone. Plastic used to wrap around flowers at the florists does a great job but must be crumpled or balled up then released to work.

This project is all about fun, and you should not take it too seriously. Look around you and do not be afraid to experiment and test wild ideas. Worst case, you lose a few seconds of your life trying something that did not work. When things work, though, the reward can be huge. I found some good tips in a You Tube video from Josh Dunlop: *expertphotography.com/category/creative-projects-challenges/page/2/*.

SmallRig L-Bracket

by Roger Botting

Anyone who has been a photographer for more than a few years knows that some things are just not designed to work for you. Tripods are a great example. They can be cheap and wobbly, expensive and heavy or outrageously expensive and great.

But, between your tripod and the camera is the tripod head and that is where things really don't work. And the problem isn't always the tripod head but rather how it attaches to your camera or lens.

Some use a single screw and there are two different sizes. Old Hasselblads came with the ability to use either size but most cameras don't and then it takes forever to attach or remove the camera.

Some tripod heads use proprietary quick release plates. Different brands and models use different plates. They are a pain.

Many photographers use "Arca Swiss" type mounting plates and brackets made by several companies. When made correctly, the system allows for a quick mounting of your camera. When not made correctly, they jam and wobble and are not worth it.

The other problem with simple mounting plates is that your camera is now locked into one plane of use. Horizontal! Using an L bracket allows you to mount your camera in a horizontal or vertical position.

When I bought my latest camera I had a choice, either buy the more expensive Kirk or RRS L brackets (prices have dropped in the last few years) or a cheapo eBay bracket for 15% of the price.

For $20 the cheap eBay bracket arrived fairly quickly and worked well on some of my tripod heads but never worked quite right on my expensive RRS ballhead with the quick release clamp. The help forums stated that the ball head clamp was not adjustable. The fit was wobbly on one position and would jam the quick release clamp in another position. A quick measurement with some callipers showed the cheapo L plate to not be made to specs. A lot of machining went into making the plate, but the quality control wasn't there. I guess quality comes at a price.

My daughter mentioned buying SmallRig accessories. She does video with the same camera that I have.

I ended up buying a SmallRig L bracket #2947 for my camera plus a BUC2736 Cold Shoe mount so that I could attach a device designed for hot shoe mounting.

A short wait later I had the L bracket. It fits my tripod head just so and has two great features. First, it comes with a tool that attaches on the bottom of the plate to allows me to attach the L bracket and second, the same tool lets me adjust the position of the vertical part of the L plate. This allow me to use a microphone or a cable release or the video out port while having the camera in a vertical position on the tripod head. One issue in common to some Kirk and the RRS L bracket and my cheapo Ebay L bracket is that if I want to take a vertical photo I can't use the plug-in ports should I want to use a wired release or microphone, etc. That is, unless I buy right-angle cables or use a spacer like the RRS Camera Cable Relief Spacer (CRS). Please note that this RRS piece costs more than my SmallRig L bracket. Further, if you buy the more expensive RRS L bracket, it is adjustable like my SmallRig L bracket and would not need the RRS Camera Cable Relief Spacer.

The cold shoe mount allows me to attach a flash on the hot shoe of my camera and at the same time attach some other device like a MIOPS Smart+ Camera Trigger or a Timelapse+ View Intervalometer to the bracket. Or in the case of my Nikon Z camera when it's not lighting up the focus assist function on my flashes, I have on occasion attached a small LED lamp sufficient to assist in focusing. Think of it as a modelling light.

The cold shoe screws into the L bracket and is easily detachable. You could mount a small monitor, cell phone etc. on the cold shoe Mount or directly onto the L bracket but that is getting into the range where you might want a proper cage with its capabilities.

Recent Updates to Lightroom

by Cindy Stephenson

This article highlights three new features that have come with recent updates to Lightroom Classic (the desktop version of Lightroom). This is the version that I teach in my workshops for the Club. It differs quite a bit from the cloud-based version.

With the latest Lightroom Classic 10.0 release Adobe has dropped support for Windows 7 and for Mac OS High Sierra (10.13). It's always a good idea to make sure that you are using the most recent version of Lightroom. Apple has confirmed that their newest Mac operating system, Big Sur, is compatible with Lightroom Classic 10.0 but is not guaranteed to work with older versions of Lightroom. However, Adobe is still working on making all their apps work with the new "Apple Silicon" hardware.

