

# PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

P.30 UP WHEN IT'S DOWN  
Slow Season Savvy

P.34 NIKON ZR  
Cinema You Can Afford

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Celebrating Nature Photography

# Celestial

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APRIL 2026

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# PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS OF AMERICA

**Director of Publications** Melanie Lasoff Levs, mlevs@ppa.com  
**Senior Editor** Joan Sherwood, jsherwood@ppa.com  
**Senior Editor** Amanda Arnold, aarnold@ppa.com  
**Art Director/Production Manager** Eryn March, emarch@ppa.com  
**Editor-at-Large** Jeff Kent, jkent@ppa.com  
**Contributing Editor** Ellis Vener

**Director of Sales & Strategic Alliances** Kalia Bonner, kbonner@ppa.com, (404) 522-8600 x248  
**Account Manager** Jasmine Butler, jbutler@ppa.com, (404) 522-8600 x215  
**Advertising Sales Specialist** Melat Tezera, mtezera@ppa.com, (404) 522-8600 x223

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### PPA MEMBER SERVICES

Professional Photographers of America, csc@ppa.com, ppa.com, (800) 786-6277

### EDITORIAL OFFICES

*Professional Photographer*, 229 Peachtree Street NE, Suite 2300, Atlanta, GA 30303-1608 U.S.A., (404) 522-8600

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# It's Not Personal

NEGATIVE CLIENT FEEDBACK CAN LEAD TO POSITIVE CHANGE

I don't recall exactly what got a PPA colleague and I started talking about reading online negative feedback about our work. But we both agreed it unfortunately happens, and it hurts. On top of the pain is an extra layer of anxiety when a disgruntled client goes after your business. Your first instinct might be to defend yourself (hopefully at least at first in your head): *This is not true! How dare they completely misinterpret what happened?* You might spend hours, or even days or weeks, agonizing over a harsh post and fretting over how it will impact sales and relationships.

What if, instead, you took a deep breath and asked yourself: *What did I do wrong?*

This is what a confidant asked Oahu, Hawaii-based family and portrait photographer Jennifer Okamoto after a dissatisfied client posted a rant about a session in a local Facebook group ("Owning Up and Moving On," page 26). She happens to be a friend of my PPA colleague, who casually shared part of her story with me. I thought Okamoto's experience would resonate, especially as more people take to social media to air grievances. How can one bounce back from distressing feedback and even turn it into a positive?

That's what Okamoto did. She shares with Editor-at-Large Jeff Kent that at first, she vented to other photographers and friends. She allowed reactive emotions, but only for a short time. Then, she asked for advice. That's when a colleague posed that seemingly simple question.

Okamoto paused and realized she could have handled that client session better. It wasn't personal; it was an opportunity to reflect on her current business processes and make some changes for the better. She seized that opportunity and shares her advice for other photographers who may find themselves in a similar situation. One of her tips: Own your mistakes. Of course your first instinct when reading a negative comment about your business would likely be, "Ouch." But wallowing in the dismay almost guarantees that whatever impact the initial issue might have won't be addressed and could become even more detrimental to your business. Take that breath and Okamoto's hard-earned advice, and hold onto your strength and confidence. A bad client experience then becomes a learning experience, not a soul-crushing one.

"Remember that we're all human; we're all flawed. But we're trying to do our best," Okamoto says. "When things don't go right, don't blame other people. Don't worry about them. Just look at yourself, figure out what you can improve, and move forward." •

Melanie Lasoff Levs  
Director of Publications



In the February issue on page 78, *Professional Photographer* misidentified Serena Dearman, CPP. At left is a photo of Dearman.

## BENEFIT FOCUS



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# FOREGROUND

By Amanda Arnold

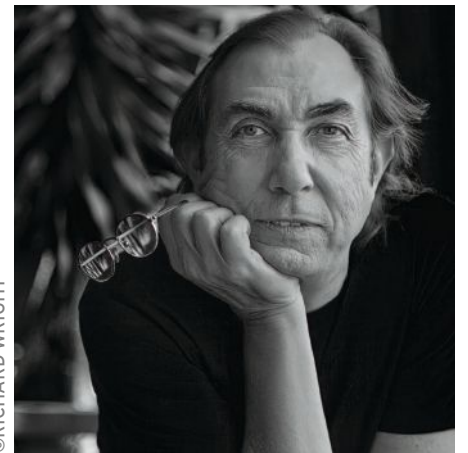
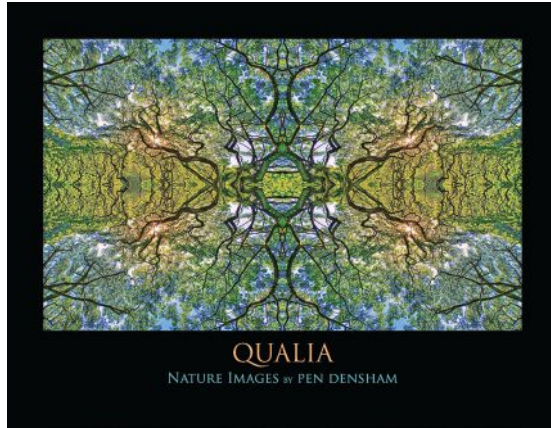
## Letting Go of the Rules

NATURE'S TAPESTRY



Oscar-nominated filmmaker and fine art photographer Pen Densham says he doesn't want to capture nature as it looks. He wants to capture nature as it *feels*. That's why he continually challenges conventional image-making techniques with results that often surprise him.

"I have an enormous body of experimental images on all kinds of nature subjects," says Densham, who uses a Sony Alpha 7R IV and is publishing a new photo book, "Qualia." "Trees, plants, streams, waves, water reflections of all kinds, fall leaves, koi, waterfalls, beach sand." He's sprayed mist from a hose to create rainbows over swimming koi; he's moved his hands during exposures to make plants dance; he's used super high ISOs with ND9 filters to emphasize grain and noise, and long exposures to reveal sculptural flows in streams. "Every image is a total experiment, but the results can be amazing." Though his work involves "a massive amount of discards," he notes, he's begun to return to them with fresh eyes. "When I tweak an image and it reaches some kind of Zen rightness, I choke up." •



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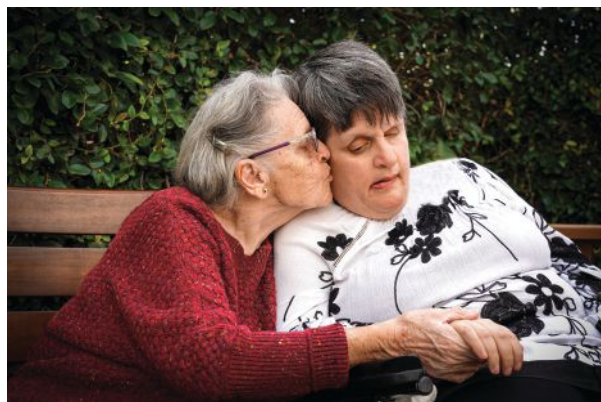
PEN DENSHAM

# Thoughtful Portrait Sessions

PHOTOGRAPHING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



IMAGES ©SCOTT GUTENTAG / scottgutentag.com



Parents of children with disabilities want respectful and memorable photos of their children to display at home, says Pasadena, California-based portrait and family photographer Scott Gutentag, but those portrait sessions can sometimes be stressful. Gutentag has spent over 30 years as a licensed educational psychologist working with patients with mild to severe intellectual disabilities, autism, sensory impairments, genetic syndromes, and other physical challenges. Today, he also specializes in photo sessions for a similar clientele. Here are some of his tips for photographing subjects with disabilities:

- **Prior to the session, learn about the subject's abilities.**

What might prevent them from understanding or talking? Are there any accessibility or mobility issues to be addressed? What about interests, aversions, and energy level? These factors can determine session location, structure, and ways to be creative during the photo session.



- **Include people during the session who know the subject best.** They will let you know if certain visual or auditory stimuli is overwhelming or if certain movements will not be comfortable for the subject.

- **Follow the subject's lead.** That includes following their lead on verbal communication, eye gaze, gestures, expressions, and body movements. "There won't always be direct eye contact or a smile," Gutentag says. Instead of giving only verbal directions, he may show subjects where to sit or stand, "gently guiding them through poses."

