

Shooting for the Heart - The Pathway to more Personal Expression

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Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4

Editor's Note - Thumbnails are links to larger images, presented in slide show format.

I've always wanted to be immersed in nature. Even as a young boy, when asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would say, "a forest ranger." I naively thought the job involved being friends and caretaker to all the forest animals. Later, in University, I earned degrees in Zoology and became a research biologist specializing in animal behavior. I absolutely loved the field work involved but hated the subsequent analyses of data, writing grant proposals, committee meetings, and the politics of the 'publish or perish' mindset of academia. Being a biologist was not the dream job I thought it would be. Basically, I just wanted to be Grizzly Adams living with my pet bear in a log cabin by a mountain lake. Instead, I was a 'high thinker' stuck in an ivory tower.

In 1986, I discovered a book by Freeman Patterson entitled "Photography of Natural Things." That book changed the course of my life. Inside were photographs of flowers, bugs, critters, forests, sunsets, and close-ups. Here was someone that wandered about the forest and meadow, snapping photos of things he loved – and he got paid! What a gig! I decided right then that I was going to be a nature photographer!

During the early days of my new 'career,' I just naively snapped photos of flower close-ups, the patterns of color on a lichen-encrusted rock, all the furry little critters I could find (mice, voles, chipmunks) and birds, lots of birds (bluebirds, wrens, woodpeckers, flycatchers). My 'business plan' was to shoot intimate little nature scenes that most people overlooked, and photograph the animals that most people knew little about or never even saw (like shrews, pocket gophers, or muskrats). After all, I never saw calendars or books filled with those kinds of pictures. Grand landscapes of famous national parks and images of nature's glamour species (bears, eagles, cougars, wolves) seemed to saturate the nature photography market. I was going to change all that....

Back then, I didn't realize that the reason I never saw 'intimate' nature photography published was that nobody was buying those kinds of photos! What the market demanded was iconic views of spectacular locations in dramatic and theatrical light. So I evolved into a nature photographer who could provide the market with exactly those kinds of 'saleable' images. Photos 1, 2, and 3 are examples of my commercial nature photography. In fact, Photo 1 is the March 2005 cover of Outdoor Photographer simply because it is high impact and attracts attention. For a good long time I found it hugely rewarding to come up with popular images that would satisfy and please the



Photo 5



Photo 6



Photo 7



Photo 8

photo buyers and resonate with the general public. And most importantly, they put food on my table! But over the last few years, shooting to 'please the market' has lost much of its luster for me. Sure I still like cashing the checks, but it felt like something was lacking... and that something was 'heart'. I had forgotten why it was that I got into photography in the first place. Lately, it was the "yeah, but will it sell?" mantra.

Over the last year or so, I have stopped focusing so much on the needs of the market and have returned to my roots, focused on my own interests and desires photographically. In doing so, I have come full circle, back to shooting more subtle, understated scenes, and intimate subjects. I now spend more time looking for little vignettes of nature that appeal to me and that excite my eye. And, as a result, the joy I first felt for photography has returned. These new images may not have a wide audience, and may never even be published but those things don't matter. What does matter is that I am pleased as punch with the new work I am doing and that it seems to fill the gnawing, empty void that my 'predictable' market-driven photography had created. In the end, the lesson I learned was that we should do photography only to please ourselves - not for the accolades or consumption of others. By doing so, we will produce work that is more from the heart, and that speaks with more personal expression.



Photo 9

A note about photos 4 through 9...

These images are some of my favorite photos from recent shoots. I am very fond of Photo 5 and was pleased when a designer selected this photo from thousands of my 'high impact – dramatic light' mountain photos as his personal favorite. It's wonderful to have a photo that really resonates with you on a personal level; but to have that same image connect in a meaningful way with another viewer is icing on the cake. I also really like Photo 8 – (it is better appreciated when viewed larger - [see here](#)) because it expresses so well my feelings for the countryside that surrounds my home in rural Alberta. Photo 4 was taken in the driveway in my yard, and this simple photo started me back on the path to 'intimate' nature photography because it excited me more than most of my grand landscape photos. Photos 6, 7 and 9 are explorations into 'seeing' in a new way (for me) that has long since been biased by the grand and dramatic view on nature. The best thing about these kinds of photos is that they can be done anywhere, anytime with any equipment. I am beginning to see a backlash to the 'same old, same old' iconic and predictable nature photography, photo buyers are more open to new styles and to more subtle subjects. Who knows, maybe returning to my roots will not only be good for my heart, but also for my pocketbook?

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About the author...

Darwin Wiggett and his wife Anita Dammer are the proprietors of Natural Moments Photography. Anita has 17 years experience as staff photographer for the Glenbow Museum in Calgary and is currently the editor-in-chief of [Photo Life](#) magazine. Darwin has been shooting stock since 1990, and has two books published by Whitecap in Vancouver; [Darwin Wiggett Photographs Canada](#) and [Seasons in the Rockies](#). Darwin's newest book, [How to Photograph the Canadian Rockies](#) will hit the shelves in the spring of 2005. Together they specialize in landscape, nature, animal, humor and kid photography and are represented by various stock agencies worldwide. Their primary stock agent is [First Light](#) in Toronto, Canada. You can view more of Darwin's work at www.darwinwiggett.com and on his [online portfolio](#).



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