Adobe's June 2020 update (9.3) added the Hue Slider in the Develop Module (Basic Panel). This slider lets you change colours within specific areas of your image. This will be a welcome addition to your Lightroom toolkit.

Accessing this tool requires that you use local adjustment tools (Local Adjustment Brush, Radial or Graduated Filter, etc.) to select specific areas that you would like to edit.

Once you have selected and masked an area using one of these tools, a panel opens showing all of the sliders that are available to you, much like the Basic Panel. One of these is the Hue Slider. When it is set to '0.0', the slider indicates the current colour of the area you have selected.
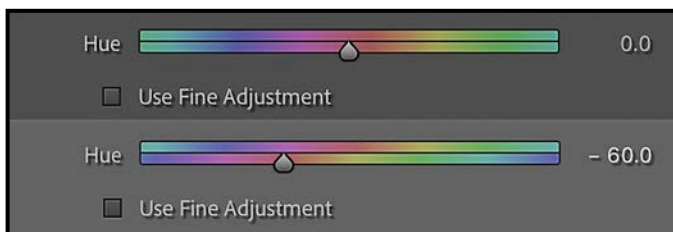
"Hue Adjustment Slider"

Repositioning the slider will change the colour. In the images of an umbrella below, I shifted the colour red (left) to purple (right). Notice how the numbers beside the hue slider have changed from '0.0' to '-60.0' and the slider has also moved and is pointing at the new colour.

"Use Fine Adjustment" slows the rate of change as the slider is scrubbed left or right. You can also enter a number manually if you want to be precise, or repeat the colour change in a different area of your image.

"Before-After Adjustments"

Adobe's June update (9.3) included some changes to Adobe Camera Raw so the interface looks more like Lightroom. If you regularly take your images into Photoshop once you have worked on them in Lightroom, one thing you might try is to open your images from Lightroom to Photoshop as smart objects (Edit in>Open as Smart Object) rather than as a PSD or TIFF file, in which case your Lightroom work will be baked in.

Once in Photoshop, if you decide you want to make further changes, you can double-click on your image in the Photoshop Layers panel and it will open in Camera Raw. Once there, you can see all of your Lightroom work and you can undo it or change it as needed. Note, however, that once it goes back to Lightroom, the changes will be baked in.

Adobe's October 2020 update (10.0) included two new zooming tools, Box Zoom and Scrubby Zoom, as well as changes to the Navigator panel. To activate the Box Zoom tool, hold down the command key on a Mac (Ctrl on PC) then click and drag to define the area you want.

The area you have zoomed in on shows up in the centre panel. In the case of Scrubby Zoom, hold down the shift key, drag on the image where you want to zoom, left to zoom out, and right to zoom in. At this point Scrubby Zoom only works in the Develop module. With both zoom tools, click on the 'z' key to reverse the zoom.

With each update, Adobe adds support for new cameras and lenses. If you own an older version of Photoshop or Lightroom (such as Photoshop CS6 or Lightroom 6) and have recently purchased a new camera, you may find that these programs no longer recognize your camera's raw files. Adobe offers a free DNG (Digital Negative) converter. With this tool, you can convert camera-specific raw files from supported cameras to a more universal DNG raw file. Check out Adobe's website for more information.

Scene-referred Images

by Neil Schemenauer

In recent years, the motion-picture industry has been switching from a "display-referred" image workflow to "scene-referred". They have standardized on a process called "The Academy Color Encoding System" (ACES). A key idea of the ACES is that the image data is maintained in scene-referred form until it is sent to a display when it is transformed to display-referred. This article gives a brief explanation of the differences between these workflows and suggests why photographers may be interested in making a similar change.

One challenge in photography is to handle the huge range of luminance that can occur in real world scenes. "EV" is the relative luminance on a logarithmic scale (i.e. 1 EV is a doubling of the light intensity, corresponding to one stop of exposure). For example: the sun - 23.9, incandescent light bulb - 17.8, blue sky - 5.6, deep shade - 2.1, white paper in office lighting - 0, white paper in candlelight - -6.6, human night vision - 13.3.

To simplify the comparison of display-referred and scene-referred image models consider greyscale images. For a display-referred image, each pixel value encodes the brightness for a corresponding pixel on a display device. There is an absolute minimum and maximum brightness for every pixel (e.g. 0 to 255 for 8-bit depth). This is logical given the physical limitations of the display.