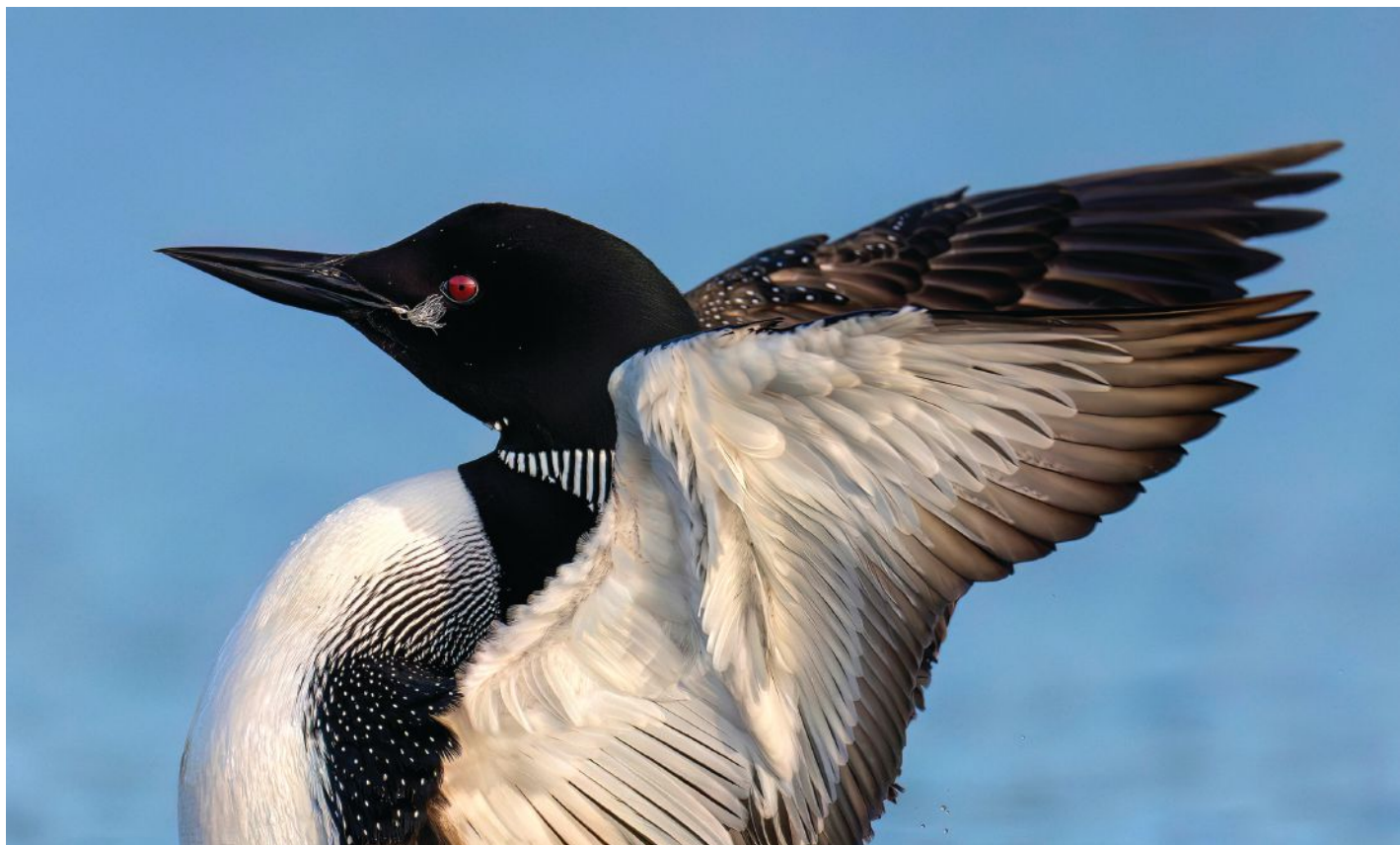
- **Take plenty of breaks.** Check in to see how the subject is feeling. Some might like a checklist to tick off as the session moves along. "Realize that the shoot may not go as long as expected, more breaks are needed, or only certain locations or places within a planned location will work best," he notes.

- **Use lighting that is mobile and can be arranged in different positions and angles quickly.** "I had one assistant put the light on his head to direct it well," Gutentag says. •



# Avian Action

A PHOTOJOURNALISTIC TAKE ON BIRDS



When COVID-19 shut down the world in 2020, veteran photojournalist Steve Jessmore spent that summer holed up in his cottage in northern Michigan, as his workload dwindled from 100-plus assignments in 2019 to just a handful. He says he spent about a month watching instructional photography videos online before his wife reminded him that every day was a gift and he was too talented to be idling. “Figure out what you always wanted to do and do it,” he says she told him.

Jessmore admits he was uncertain at first. Then, a client hired him to document the rising popularity of kayaking during the lockdown. He bought his own kayak, began exploring the marshes surrounding his cottage, and found a new calling: photographing birds.

Since then, Jessmore’s bird photography —



STEVE JESSMORE

©KEN KOLKER



which he's branded and trademarked as "Birds Doing Stuff"—has earned him four Audubon Photography Awards and spots in *National Audubon*, *Smithsonian*, and *Ducks Unlimited* magazines. What sets his images apart from what he calls "birds-on-a-stick" photography is his photojournalistic take. He captures action: birds diving, hunting, interacting, taking care of their families, making their homes. "I love storytelling and this became my goal," Jessmore says. "Having photographed pro sports and spot news as a photojournalist gave me the technical skills of working in poor light, changing conditions, and staying focused mentally."

His most important piece of equipment is not a camera, he says; it's his kayak, because it allows him to approach and observe his feathered subjects without disturbing them. "It's a window to a world I never knew," he adds.





Jessmore offers notes on how to capture the best photographs of birds:

**Be prepared for the weather.** Gloves, hats, warm waterproof boots, waterproof cover for both you and camera—have it all handy. He buys his clothing in camo patterns to match the environment and season, including winter white covers.

**As most birds are small, you need a lens with reach.** Jessmore upgraded from DSLRs and a 300mm f/2.8 lens to a Sony Alpha 1 II with a Sony FE 600mm F4 GM OSS lens. He starts his morning in the dark, as he prefers to shoot during sunrise hours, and the f/4 aperture is great for the early moments of light, he says. In his kayak, he also brings a second Sony camera, a Sony 1.4x teleconverter SEL14TC lens, a Sigma 20-200mm F3.5-6.3 DG lens with a polarizing filter, plus a dry bag for gear in case of rain. “I carry insurance for water damage in case anything happens,” he adds.

**Culling is paramount.** After time in the field, he takes a critical eye to his many images to narrow down the best. “You spent time out there; now spending time at the computer is key to realizing how successful your day was,” he says. “No one needs to see five images posted that are virtually the same.” •

## PERSONAL, MEET PROFESSIONAL

### LET WORLDS COLLIDE

Do you tend to separate your professional life from your personal life? If so, you're not alone. This “separate worlds” thinking is common, yet you might want to flip to “integrated worlds” thinking, advises Paul Ingram, professor of business at Columbia Business School, in *Harvard Business Review*. Draw a circle labeled “friends” and a circle labeled “professional network,” advises Ingram. What percentage of those relationships overlap? In his survey of 1,500 executives, Ingram found that the ones with more overlap in the two circles had bigger professional networks, higher career satisfaction, and higher incomes. “Why? Because friendship is the domain of social exchange, which is effective for the exchange of information,” Ingram writes.



## GOOD NEWS FOR YOUR BRAIN

### CREATIVES AGE WELL

Be thankful you've chosen a creative profession. A recent study on 1,200 healthy individuals shows that those who engaged in creative pursuits like visual arts, music, and dance had younger brains than noncreative participants. Dancers had the youngest brains of all, likely because dance combines creativity with physical activity, which is known to slow brain aging. The study, conducted by researchers at the Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez in Chile and Trinity College in Ireland, also shows that “those who were most expert in their respective creative areas saw the greatest brain benefit,” according to *Inc.* magazine. “And they found that connections within the brain that typically deteriorate with aging were stronger in creative types.”



# Photos Are Anchors

OUR WORK HAS PURPOSE

By Makayla Harris, Cr.Photog., CPP

©PHANEENDRA GUDAPATI



Early in my photography career, my motivation was simple: money. We had a new baby and a new mortgage, and if I wasn't going back to the corporate world, this business needed to work. And because I didn't have childcare, a high-volume model wasn't an option. I had to earn the most I could from the fewest clients possible.

