

Nature Photographers

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Online Magazine

NPN Member Profile...



Gary Crabbe - NPN 872



I became a professional photographer by way of “accidental destiny”. If the truth were to be told, I’m forced to chalk the whole thing up to fairy dust.

It seems that my primary qualifications for becoming a photographer was working ten years as a cook, and one basic B&W Photo class; Photography 101. After finishing college, I was still working as a cook, but looking for a ‘real’ job. Let’s just say that after that much cooking, I was ready to do just about anything else.

Then, one day our Sunday paper had a classified ad for help running a small outdoor photo agency. I had no idea what that meant, but I backpacked, skied, fished, boated, etc.. Somehow I got called for an interview. It turned out the company was Mountain Light, and the photographer, Galen Rowell. Up to that point, I’d only seen two photography exhibits in my life, Galen’s Mountain Light, and Ansel Adams. I got the job. My favorite part of the story was how I asked for, and got, a raise on my first day at work. – But I’ll save that for another time.

Months later I asked Galen’s executive assistant what made them choose me. The only answer I ever got from her was, “There must have been fairy dust on your resume.” I found out much later that one of the primary considerations was when they realized I had absolutely no interest in becoming a photographer.

As it turns out, part of my job was to work the photo workshops that Galen offered. After being involved in several dozen workshops, I eventually realized I had become a photographer. It started with a Minolta x370, and continues today with a Nikon n90s. I’ve never worried much about needing the best equipment for my picture taking after reading a sign at our local pro camera store that read, “The best photographer can take an excellent image on bad equipment, but the best equipment can never make an excellent image if you’re a bad photographer.” That simple line summed up what it was all about; it’s about the image, it’s about the light, it’s about your understanding, and it’s about developing your vision.

For me, my passion has always been the landscape. I love feeling a personal connection to the grand cycles and evolution of our planet, and our place in the cosmos. As I see it, we sit inside a flowing river of time, like individual film frames stacked in a pile. Each frame is a moment in time. Personally, photography represents my own artistic ability to stop time, and pull a single, perfect frame out of the stack. It’s those ethereal moments when light, subject, form, and other elements combine themselves in a fleeting, yet timeless presentation that I consider the apex of the photography experience. I use my passion for the planet as my guiding



force, and my understanding of film, light, and equipment to be the compass that gets me to those wonderful moments of convergence.

Today, photography for me is as much about the hunt as it is about the final image. Without a passionate and intellectual quest for something to capture, there is much less chance of obtaining a personally expressive image. It is not enough for me to stumble on good images by taking the "happy accidents" approach to photography. Often, when I head to a location, I start with a goal; a single image in my mind. I then try to maximize every chance of realizing that goal on film by careful consideration and understanding of those elements I have at my control, i.e. camera, lenses, timing, and placement. When I arrive where I want to shoot, I immediately survey the surroundings and ask myself a series of questions: What's here that I like? Can I combine it with other elements here that I also like? Does adding or subtracting (any) element help or hurt the image? Many times, the composition speaks to me, calling my camera to a certain spot.

Even in those cases when everything adds up just right, I get an image on film that never really matches the picture in my mind. Rather, the image on film becomes a new, somehow different physical expression of an ideal (flashbacks to college philosophy class). And yet, when looking back later, I see the film image as a perfect representation of what I had in my mind. I still haven't figured out how, when, or why that transformation of thought occurs, but it does.

But in the end, I admit that my hunt boils down to one thing only; the search for great light. It's like those special moments, when beams of sunlight stream through broken clouds, and dance across a shadowed landscape. That's when I feel alive, and connected with the forces of nature. Each movement of the light brings to life a new moment, and the chance for a new photo. I just need to make sure I'm there, and ready with my camera.

Editor's Note - Click any of the thumbnail images on this page to view a slide show of larger images. You can view more of Gary's work on his website at www.enlightphoto.com.

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