For a scene-referred image, each pixel value records the luminance of the original scene. These values are stored on a relative scale with the middle grey of the scene conventionally being stored at a value of 0.18. Assume the middle grey was defined as 80 cd/m^2. Then, a region of blue sky at 5000 cd/m^2 would have a pixel value of 11.25 (5000/80 × 0.18). In this model, like in nature, there is no maximum value defined.

While the model has no maximum value, the image formats have constraints. E.g. the OpenEXR image format, standardized for use in the motion-picture industry, uses 16-bit floating point values for each channel. It can represent luminescence 24 stops darker than middle grey and 16 stops brighter. While not infinite, it is a huge range and rarely a significant limitation.

In theory, the JPEG image format also allows the storage of images with a huge range of brightness values. However, to achieve a large brightness range, the format must reduce the number of distinct colours. As an example, consider an image with an 8-stop brightness range. Stored as an 8-bit gamma 2.2 JPEG, it has only 235 distinct colour values. A corresponding OpenEXR image would have over 24,000 distinct colours. Some digital cameras can capture over 14 stops of dynamic range in a single exposure and so the JPEG format can often be a significant limitation on quality.

For photography work the display-referred workflow dominates, and it would be natural to question the value of scene-referred. The display-referred workflow is mature, well supported by software and well understood. It also has the advantage that it generally requires less computer resources.

Without getting into technical details you can think of the conversion from scene-referred to display-referred as a lossy transform. In other words, it is not reversible, and some image quality is lost. If the pixel values are not extreme, either in brightness or in saturation, the loss is minor. Display-referred image models have been carefully designed with consideration of the colours humans can see and the brightness values that can be reproduced on displays or print media. They don't waste precious bits storing colours that cannot be seen and brightness values that cannot be reproduced.

Some image processing operations are naturally performed on scene-referred image data. Internally, an image editor working with display-referred image data must, in effect, transform that data back to scene-referred and then convert it back to display-referred. This is a little bit like saving your image into a lossy JPEG file after each editing operation. That's not too bad because modern image software typically uses 16-bit colour channels and a wide colour space (like ProPhoto RGB) for internal storage. Usually the quality loss is minor and would only be noticeable in the case of extreme pixel values (e.g. HDR-like images or operations that aggressively "push" colours and brightness).

At least some photo editing tools support a scene-referred workflow. The developers of Affinity Photo state that, if starting with a RAW file, most processing is done in a 32-bit unbounded linear colour space. Recent versions of Darktable support a scene-referred workflow. See the "Filmic FAQ" for details. For a deeper explanation of this topic, I would recommend the paper "*Cinematic Color VES.04*" (*tinyurl.com/y3qhwb2t*) by Jeremy Selan. In the motion-picture business, a scene-referred workflow is more desirable due to the extensive exchange of image data between artists and systems. For photographers, the greatest benefit would be for processing images from modern digital cameras with a high dynamic range.

Sky Replacement

by Bob Law

One of the latest "hot topics" in photography is sky replacement. We have been able to do this using Photoshop but it was a very long and laborious process that required you to have you own supply of sky images and a high degree of skill. That all changed with Luminar 4, and the latest version of Photoshop, both of which use Artificial Intelligence (AI). With AI, sky replacement is simple, and both programs supply stock sky images for your use. There are lots of YouTube videos available for both Luminar 4 and Photoshop sky replacement to bring you up to speed quickly.

Is it ethical to replace a sky? The purists will say "no" but at the end of the day, it is your image and the only one you should have to satisfy is yourself. If the image has a bland or lifeless sky, any step up from that should be an improvement if it is not glaringly obvious that the sky was replaced and the new sky and the rest of the image blend well.

"North Park Before"

Think of it as adding a sky to improve an image, by adding depth or colour, rather than replacing a sky. I do commercial building real estate photography and there is often a featureless light grey sky which detracts from the overall look of the building. I cannot wait for a clear sky and trying to enhance a poor sky in basic post-processing is not reliable. A plain blue sky or a blue sky with some white clouds gives the image more depth and makes the building much more attractive and it is more likely to sell or lease. The North Park before and after images are a good example of making a building come to life.

The biggest challenge when replacing skies is getting the light in the sky to match the ground in intensity, tone,

and direction. Remember, you may be adding pre-set skies to your image and they may not match perfectly. Direction is easy, the programs have "flip sky" features. Light intensity and tone can be carefully altered with the adjustment sliders or tools available in the programs. The goal is to improve your image and make it look pleasing and natural and give it a little "punch".