So, while I worked relentlessly to improve my technical skills, I also searched for a business model that made sense for my life. I discovered the in-person sales (IPS) approach early on. Guided sales with printed artwork and albums for maximum profit? It felt like the missing piece. If I could create meaningful images my clients couldn't say no to, and guide them through a powerful experience, I could serve them well and build a sustainable business.

I became obsessed, not just with photography, but with the client experience and the psychology of sales. I studied how to communicate value, how to design products people would treasure, how to help clients see what their memories could become on their walls. It worked. Sometimes it worked so well I felt guilty. People were investing thousands of dollars and I'd think, *Is my work really worth that?*

Then something happened that changed everything.

Late one night, my husband and I drove to his family's lake house for a long weekend. The whole family was there, including his sister Nicole. That alone was special because she had struggled with addiction for years and hadn't often been present at family gatherings. But that weekend, she had been sober for six months, and we were all so happy to be together. At one point, in swimsuits and loungewear, we took a photo. The lighting was off. The composition was casual. It looked like

something you'd snap on a phone. But to us, it was everything. It was the first photo in years with everyone together. We printed it immediately and sent copies to the whole family. Nicole even shared it online with the caption, "My family gives me life."

Four days later, we got the call. She was gone.

Our kids were 2 and 4 at the time. That printed photo still hangs in our home. Because it's displayed where we see it every day, we're reminded constantly of that weekend, that joy, that togetherness. It keeps her present in our lives and gives us a way to share stories about her with our children.

That photo changed how I see my work.

So many photographers quietly question whether their images are "worth" what clients invest. But when we say that, what we're really saying is that someone else's memories, someone else's joy, someone else's legacy might not be worth it. And that isn't our call. Our job isn't to judge the value of a memory. Our job is to preserve it. To

elevate it. To make sure it lives somewhere more permanent than a phone screen or a forgotten hard drive.

Printed photographs aren't just products. They're anchors. They're proof that a moment existed, that people were loved, that a story mattered. I started this journey chasing income. I stayed because I discovered purpose. And if you've ever wondered whether what you do matters, I hope you remember this: Long after we're gone, the photographs we create may still be speaking for us. •

*Bonita Springs, Florida-based Makayla Harris is co-founder of The Harris Company, and founder/CEO of ASET: Album & Art Sales and the Printographers Society.*

OUR JOB ISN'T TO  
JUDGE THE VALUE OF  
A MEMORY. OUR JOB IS  
TO PRESERVE IT.

KEVIN DOOLEY

PHOTO  
VISION



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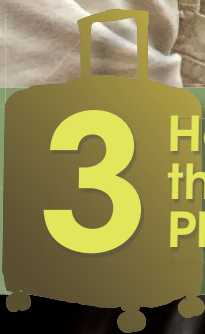
*Fuel* for Photographers

# FILL YOUR MIND WITH BEAUTIFUL THINGS

FROM **KEVIN DOOLEY**

Kevin Dooley, M.Photog.Cr., is an award-winning wildlife, portrait, and wedding photographer with a long-running photography studio in New Mexico. He's a published author, a certified field guide in South Africa, and the founder of Idube Photo Safaris, his tour company that takes photographers to some of the most unique corners of the world.

*"You get these dreams of photographs you want to capture. If you don't get it one day; you'll go to bed and dream that maybe tomorrow's the day it will happen. That keeps me highly motivated."*



## 3 Hacks for the Traveling Photographer

### 1. Arrive a day, if not two days early.

Catch the earliest flight, sleep off jet lag, and show up rested and alert when your journey begins.

### 2. Wheels are an absolute necessity.

Get a rolling duffel bag, they fit into tight luggage compartments across almost every mode of transportation.

### 3. Invest in an insulated water bottle with a sling.

Get a sling with a zip pocket to stash extra lens cloths, media cards, batteries, electrolytes, etc.

## HONE YOUR CRAFT THROUGH COMPETITION

Kevin has spent 10 years competing in PPA's International Photographic Competition (IPC) and represented Team USA at the World Photographic Cup five times. So, what keeps him coming back?

For Kevin, competition prevents burnout. In order to create images that have real impact, he has to make time for creative play and rest.

Beyond improving your technical skills, competition connects you with photographers who are stepping outside their comfort zone. Here, you'll find a community dedicated to growing creatively and sharing knowledge in service of the profession.

Get involved:  
[PPA.com/IPC](http://PPA.com/IPC)  
[WorldPhotographicCup.org](http://WorldPhotographicCup.org)

Kevin Dooley's image, "Among the Stripes" won Platinum in the 2026 IPC.



Explore the magical corners of Kevin Dooley's world, visit places that defy imagination, and dabble in new forms of creative play.  
[PPA.com/KevinDooleyTips](http://PPA.com/KevinDooleyTips)





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## Northern Lights Over Vestrahorn

**Peterson Pierre**

Travelens

Newberry Park, California

**PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE:** "This was my first trip to Iceland, and capturing the northern lights was at the top of my list," says Peterson Pierre. "This photo was taken on day five or six of the trip. Thank God we were at Vestrahorn that day. The lights showed up and formed a perfect rainbow over the mountain range, complete with a reflection in the water. ... I kept shooting away but the scene was simply too grand to fit in one frame, even with the widest wide-angle lens, so I decided to try a pano. When I stitched it together in Lightroom, I was blown away."

**CAMERA & LENS:** Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS II USM lens

**EXPOSURE:** 8 seconds at f/4, ISO 3200

**LIGHTING:** Natural light

**POST-CAPTURE:** Pierre used Adobe Lightroom to stitch a panoramic image together and make minor adjustments to exposure and contrast.

**OUR COVERS:** *Professional Photographer* staff chooses each month's cover image from the top 32 images across each category in the International Photographic Competition.



# Sequence

**J. Bradley Alan  
Faulkner**

Bradley Alan  
Marathon, Florida

**LOCATION:** Key West, Florida

**CAMERA & LENS:** Sony a7R III,  
Sony FE 24-70mm F2.8 GM lens  
with PolarPro Summit ND4-GR  
and ND64 filters

**EXPOSURE:** 68 seconds at f/14,  
ISO 320

**LIGHTING:** Natural light

**POST-CAPTURE:** In Adobe  
Camera Raw, J. Bradley  
Alan Faulkner made minor  
adjustments to blacks, shadows,  
highlights, and camera color  
calibration. In Photoshop,  
he cropped and removed  
distractions.

©BRADLEY ALAN / bradleyalan.art

**ABOUT THE IMAGING EXCELLENCE COLLECTION:** The Imaging Excellence Collection comprises photographs chosen by trained jurors as being the best of the best in PPA's Merit Image Review. The Imaging Excellence distinction is awarded to compositions that successfully address the 12 elements of a merit image. **NOTE:** Lighting diagrams shown here are not to scale. [ppa.com/mir](http://ppa.com/mir)



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## Doggie Diva

Cindy Strupp, M.Photog.M.Wed.Photog.M.Artist.Cr., CPP

Revelation Photography

Carlisle, Pennsylvania

**CAMERA & LENS:** Nikon D750, AF-S Nikkor 24-70mm f/2.8 lens

**EXPOSURE:** 1/160 second at f/8, ISO 320

**LIGHTING:** A Godox AD200 with round diffuser modifier, camera right

**POST-CAPTURE:** Cindy Strupp did basic edits in Adobe Lightroom and painted and edited the image further in Photoshop. Strupp was able to get one curler in the dog's hair during the session, but he wasn't happy about it. So, in post-production, she added additional curlers by duplicating and resizing/flipping the curlers, and when necessary, changing the lighting direction. She removed cords, wires, and bottles from the background and painted the entire image for consistency and color harmony.

# Golden Light of Autumn

Annette Stiers Jones

Annette Stiers Jones Photography

Seattle, Washington



©ANNETTE STIERS JONES / annestiersjonesphotography.com

**PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE:** "This location is one of my favorite areas within Mount Rainier National Park," says Annette Stiers Jones, "offering an incredible variety of compositions throughout the seasons. ... I set out on a beautiful autumn afternoon, guided by recent trip reports noting exceptional fall color in one of my favorite corners of the park. After a short hike to scout the area, I found myself standing in a glowing alpine meadow just as golden hour began to unfold."

