

Seeing Pictorially

By the late Le Jeune Whitney
(Lejeune was a member of OPCC)

Some of my earliest memories are of watching my father at his drawing board carefully drafting an elevation for a home, or a bridge, or a cross section of some structure, or the linear details of one of his inventions. Later I would see the finished home he had constructed or the bridge or the building, and my mind would transfer to the finished structure his meticulous lines which seemed to me to be its skeleton, that gave it its form—the basis for its strength and shape and purpose

I think that is when, during my very early years, I began to form pictures in my mind and later wanted to capture them in some tangible form so I could enjoy them again and again, in a sense, to make them permanent. I did not have my father's skill in drafting, and when I was given a box camera in my pre-teen years, I began to realize that my mental images could be transferred to film and preserved to enjoy. And that I could photograph a subject new and fresh to me, and put it in tangible form. My mind became my camera.

I have a storehouse of mental images carefully filed away—some I have eventually recorded on film, others remain in the private gallery of my imagination. One of my mental files consists of 8 x 10 glossies of scenes I failed to capture on film, but to me they still seem real: the dramatic cloud in the form of an eagle floating above a west-lit Seattle waterfront viewed from the Space Needle more than 30 years ago; a back-lit golden-haired child playing with her doll in the window of a ferry to Nanaimo; the rainbow suspended over a southwest desert landscape; fishing boats along the coast seen from a train going east from Barcelona.

One of my great moments as a mother, a feeling of accomplishment, was when my 11-year-old son returned from a school bus trip to the old Spanish mission at San Juan Batista in California. I always asked him what he remembered most of any experience, and he said of this one that he wished he had taken a camera because on the way home, the late afternoon sun was making interesting streaks of light through a row of palm trees. He, too, was beginning to see pictorially.

When he was in the second or third grade at a neighborhood school, he returned home excitedly one day, grabbed my hand and took me back along his walking route to see a tree that he said was "melting." I found to my delight a beautiful wisteria tree in full bloom, its lavender blossoms cascading toward the ground. Since then I have always had a wisteria tree and still enjoy photographing it in bloom to relive each spring my son's revealing impression that the tree was melting.

My life has been spent in some form of communications, always linked with photographs and graphic images. I think in terms of transferring images to the flat surface of a photographic print or slide or to the printed page. So I tend to view scenes for the impact they will have when reproduced on a flat surface, cropped and printed and ready to view. I find myself automatically framing the world, scene by scene.

When I bought my property in Sequim on Bell Hill, I decided on property punctuated with tall trees and interesting vegetation, instead of the bare hillside lots with unrestricted views. I find I am most comfortable with a variety of views, each with a different framing of trees, which filter some scenes, throw interesting light patterns, and provide a seasonal variety to enhance the sky, the Strait, the mountains and islands beyond