"North Park After"

Luminar 4 is a permanent licence (vs. subscription), non-destructive photo editor that can be used on its own or as a plug-in for Lightroom or other "base" photo editing-programs. Its most impressive features are its AI-powered tools and content-aware technology with the leading feature being sky replacement. It excels with its many pre-sets in all its functions. It can be used as a base photo editor, but I find it works best in conjunction with Lightroom for quick specialized pre-set functions such as sky replacement and sky additions. As a plug-in to Lightroom, images are automatically imported to Luminar and then saved back to Lightroom where additional adjustments can be made.

The AI Sky Replacement tool in Luminar doesn't just identify the sky in an outdoor scene, it selects all the tiny bits between branches and around trees, the edges of buildings and rooftops, hillside and mountains without a single mouse click. It goes way further than other auto-select tools, eliminating edge halos, edge artifacts and transitions, avoiding all that tedious selecting, feathering, edge shifting, edge masking and all the other exhausting steps of manual sky replacement techniques.

Luminar sky replacement has pre-sets for a wide variety of clouds, sky, weather, night and day, stars, meteor showers, sunsets, sunrays, northern lights, and light-direction alternatives. You can load your own sky images into the program and there are also additional stock images available. It is up to the photographer to choose a sky image with lighting compatible with the ground although Luminar does a great job of masking the foreground and

relighting the rest of the scene very well most of the time. Luminar also has an "Augmented Skies" section where you can place, move, enlarge, or shape pre-set objects in the sky of your image. These include birds, balloons, clouds, fireworks, lightening, plane, and rainbows to give your image extra "punch".

In a landscape shot, grey skies are a little depressing but a blue sky brings the scene to life. The Mt. Finlayson before and after images show converting a very boring image into a usable image. However, for the purists, that image is now "altered reality".

"Mount Finlayson Before"

Using Luminar is quite easy. Load your image, either directly or from Lightroom, and go to the Sky Replacement section of the Creative Icon (the "pallet"). Scroll down and try the various pre-set skies until you find one that works. Luminar will create an accurate reflection of the sky and re-light the entire scene, if appropriate. Most of the time it looks right but occasionally, you might have to fix blending issues where the sky meets the horizon, or some lighting issues. Luminar's AI is very clever at making sure the new sky is placed behind foreground features and rarely places the horizon in the wrong place or allows the sky to "bleed" into the foreground.

For fine adjustments to your image there are basic sliders to adjust horizon blending, the horizon position, overall exposure, and global sky adjustment. There are also Advanced Settings that close gaps, make local sky adjustments, defocus the sky, add atmospheric haze, adjust sky exposure or colour temperature, and flip the sky right to left to match the existing light direction. Finally, there is also an edit mask for even more fine tuning.

Additional features in Luminar 4 mirror other processing programs with adjustments for colour LUTs, black and white conversion, toning, opacity, noise reduction, edit masks and brushes, exposure, contrast, layers, cropping, vignette. Another interesting function in Luminar is the Portrait function with extensive specialized pre-sets and healing functions.

Photoshop 2021 (v22) has added sky replacement using Adobe's version of AI, "Sensei". You can access this via Edit > Sky Replacement. A dialogue box will appear where you can select a sky from the supplied pre-sets (or from your own images). You can access all the normal Photoshop tools, including the layers that Photoshop has generated to fine-tune your image. Photoshop does not automatically generate a sky reflection but you can do this by using the familiar Photoshop tools for selection and masking.
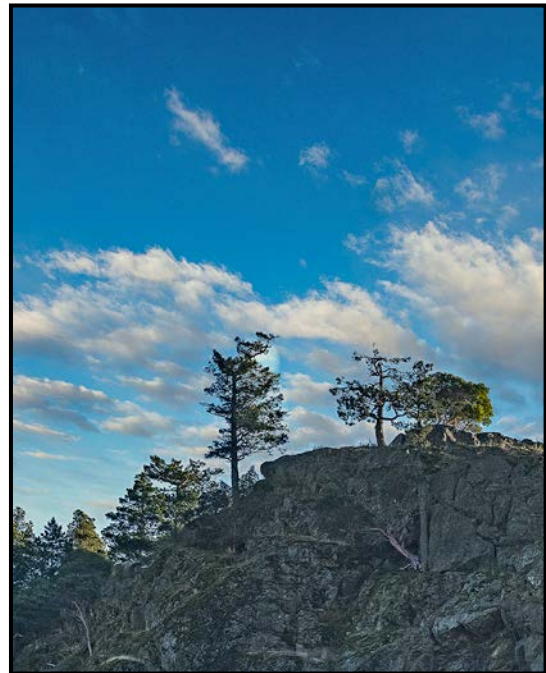
"Mount Finlayson After"