**CAMERA & LENS:** Sony a7R V, Sony FE 16-35mm F2.8 GM lens

**EXPOSURE:** Exposure bracket at 1/13, 1/100, 1/125 second at f/14, ISO 100

**LIGHTING:** Natural light

**POST-CAPTURE:** She did basic tonal and color adjustments in the raw files in Adobe Lightroom. She then stacked and blended the bracketed exposures in Photoshop to retain highlight and shadow detail. Finally, she made some localized adjustments to color and tone, and applied a Gaussian blur.

## Add an Hour to Your Day

Last month, we “sprang forward” for Daylight Saving Time, but that doesn’t mean you can’t add that extra hour back. It’s all about being efficient and deliberate with your time, according to mindfulness coach and speaker Leo Babauta, founder of Zen Habits. On his website, he shares “25 Painless Ways to Free Up an Hour a Day for Your Goals.” Pick and choose from the list what works for your schedule. His tips include:

### Identify your priorities for the day.

Once you know exactly what needs to be accomplished on a particular day, do it first, which frees you up to do other things (or rest).

### Say no.

One major time-suck is handling all the requests we get all day from others: meetings, events, tasks. “No” is a complete sentence.

### Search, don’t file.

Instead of spending time hunting through intricate folder and file structures, use Find and Filter functions to find what you want more quickly.

### Delegate.

Can you farm out some tasks to software, an assistant, a friend or family member? If so, take advantage of that luxury.

### Go phone-free, at least for part of the day.

Turn off your phone for some blocks of time to focus on important tasks.



### Cut down on screen time.

You may be compelled to watch three episodes of a show at once, but you don’t have to. Same with online reading. Set a limit for what you’ll consume on screen, then get back to what’s more important.

### Start early so you can end early.

Wake up before everyone else and get going, so that you can finish what you have to do earlier in the day. Use the rest of your day for something you enjoy.

# Owning Up and Moving On

HOW JENNIFER OKAMOTO TURNED A NEGATIVE CLIENT EXPERIENCE INTO A POSITIVE

*By Jeff Kent*

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, things go south on a job. Bad reviews can ensue, and your professional reputation, not to mention your referral pipeline, can be thrown into jeopardy. How you react makes all the difference.

A few years ago, family and portrait photographer Jennifer Okamoto was running a “first birthday smash cake” portrait special at her studio in Mililani, on the island of O’ahu, Hawaii. The program was straightforward: Okamoto would conduct a portrait session with a one-year-old, who got to smash a birthday cake and generally have a blast. Okamoto provided the cake, balloons, a decorated set, and a safe environment in her home studio. Clients got to select the colors to semi-customize their experience. The promotion involved a \$75 session fee with an in-person sales appointment to select and purchase the images.

Prior to one of these sessions for a little girl, Okamoto learned that the cake she’d ordered from a

local bakery wasn’t going to be ready in time. Panicking a little, she rushed out, bought cake supplies, and made her own cake. “And it wasn’t great,” she recalls. “But I thought, the little girl is just going to smash it. It should be OK. However,

her pricing and scheduled the in-person ordering appointment.

When she came back for the ordering appointment, Okamoto recalls, “the mother was suddenly not happy with my pricing.” The mother was also stressed:

“I DIDN’T HAVE A SYSTEM WHERE EACH AND EVERY CLIENT WAS RECEIVING THE SAME HIGH-LEVEL EXPERIENCE. I REALIZED I NEEDED TO ADDRESS THAT SITUATION RIGHT AWAY.”

the cake pictured in the advertisement the mother had brought in was a really fancy cake, so that was ‘strike one’ on me in many ways. The expectations had not been met.”

She and the client moved past the cake disappointment and Okamoto captured some adorable images. “The mother said her daughter never smiled for photographs, but I got smiles. I got tender moments,” she recalls. “Everything was covered.” At the end of the session, Okamoto reviewed

Her husband was on active duty in the military and she hadn’t heard from him in a few days. He was supposed to join a Zoom call to look at the images, but he didn’t show up. “I like all the decision-makers at the sales appointment, but I made an exception in this case to be sympathetic to her situation and show her some compassion with how stressful her morning had been,” says Okamoto.

The client chose eight portraits that she wanted in a diamond photo box, and said she would be in touch to finalize the purchase. “By the end of that appointment,” Okamoto recalls, “she left really happy, really excited.”

A couple days later, Okamoto received a call from another photographer on the island who was part of a military wives Facebook group to let Okamoto know that she was getting trashed by an angry client. Okamoto was eventually able to see the post: It was the client from the recent smash cake session.



IMAGES ©JENNIFER OKAMOTO / jenniferokamoto.com

Okamoto was particularly distressed because her studio receives a lot of business from military families stationed on O'ahu. If that referral pipeline dried up, she thought, it could mean big problems for her business. She contacted photography colleagues and mentors, at first to vent, but then to ask for advice. Photographer, business coach, and a mentor from The Difference Maker Revolution, Steve Saporito asked her a pivotal question: "So, what did you do wrong?"

"I wasn't thinking about it that way," Okamoto admits. "I did know that the cake wasn't great, but I thought it was OK. But what else did I do wrong?" After pondering, she had a realization. "My discovery call could have gone into so much more depth. I could have made a better effort to really understand her, a mom in a tough situation, raising a baby for periods of time by herself while her husband is deployed, and the pressures that situation brings," she says. "I could have called her before the session and explained the situation with the cake and offered to reschedule."

Then Okamoto took a deeper look at her process and understood that she didn't have solid, repeatable systems in place. "I didn't have a system where each and every client was receiving the same high-level experience," she says. "I realized I needed to address that situation right away."

And she did. Today, Okamoto has a dialed-in system with multiple communications via text, email, and phone prior to the portrait session. She makes sure to talk to her clients, get them excited about their upcoming experience, and address any concerns ahead of time. She talks about



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pricing up front and during the session, and makes sure everyone is on the same page before she clicks the shutter. She's also augmented her on-site experience, creating a warm, welcoming atmosphere with a private area to bathe the babies after the cake smashing. She puts up a "Happy birthday" sign and a customized welcome sign with the baby's name on it. Two days before the session, and again the morning of the session, she sends clients a photo of her home studio with the address, to reduce stress and confusion. "The idea is to have a consistent flow so the experience is reliably high-quality, and every client gets an A+ experience, not just the lucky ones," she says.

The changes have helped Okamoto stabilize her business and re-earn the trust of the military families on the island. The impact on her business has been positive, with strong growth and supportive client feedback since she's implemented the updates. With her experience in mind, she offers advice to photographers who face—and all who want to avoid—negative reviews and publicity.

**Look inward.** If something goes awry, ask yourself, "What did I do wrong?" or "What could I have done better?" Own your missteps. Treat the incident as a learning opportunity rather than something unfair that is happening to you.

**Go deeper.** Try to understand the client's life, stressors, and emotional state. Ask deeper, emotionally focused questions. Explore the context and the relationships involved so you can deliver what truly matters to the client.

**Provide real value.** Value is about emotion, not just the photos. Deliver an experience that aligns with the needs, wants, and desires of your clients. The client will perceive the greatest value in how the session evolves and how attuned you are to them.

**Set clear expectations.** Let clients know up front what you will deliver, what the session will cost, and what they will receive. Get them excited but also establish realistic expectations.

**Standardize the experience.** Create a repeatable system that is consistent from one client to the next. This will help you set and manage expectations, and also make your business much more efficient.

**Communicate pricing clearly.** When it comes to pricing, people often hear what they want to hear. Be explicit, and don't leave room for interpretation. If something costs \$500, say it costs \$500. Then confirm the client's understanding.

**Accept that you can't please everyone.** Some people are just never going to be happy. If your best efforts to make a situation right aren't working, then accept that you're not going to change the person's mind and move on.

