



Better Days

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The seasonably unpredictable days of spring had arrived. Bare branches left frozen and raw for months, were slowly being adorned by a billowing tapestry of light green foliage. Flower bulbs lying dormant and forgotten just below the surface of the cold Earth, were gradually releasing their colorful offspring into the world.

Although the weather can sometimes be unpredictable, this annual spectacle of nature is not. My days of spring had become commonplace - almost routine. Each year, I photographed the usual daffodils, cherry blossoms and tulips. However, I would always bypass the tulip display at the World Trade Center on my way to work at the Deutsche Bank building across the street. The tulips decorated the planters in the plaza area between the towers. Being a nature photographer in an urban environment like New York City can be a challenge, especially if you don't own a car. However, I had learned to develop shooting around obstacles like streetlamps, traffic and buildings into quite an art form. People are often amazed to learn that some of my most stunning imagery was actually created in the heart of the Bronx or downtown Brooklyn.

Since avoiding man-made objects in my nature shots had always been a top priority of mine, I never considered the WTC tulips a worthwhile photo opportunity. I could never figure out how to shoot them artistically in such a confined area. Depending on the time of day, the plaza would be filled with venter carts, tourists taking pictures, workers hustling back and forth, or musicians performing for the lunchtime crowds - not exactly the prime backdrop for creative nature photography. The biggest obstacles were, of course, the towers themselves, which I viewed as "in the way."

For some reason, I had a change of heart in Spring of 2001. Succumbing to the "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" mentality, I decided to include the buildings in the shot. On a clear April morning, I shot a series of low-angle close-ups with a 16mm fisheye lens. The extremely wide view enabled me to capture the tulips and the towers with room to spare. A right-angle finder comfortably allowed for an even lower than normal perspective. A lens setting of f/22 brought the foreground and background into perfect focus. I've never found much use for the barrel distortion of this lens, but in this particular case, I felt it conveniently served as a bonus aesthetic element.



I learned a lot of things from the pictures I took on that cloudless day. As one of my first attempts at deliberately

combining natural and man-made objects, it's clear that the two don't always have to remain exclusive. Great images can be made by the skillful juxtaposition of these two worlds. Sadly, five months after this scene was captured, it was wiped away forever, along with the Deutsche Bank building where I used to work. That taught me to never to take things for granted - things I might even consider obtrusive. Perhaps my most sobering realization was that this was a time of innocence - a time when everything was right with the world. Those seemingly "routine" days of Spring '01 truly were better days.

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F.M. Kearney began his career as a photojournalist for a variety of local New York City newspapers. It was an exciting profession, allowing him to cover everything from famous celebrities and sports figures to ride-alongs with NYPD and FDNY. However, as he puts it, "you can only get so creative when shooting the news." It wasn't long before his focus shifted to capturing the beauty of our natural world.

As an award-winning nature photographer, his work is represented by a number of national and international stock agencies and has been published in numerous art-related books and magazines. To see more of Kearney's work, please visit www.starlitecollection.com.

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