As photographers we are all receiving the benefit of the current intense competition in photo software. Luminar pushed Photoshop to create the sky replacement module and Photoshop will push Luminar or some other program to greater heights, forcing more AI offerings for photographers. In my opinion, Photoshop currently gives you a little more fine control over your sky replacement but Luminar is much faster and simpler to use. However, both are major advances in photo editing technology that make our life simpler to help us produce outstanding images. Luminar isn't for pros or dyed-in-the-wool Photoshop devotees but it does give photographers the opportunity to explore creativity in exciting new ways without getting bogged down in sliders, masks and jargon.

Great Competition Images

by Judy Plummer

All of the photographs that accompany this article are award-winning images from VCC members. There are both internal and International competition winners.

The most important point is to know the rules of the competition. You have a great image, and you want to enter your photograph in a competition. Where do you start? The first thing to think about when you have a photograph that is competition-worthy is to determine what category it fits into by going to our website. Sign in and go to Competitions>Internal Competitions>2020-2021 Competition Guidelines (PDF) for internal competitions or >Competitions>External Competitions Overview for external competitions.

Reviewing these documents will give you a more in-depth description of the rules. Just because the photograph is of a bird does not mean that it is automatically included in the Wildlife category. It may have to go in the Nature or the Open category. By reading the rules you will know which competition your photograph will qualify for. The VCC website is full of information for photographers of all levels. The question, "Can I blur the background?" depends on the rules when taking Nature and Wildlife photos.

"Grizzly Cubs Play-fighting" by Steve Smith

This image was entered the Wildlife category in a VCC competition where it earned an Honourable Mention.

"Female Rufous Flash" was entered in the PSA Open competition Round 3 in 2019-2020 and won an Award of Honour. These two photographs are of animals and birds found in British Columbia. These all show a subject that is active, a story has been told, the subject is easily the focus for our attention and there are no

"Female Rufous Flash" by Rick Shapka

distracting backgrounds. All show a unique moment in the subject's life.

Planning is essential to getting award-winning photographs. Both appear to have been shot at eye level thereby establishing a connection with the bird or the bears. Planning for the shoot involves not only the right gear but knowing the animal as well. Researching the habitat as well as the location will help get that award-winning shot.

"Winter Grasses" by Kim Smith

This image won the Intermediate Year End Print Category in 2019-2020 and earned an Honourable Mention in the PSA Inter-club Digital Open Round 3 in 2019-2020.

Award-winning photographs don't happen by chance. Courses have been taken, workshops attended along with the reading of articles and following photographers online. To improve your technique there are courses and workshops offered by VCC as well as courses at Camosun College and UVic. Learn the basics of a good photograph. Photography is a wonderful subject in that there is always more to discover and learn and opportunities to be creative. Take lots of shots. Print the photo, absorb it for a few days. Try to identify what makes your image strong. Maybe join an image review group.

"I wish I was a One-Man Band" by Normand Marcotte

"Studious" by Peter Koelbleitner

This image placed first in Advanced Altered Reality in the VCC 2019-2020 Year End Competition.

Altered Reality is the "extensive manipulation and combination of images". All parts must be made by the author and must have a photographic base. Altered Reality is one of the categories that the Club has each month for Intermediate and Advanced photographers. Those competing in the Novice category would follow these rules and submit in the Novice Open category.

Since there will be manipulation of your photos in this category you will need to learn to use programs such as Lightroom and Photoshop, two of the many programs available. Club members are fortunate as we have a Creative SIG that meets once a month where members share their creations and the "how to" behind them.

"Studious" won First Place in the VCC People category in the Year End competition in 2019-2020. Check all the rules regarding photographing people before entering this competition. This image is another example of how a story is told. It is a compelling composition displaying the emotions of the students and demonstrates the maker's understanding of light and colour.

When photographing abroad you need to know the customs of your destination regarding photographing people. Investigate the photography of others who have been there when you make plans for your trip.

The final image, "Evening Stroll along the Seine" won First Place in the Theme Category for October 2020.

The judges for our competitions are from across Canada and the United States. The judge of this photo had this to say, "Well done illustrating a less than typical perspective on a well photographed landmark. Including the human element creates a "story" and provides a sense of scale and reference for the location.