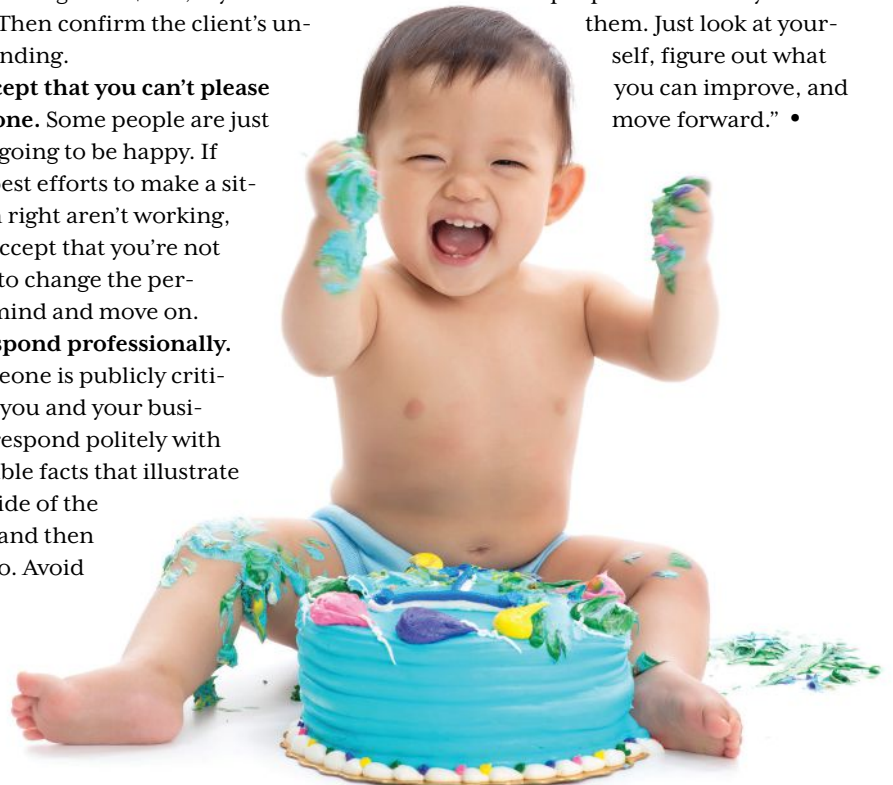
**Respond professionally.** If someone is publicly criticizing you and your business, respond politely with verifiable facts that illustrate your side of the issue, and then let it go. Avoid

an emotional back-and-forth that makes you look defensive and unprofessional.

**Refocus on your core clients.** Often, disputes happen when photographers try to stretch to meet the demands of someone who's not an ideal client. Take persistent complaints as a signal that it might be time to refocus on the clients who appreciate you and value your work.

**Use downturns to improve.** If you are made aware of negative comments or reviews about your business, use gaps in your schedule to fix processes and enhance your offerings so future clients have a better experience.

"The key takeaway is to have the strength and confidence to look inward and just remember that we're all human, we're all flawed," says Okamoto. "But we're trying to do our best. When things don't go right, don't blame other people. Don't worry about them. Just look at yourself, figure out what you can improve, and move forward." •



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# Succeed in Uncertainty

STEP OUT AND UP IN A SLOW SEASON

By *Melanie Lasoff Levs*



IMAGES ©SCOTT JOHNSON / theedgephotography.co.uk

episode “Ways Photographers Can Thrive During a Slow Season.” “They’re the ones that are struggling, and when they make a decision, they’re a lot more careful.”

Those decisions include when and how to spend their money on photography, which Johnson recalls learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. His wedding business had virtually dried up. So Johnson turned his camera on family and portrait subjects. It was a tricky transition that took almost two months to smooth out, he says.

“It was the biggest stress I think I ever had, Pat, because I can shoot, and I’ve shot a thousand weddings. I can do it with my eyes closed. Moving into family studio portraiture ... I was in no way versed in the marketing, the process, the lighting,” Johnson says, adding that though he invested in the equipment, “You’re dealing with families in a closed space. It was so far out of my comfort zone, you have no idea.”



SCOTT JOHNSON

## BE PATIENT

By stepping out of your comfort zone, you can not only survive during tough financial times but thrive, he explains. It takes patience to pivot, though. “I think photography and running a business is like raising a child,” Johnson says during the podcast. “The sooner you get into a routine, with financial

practices, working practices, the easier it all becomes.” After being a professional photographer for 23 years, he was stuck in his ways, he adds. “I like the way I do

Economic uncertainty is not just an American experience. Scott Johnson, an award-winning wedding photographer based 30 miles north of London, says his clients and fellow photographers in England and the UK are feeling it too. “It’s that middle market, the people that are working 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, that may be living paycheck to paycheck,” he tells “Professional Photographer” podcast host Pat Miller on the



Get more insights from the “Professional Photographer” podcast at: [ppa.com/podcast](http://ppa.com/podcast)



things, so trying to do things differently was very hard to try to get my head around at the start,” he says, including marketing and in-person client meetings. “But I knew that if I didn’t do it, we were going to be in big trouble.”

How can a photographer know that “trouble” is potentially coming? Both Miller and Johnson cite some red flags:

- A drop in number of clients
- Fewer dollars spent by them
- Fewer inquiries, and
- Fewer assignments on the calendar.

In the fall of 2024, Johnson says he checked his calendar for 2025 dates. “I thought, *Huh, OK, something’s different now. Something’s wrong.* The inquiries were almost non-existent,” he says. He also noticed that when he replied to inquiries with his price structure, he was typically ghosted. “People were just now ... throwing a fishing net, trying to get the

cheapest possible price and going with that one, rather than picking someone like myself that charges more than the average photographer.”

Johnson has built a successful portrait business by relying on his reputation and by reaching out to years’ worth of previous wedding clients. “Through COVID, I learned to only focus on the things that I can control and not worry so much about the things that I can’t,” like the financial markets, he says. Instead, he adds, he rethought his market and he hustled, “and it’s been going really, really well.”

#### CHANGE UP YOUR MARKETING

As he ramped up his portrait and family photography business, Johnson diversified his marketing strategy. He added a new Instagram account with a variation on his wedding photography name, so current and potential clients knew they

were connected. He kept the same branding and the same logo but with a different background, he explains. “So, people knew it was me but [would wonder] *Oh, what’s that?* You’re tweaking people’s curiosity by associating the brand logo with something that’s just a little bit different.” He also leaned heavily on Reels rather than posting just one image at a time. “You’ve got to be visual, you’ve got to be doing behind-the-scenes [videos], you’ve got to be doing so much more—which again is a little bit out of my comfort zone—to become more relevant, because people want to see me in action working,” Johnson says. “They just don’t want to see the one hero shot anymore.”

Johnson says he has a love-hate relationship with social media, which he has used since 2008. The bottom line: It is invaluable. “From a business point of view, as an image maker, it’s essential



“I LIKE THE WAY I DO THINGS, SO TRYING TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY WAS VERY HARD TO TRY TO GET MY HEAD AROUND AT THE START. BUT I KNEW THAT IF I DIDN'T DO IT, WE WERE GOING TO BE IN BIG TROUBLE.”

because if you're not on social media now, you're not anywhere,” he says. In fact, social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook are today the first places potential clients look for photographers, versus a website, he explains. “So, if you're not on it, it's almost career suicide.” Social media advertising, still tied heavily to his wedding brand, is also crucial. Johnson has “a very healthy budget that we throw at it,” he explains, “and we get a lot of traction out of it.” An average campaign is about \$600 to \$700 per month, which leads to 60,000 to 70,000 impressions across social media channels

for that month, he says. It took about four advertising cycles to get the algorithm right, but now he is careful to advertise to people who realistically would book his services—not someone, for example, 200 miles away. “I want people within a 60-mile radius that are actually going to commit and turn up,” he says. “So, it's about how you [advertise] and cast a wide net, but don't be silly about it.”

Another shift Johnson has made during economic uncertainty is focusing more on in-person sales. As a wedding photographer, all client interactions (other than the event) were remote, he

says: sending the couple their gallery, designing the album, emailing a proof. The client only came in to choose colors for their album. With portrait and family photography, Johnson books the in-person viewing appointment before the client leaves their session. When they return a few weeks later, they review their images on a giant projector with surround-sound music, “and we sell,” Johnson says, adding that a client recently spent \$2,000. “The system works. You just have to trust the system,” he says. “You're not going to get that kind of sale every single day. You have to kind of work to

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the average sale. Don't work to the big sale. What is your average? That's what you need to work towards. The big ones are going to come in [and] the small ones will be there. But as long as your average is progressively going up, that's what you work towards."

