

WISHES, FEELINGS AND FULFILLMENT (OR WHERE DID I GO WRONG?)

by

Bill Black, APSA

After a vacation trip to western Canada a few years ago I anxiously awaited the return of my slides [this was before digital imaging took over]. My wife, Carole, and I typically spend a great amount of our travel time photographing. We always have high expectations for our endeavors. As I reviewed the images of this trip, I could tell that something was different. The results, at least for me, were disappointing. I could not put my finger on the problem until I happened to reread an article in *Nature Photographer* by Larry W. Richardson. In the article entitled "Creative Seeing", Richardson expressed in a few paragraphs what I seemed to be experiencing as I reviewed my images. The following is a paraphrased part of what he wrote.

"Most of what I have learned has come from a deeply buried desire to connect with the natural world and share that experience with others through my images. Initially I struggled with trying to master technique. I read. I practiced. I threw away many of my slides. Those that were keepers frequently did not get me that excited. My photographs were very ordinary and seemed to lack any compelling elements. I searched for books to read that were written specifically about patterns and composition. Studying illustrations using the various aspects of composition such as perspective, use of color, arrangement, rhyming shapes, lens selection and exposure gave me a better understanding of how to use these components in organizing what I was seeing."

Much of what Richardson wrote seemed to apply directly to me. As an engineer by profession, I tend to see things analytically. I am a technocrat. I know the "rules" of composition. I know my film's expanses as well as its limitations. I know my equipment very well. But I made an interesting discovery one

day, while reviewing my slides on a light box. In spite of their diversity, each image seemed to evoke the same stoic response.

In developing my photography skills, I employed many of the attributes that had evolved in my role as a technologist over the past four decades. My approach to photography was scientific. I had not read John Shaw's words carefully enough (*Close Ups in Nature*): "A technocrat without emotion is clinical and soulless while a poet without order is bound within personal imagery and cannot convey his or her feelings to others." I realized sensitivity was missing – at least on this particular photo trip). I was letting my technique get in the way of my creative spirit. In my methodical, clinical quest to develop an understanding of composition, I had let these elements overpower the most important aspects of photography, that is, a creative, personal vision. While composing my subject, I was *observing* but I was not *seeing*. Frequently I was not mindful of the spiritual awakening that could and should be taking place.

I wanted my photographs to make people feel what I was feeling. I wanted them to share the passion I experienced. When I felt so moved to capture an inspirational scene on film, I wanted them to see it as I saw it too. I wanted them to look at my images and feel something beyond the colors, lines, curves, and arrangement of the components in the view. I wanted my photographs to reveal the natural world and also raise the viewer's awareness. I wanted them to understand the subject's existence in its environment, its niche in its ecosystem. As a photographer and a temporary resident of the earth, I felt I shared a responsibility in maintaining the intricate systems of the natural world that preserve this biosphere. I wanted to create meaningful images so that my viewers could appreciate the environment we share with all creatures.

Some years ago in an article for our camera club newsletter I wrote, "Pre-visualization is the key to great photographs. Getting a clear mental image of the picture you want begins with identifying your purpose. Most

photographers are so swept away by their emotions that they forget to identify their intentions. It pays to take a few moments to define what caught your eye and why you want to take a particular photograph. Focusing your attention on what is most important to you will help you make smart decisions about composition, exposure, film, and other technical choices. In other words, **"IDENTIFY YOUR GOAL."**

I had neglected my own advice. I had become overwhelmed by the exquisite scenery of the Canadian Rockies and reverted to "point and shoot." The results were anything less than spectacular. Oh, yes, the slides were well composed and the exposure was just right. Nevertheless, I was pleased with only six images of all those I had taken.

I had *wished* to make viewers of my photographs *feel* the energy, the emotion I was experiencing when I saw the many beautiful landscapes. But I had failed to *fulfill* these expectations. I had failed to identify my goals. I had failed to strip away whatever did not serve my purpose and incorporate only what contributed to the final image.

Will I make these mistakes again? Probably. But, I hope, not for a very long time. As a constant reminder I now have taped to the back of my camera, **"WHAT IS THE GOAL?"**



Peyto Lake, Banff National Park,
Alberta, Canada
© W. E. Black