All photographs in our competitions are scored out of 20. The judges do not know the maker's name when they judge a photograph which is why you must not add your name (signature/logo) to your images in a competition submission. The judges are asked to make comments on each photo. As members you can read all the judges' comments under Competitions>Competition Results then select the competition from the list. By regularly reading the comments you will see how others see your image.

A most grateful thank you to the photographers that provided photographs for this article.

"Evening Stroll Along the Seine" by Leah Gray

Beginner's Corner: JPEG vs. Raw

by Joseph Finkleman

There is a pure pleasure in finding a picture in the wild and capturing it. In the film days people either sent their roll of film to the processing lab or did it themselves in their own darkroom. If you shot film you got just what was recorded and then processed by a lab: there was little editing possible.

There is little difference today with an in-camera JPEG image. Instead of sending it off to a lab, we have that lab right there within the camera. In a very real sense there is no such thing as an image straight out of the camera. This is because, once the image is captured, all we have is digital code. In order to see the image, it has to be processed by whatever algorithms the manufacturer has devised. All of the manufacturers do a very good job in processing a JPEG in-camera and some do an exemplary job in processing it. However, in order for an image to become a JPEG a great deal of information gets thrown away, never to be seen again.

Why is that information important if people are willing to throw it away? The determination of importance depends on your point of view. An image is a language. In the English language one can communicate fairly well knowing only 5,000 words. An average college-educated person has a vocabulary of roughly 20,000-30,000 words. A good dictionary has over 250,000 words. I have been told that if you add all of the borrowed and scientific words, there are roughly 1,000,000 words in the English language.

A JPEG is like having 5,000 words. One can communicate but all of the nuances and flavours are missing. A JPEG is the bare minimum one needs in order to have an image, while a raw capture has all of the 1,000,000 words that are possible in the capture. The analogy is fairly close but not perfect. Still, the difference between a JPEG and a raw image is inherently huge concerning the total amount of information that is lost or retained. A JPEG straight out of the camera's processing engine means you did not have to do anything at all.

Enjoy the full thrill of the hunt and the satisfying experience of seeing an image directly afterwards and wow, do they look good! In fact, each manufacturer makes different programmed looks with their JPEGs. My Nikon D800E has a few, as do Canon and Sony. The Olympus has a few more and the Fuji is replete with JPEG permutations. If you want really pretty JPEGs buy a Fuji, they are a very interesting company.
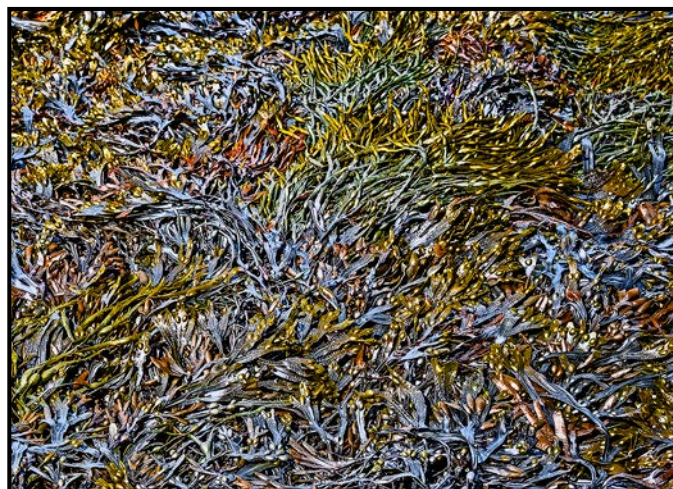

"In-Camera JPG Image"

A properly-processed raw image always creates a much more interesting, finished product than one can capture as an in-camera JPEG. I can nearly always spot a JPEG at first glance, mostly because the middle tones, all of those tones that have any detail at all in them, are dead. The colour is OK but the luminous mode is not in evidence. From value 2 (detailed black) to value 9 (detailed white) the middle tonal values are flat. Secondly, although the colour is OK, it is largely lacking the snap that it should have.

Herein lies the problem, one does not have to learn any processing knowledge to shoot JPEGs but one does have to learn a fair amount of processing knowledge in order to shoot raw.

It really is the difference between having a 5,000-word basic vocabulary and having a 30,000-word educated vocabulary. One can communicate either way but the greater vocabulary allows the greater subtlety of higher and deeper communication.

"Processed Raw Image"