## HELP YOUR CLIENTS, HELP YOURSELF

Johnson offers clients an informal payment plan, as long as they pay the full amount over three months. He does not deliver the product until it's paid in full, but that offers clients a respite, he says. His portrait sales average around \$700, "which is pretty good, especially given the climate at the minute," he explains. "To us, it's a good sale, it's a big sale," Johnson says, "but to them, it's a smaller overall spend." Rather than spending \$70,000 on a wedding, they're spending 1% of that on a session.

Help cull your own spending by going through your finances: Are you using every subscription? Must you pay for an annual subscription on a product or service that you haven't used in six months, or only used once or twice? Log in to cancel it and let the subscription run out, Johnson advises. Miller adds a tip: "If you're buying a product that's powered by AI, never buy the annual ever," he says. "Six months from now, there will be three or four other things that are doing what that one product does, and you'll regret buying the annual."

A key for both clients and small business owners is to recognize that the economy is a cycle. There are highs and lows, and having plans in place to change your business specialty or model for a time can ensure you ride out the lows. Johnson compares success during economic struggles to surfing. "You miss [a wave], you crash out, you get the next wave," he says, "and you ride that as long as you can and you do as well as you can." •

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# Cinema for the People

NIKON ZR

*By Tyler Rickenbach*



COURTESY NIKON

Wilbur Wright didn't invent flight in a lab. He first noticed it in the world. A bird banks into the wind, holds itself there, then drops and recovers as if gravity is negotiable.

That kind of observation is a human thing: not just seeing but making a connection from what we see to what could be possible. The invention of the airplane wasn't only a breakthrough in engineering. It was also about paying attention. We're in an era where creation is being redefined by automation and artificial intelligence. But AI can't replace the raw human act of being present, watching light shift across a face and seeing intention become reality.

This is why the Nikon ZR matters. Not only because of what it records, but because of what it enables: a cinema-grade workflow in a body small enough to follow real life instead of stage it.

In September 2025, Canon dropped the EOS C50, a compact full-frame cinema body built around internal 7K Cinema RAW recording capability and positioned directly at the small-crew market.

Then Nikon answered—almost immediately—with the ZR: a full-frame, pocketable cinema camera, co-developed with RED, priced at \$2,199, aimed at the creators who want real cinema files without having to build a larger rig. This shift is driven by the need for human connection. The 2026 Commercial Filmmaking Trend Report by Musicbed advises creators to “keep it human.” “The audience you're trying to reach is human. They respond to human stories, human faces, and human emotion,” the report states.

“No matter how sophisticated your tools become, that fundamental truth doesn’t change.”

When I asked Mark Cruz, the senior manager of product DCIL for Nikon, what gap Nikon was aiming to fill with the ZR, he said, “With the combined strengths of Nikon and RED technologies, the Nikon ZR was designed as a handheld cinema camera that delivers professional-level results and features at an accessible price point.” Cruz touted its performance and versatility, citing features like 6K/60p recording paired with the new R3D NE RAW video format and RED color science, with 15+ stops of dynamic range and precise color matching. The ZR has a 4-inch DCI-P3 LCD screen, advanced 32-bit float and OZO audio, and up to 7.5 stops of in-body image stabilization. “The introduction of the ZR reinforces Nikon’s commitment to providing innovative tools that empower filmmakers to elevate their videography skills across all levels of experience, fields, styles, and scenarios,” Cruz added.

But the Nikon ZR isn’t just a spec sheet. It’s Nikon enabling creators to work with less friction, a smaller footprint, and a workflow that keeps you in the moment while delivering a cinema-grade file.



IMAGES © TYLER RICKENBACH / tylerickenbach.com

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The Nikon ZR is technically a cinema camera: It records RED-based RAW, offers a staggering range of resolutions and codecs, and sits comfortably in a professional workflow. And yet, it doesn’t behave like a cinema camera. It doesn’t demand slow, deliberate pushes or perfectly motivated movement. In fact, when I tried to treat it like a traditional cinema

body with subtle slides, intentional parallax, and controlled lateral motion, it felt forced. Instead, what I realized in those first few moments is the ZR is Nikon’s response to a noisy world, a silent witness to what’s unfolding. In a world where algorithms push fast cuts and viral content, the ZR asks us to slow down and focus on what matters most: what’s happening right in front of us.

NIKON ZR	CANON EOS C50	SONY ILME-FX3A
6K up to 60fps internal RAW (RED R3D NE) 4K up to 120fps; 12-bit RAW + 10-bit options 5-axis IBIS ~7-stops, 15+ stops dynamic range 32-bit float audio built-in Very compact body (630g)	Up to 7K 60fps + open gate capture (12-Bit Cinema RAW) 4K up to 120fps; 2K up to 180fps Dual Pixel CMOS AF II, dual base ISO Active cooling for unlimited record times	Reliable 4K up to 120fps (10-bit) Excellent low-light range (ISO up to 409,600) IBIS + professional accessory support (XLR handle) Proven workflow and broad industry adoption
<b>Price: \$2,199</b>	<b>Price: \$3,899</b>	<b>Price: \$4,299</b>



Large cinema cameras announce themselves. They carry weight, physically and psychologically. When you bring a RED body into a space, people feel it. You expect the discipline, the locked-off frames, the calculated movement. With the ZR, those expectations dissolve. Handheld jitters don't feel like mistakes; they feel human. Small adjustments feel natural, not sloppy.

The Nikon ZR is a camera that happens to be capable of cinema-grade images without demanding cinema-grade behavior. It's about presence and about standing close enough to life that you can feel its movement. Nikon reinforces that philosophy by refusing to limit the creator. The ZR doesn't force you into a single "correct" way to shoot. It gives you a spectrum: full HD, 4K, 6K, and a full buffet of codecs, from 8-bit and 10-bit options to

ProRes, Nikon RAW, and RED R3D. It's rare to see a manufacturer open the floodgates this wide, and it's worth acknowledging that Nikon trusts its users to choose what makes sense for their story.

That said, the ZR isn't without friction, and some of it feels oddly out of character.

#### WORTH NOTING

When you switch the ZR to RED Raw recording, the camera's system shifts most of its processing power toward handling that raw data. As a result, features like focus peaking and certain autofocus modes don't respond as they do in standard video modes. Both early users and Nikon itself note this current limitation, though it could change with updates.

The microphone jack placement makes full screen articulation awkward with a hot-shoe mic attached, meaning

you can't fully articulate the screen without hitting the mic cord.

When switching between photo and video modes, the camera settings remain the same. For example, if I were filming in manual mode at 6K in Nikon Raw at 50fps, when I switch to stills the shutter speed will be 1/100 second and it will still be in manual mode. It takes an additional step to take stills in aperture priority, which I prefer, and to change the shutter speed and ISO. For some, this may not be a huge deal, but I quickly realized while flying around the Tetons (right) that I lost some opportunities for image capture when I needed those additional seconds to switch settings.

I love what the Nikon ZR offers on the video side and would buy it for the video aspect, but back on the ground, the photographer in me yearned for a viewfinder whenever the camera was in photo mode.

Those are real limitations, and they matter, but it doesn't ruin the camera.

## FIELD TEST

We were up at 5:15 a.m. at a friend's small farm feeding the cows, and preparing bottles for the goats, grain for the chickens, and hay for the horses. I'd been there before, but this time I brought only the ZR and a Nikon Z 35mm f/1.8 S Lens, and instead of directing anything, I just watched moments unfold. The 4-inch screen is beautiful and unobtrusive. The body is quiet. The size feels intentional. When you're documenting people's lives, the camera doesn't interfere with the moment. It preserves it.

The real test came in the air. We flew with three planes to the backside of the Tetons. The goal was simple on paper but unforgiving in practice: Capture scale, movement, and proximity, all from inside a small aircraft, where every inch of



See additional images and video taken with the Nikon ZR at [ppa.com/nikon-zr](https://ppa.com/nikon-zr)



space and every ounce of weight matters. I used only the Nikon ZR with a Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S II for image capture and a GoPro mounted on the hot shoe mount for behind-the-scenes context. In a tiny airplane cabin, switching camera bodies isn't feasible. There is no room and very little margin for error.

And this is where the ZR surprised me again.

Despite my earlier insistence that I wouldn't buy this camera for stills, this is where the ability to use the same compact body for video and photos became essential. I could capture a sequence of stills, then seconds later roll 12-bit raw video—Nikon Raw at 6K—as planes crossed in front of the Tetons. Everything meaningful I experienced in that cockpit

passed through this one camera in two reliable formats.

We took off with the battery around 80%. After nearly two hours in the air—capturing roughly 2,500 files across photo and video, much of it in high-bit-depth raw—we landed with just enough power left to capture the hangar closing for the night (above), all without overheating. Cold temps are also a factor in battery charge.

#### WHY NOW

We're saturated by notifications, constant communication, and tools that demand more input than they return. In response, creators are gravitating toward simplicity. In other words, they want tools that remove friction rather than add it. The Nikon ZR feels like a

deliberate response to that.

"The Nikon ZR is designed for content professionals, emerging cinematographers, and experienced filmmakers seeking a cinema camera that balances efficiency, creative expression, and industry-standard workflows," Cruz told me. "With the ZR, filmmakers of all levels can bring their vision to life while growing into more ambitious filmmaking."

By stripping away intimidation while retaining cinema-grade capability, Nikon has created a camera that encourages presence. And presence, in the end, is what allows us to see clearly and to capture what matters. •

*Tyler Rickenbach is a filmmaker and photographer based in Idaho.*

# Reportage Readiness

PHOTOGRAPHING IN CONFLICT AND DISASTER ZONES

By *Mark Edward Harris*

Conflicts and natural disasters are, for the foreseeable future, unfortunate realities. Knowing how to navigate in potentially dangerous environments means not only making photographs that convey the gravity of the situation, but more important, getting out alive. If you are compelled to dip into photojournalism and reportage, you will want to be prepared.

## 1. Have (or obtain) the proper credentials.

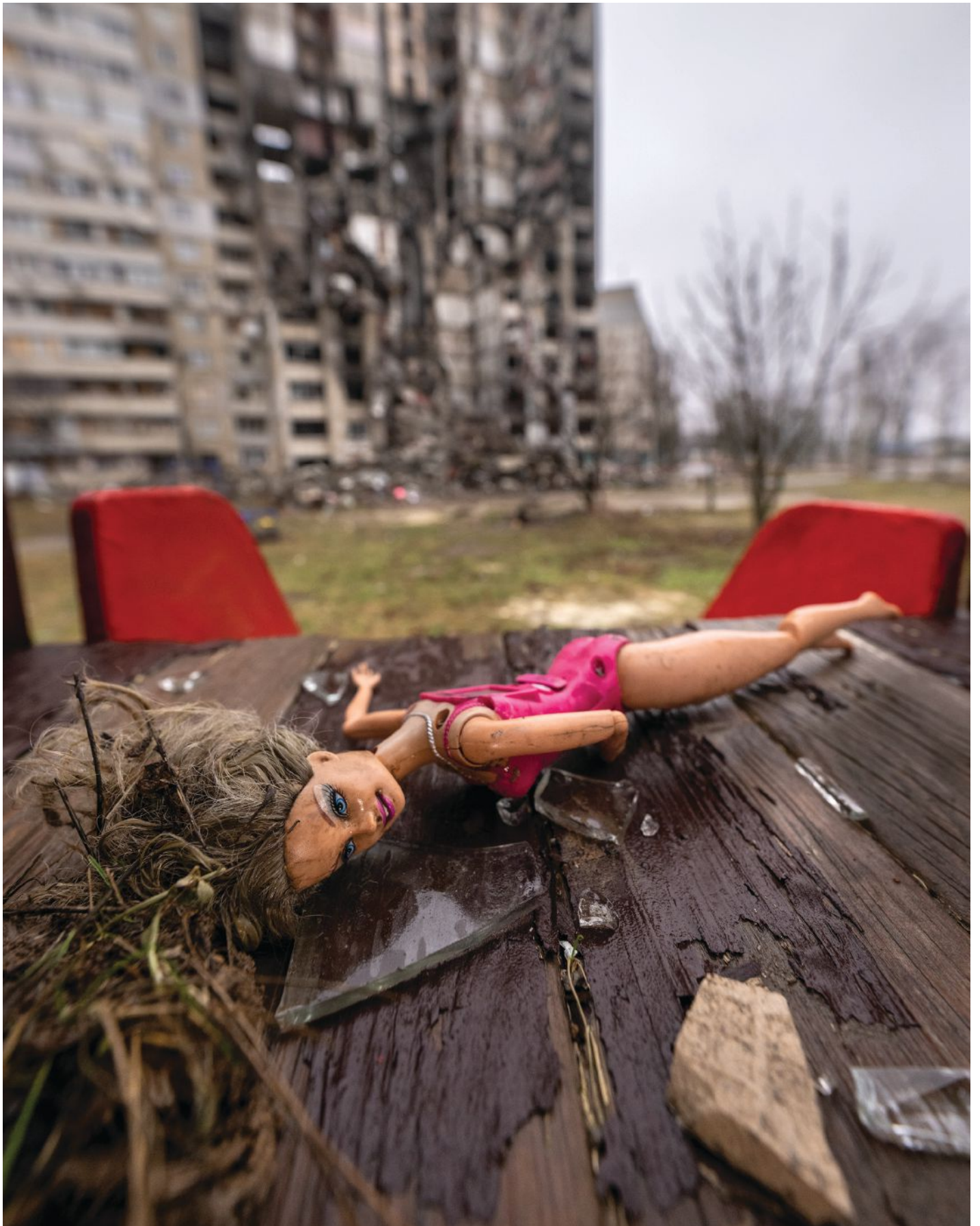
If a fire happens in a building or on your street and you capture images of it, you've practiced reportage photography. You can start a relationship with a local news organization by photographing news in your community. Contact a local news outlet to see if they will pay for or at least give you credit for showing your photos. However, if you want to visit an area of war or conflict, or that has been impacted by a natural disaster, you will need press or media credentials to enter otherwise prohibited areas. To obtain those credentials, you'll need proof you are a photojournalist, which includes a formal assignment from a news outlet such as a newspaper or online news service.

Since I am based in Los Angeles, I have an LAPD-issued credential that allows me to cross police and fire lines. While I can show it in other cities and countries, I take the chance that officials there might not recognize it as valid. I also frequently photograph for an online news agency and have credentials for those assignments. For a recent project photographing war refugees in Ukraine, the country required further documentation. I filled out the online paperwork, digitally submitted the requested documents (including



Los Angeles, California, June 2025

IMAGES ©MARK EDWARD HARRIS / markedwardharris.com



Kharkiv, Ukraine, December 2022



Mark Edward Harris in Vovchansk, a city in Kharkiv Oblast, Ukraine

my passport photo page, a passport photo, and a news agency assignment letter), and received my credential in about a week. Without it, my movements near the frontlines would have been highly restricted or completely denied. When in those dangerous areas, it's important to play by the rules. If anyone in charge asks to see your credentials, show them. It's for your safety as well as everyone else's.

## 2. Download relevant apps.

In some situations, apps are useful in conflict and disaster zones. For example, an air raid alert app in Ukraine shared advance warnings of missile and drone attacks. Through the app, I could choose the city or region I was in to receive localized warnings. No need to be alerted to an attack on Kyiv when I was working in Dnipro. Closer to home, the wildfire tracking app Watch Duty was my constant companion while covering the devastating Southern California wildfires in January 2025.

## 3. Dress appropriately.

What you wear can at times be lifesaving. Many photographers who cover protests carry gas masks and helmets. Body



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Palisades Fire, Los Angeles County, January 2025

armor for conflict zones, fire-retardant clothing that meets National Fire Protection Association standards for covering infernos, and a hazmat suit for toxic environments all have their places in the reportage arena. The only time I donned a hazmat suit was when I was working near the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant covering the aftermath of the devastating March 11, 2011 tsunami on the northeastern coast of Japan. For that assignment, I also took potassium iodide tablets to protect my thyroid gland from absorbing radioactive iodine.

Gloves, such as those made by The Heat Company, can be helpful in frigid conditions. Their heat layer system

combines a selection of inner liner gloves with a shell mitten. During pauses in your photography, you can use its polar hood pullover mitten. Because I did not have the proper gloves, I suffered frostbite while covering skiing at the 2022 Winter Olympics in China, an experience I don't want to repeat. The Heat Company also makes insole foot warmers that work for up to eight hours.

For both my documentary and travel assignment work, I often wear Clothing Arts Pick-Pocket Proof Convertible Travel Pants with 11 multi-secure pockets. Travelers in war and peace can be targets for pickpockets. Even without the fear of sticky fingers, it is easy to lose important

items in unsecured pockets. The extra pockets are also great to have for small camera accessories.

#### 4. Bring the right gear.

In terms of photographic equipment, nimbleness is key. To cover the ICE protest that turned violent in Los Angeles in June 2025, I opted to shed my camera backpack and carry a Nikon Z 8 with a Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 and a Nikon Z 9 with a Nikkor Z 14-24mm f/2.8 over my shoulders. Around my waist I had a Think Tank PressPass Sling Bag (which can also be used in a sling position) with a Nikkor Z 80-200mm f/2.8 in its main compartment, with extra batteries and a cleaning



The town of Ōtsuchi in the Iwate Prefecture, Japan, April 2011

cloth in the front pocket. I use Delkin Black series cards for their dependability, and the 1.4 TB card can record more than 92,500 48-megapixel resolution files, so I only need to carry a couple at a time.

On the road, I'll transport my equipment in a Think Tank Walker Pro Rolling Backpack, Think Tank Airport Security, Think Tank Airport Advantage XT, or a MindShift FirstLight 40L Backpack and leave the bag in the hotel before going into the field. For the recent Ukraine trip near the front lines of the conflict with Russia, I brought a Westcott 20" Collapsible 5-in-1 reflector and a demure but powerful amaran Ace 25x Bi-Color LED Light Panel. The light panel's color tem-

perature range of 2,300K-6,500K allowed me to fine tune color temperatures to match the ambient light. In photojournalism, you are not allowed to make significant color corrections in post, especially to just sections of an image.

##### 5. Check your mindset.

When covering volatile situations, I try to maintain a constant awareness of the environment and sensitivity to those inhabiting it. People in conflict and disaster conditions are often experiencing powerful emotions, and a photographer must decide how to interact with the subjects they encounter. I prefer the Humanist social documentary approach to pho-

tography that emerged in the mid-20th century after the upheaval of two world wars. This philosophy focuses more on the broad human experience than on a specific news event. At the same time, I agree with Robert Capa's statement: "If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough." I think the two can coexist. W. Gene Smith's powerful photo essays including "Spanish Village," "Country Doctor," and "Minamata," as well as his World War II coverage in the Pacific, serve as classic examples that I try to emulate. •

*Mark Edward Harris is an award-winning photographer and writer based in Los Angeles.*

BY ALLISON SHIRREFFS

# DEVELOPING A VISION

ANDRES CASALLAS FORGED HIS WAY BY EXPERIMENTING





**A**ndres Casallas, M.Photog., likes to keep things interesting. After graduating from Full Sail University with a degree in film, Casallas took a job as a video editor in Orlando, Florida. But going to the same office day after day “got repetitive,” Casallas says, so he picked up his camera and began capturing images of his soccer and jiu-jitsu teammates. Before long, people were hiring him for photography gigs. “I started seeing myself more as a photographer than a videographer,” Casallas says.

Casallas started photographing weddings on weekends while still editing video during the week. Over time, he built a successful wedding business but became burned out by the genre. He wanted creative control and to work in a more collaborative environment. “On a wedding day, you’re reacting a lot and dealing with people you can’t control a lot of the time,” he explains.







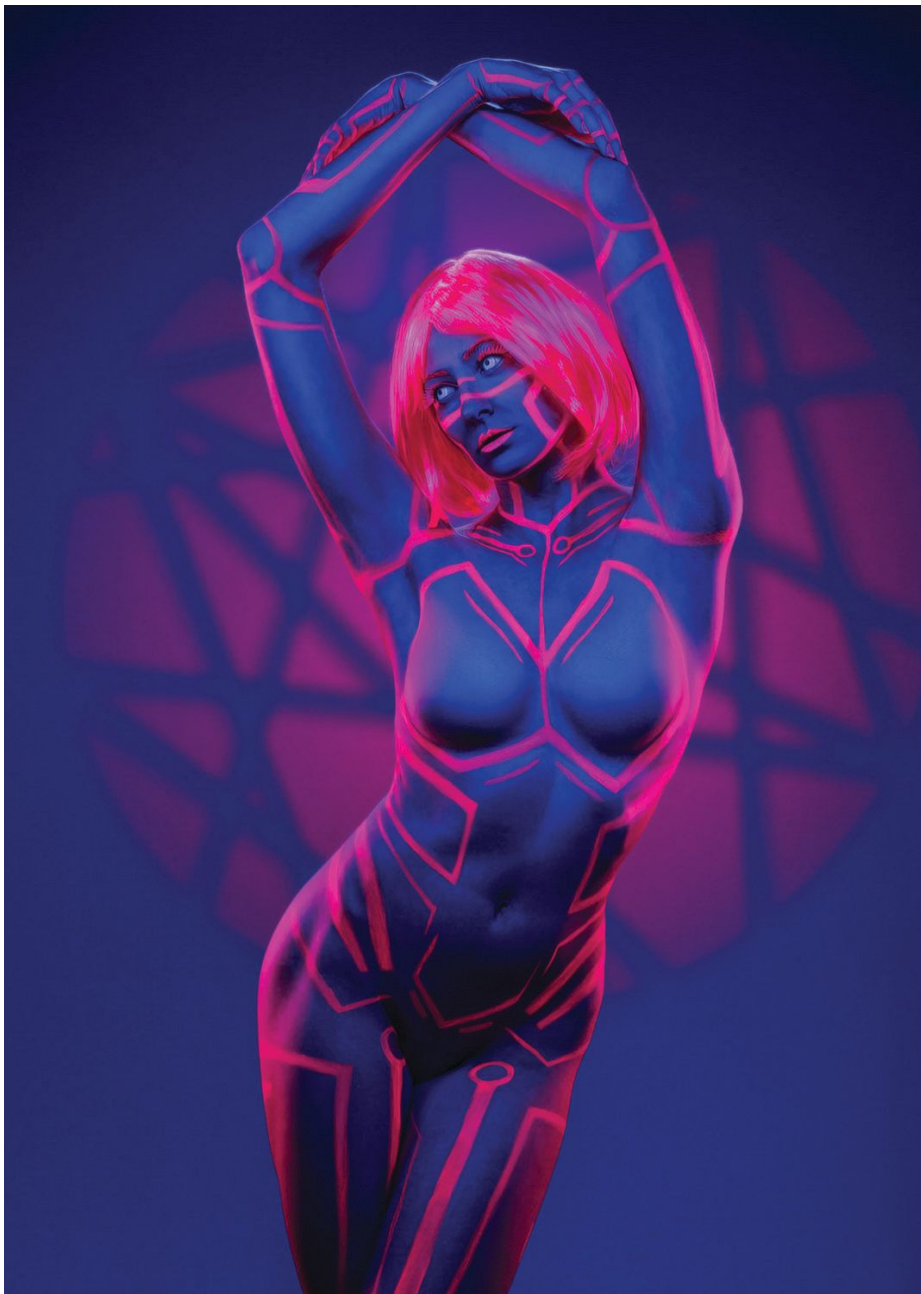
The commercial jobs Casallas had booked with beauty, fashion, and lifestyle brands felt like a better fit. “When you’re working for a company, you’re helping them develop a vision,” he says.

Through their Ocala, Florida-based business Art by Light Photography, Casallas and Tabitha Hayden, his creative and life partner, provide “intentional, people-driven visuals for brands and individuals who care about how they’re seen,” according to the website. Creating such visuals requires understanding the brand or individual’s identity, the message the client wants to communicate, and

how their photos will fit into that plan, he explains. He and Hayden work to answer those questions through pre-production research and consultation. For example, Casallas and Hayden in fall 2024 worked with three Spinning Center gyms in Bogota, Colombia, whose owners wanted to convey that their brand was a haven for community. Casallas and Hayden made photos of individuals taking part in activities, with descriptive signage in the background such as “Come Run with Us” with someone on a treadmill (left) and “Come Dance with Us” accompanying someone dancing.

“The goal was to balance strong individual moments with visible group energy,” Casallas explains, “so the visuals would communicate both performance and belonging.”

When Casallas and Hayden travel, they don’t let an interesting background go to waste. After the pair finished their work with the gym client in Colombia, the two traveled to Cartagena. There, they found a red dress in a shop and thought it would look great against the backdrop of Castillo San Felipe de Barajas, a centuries-old fortress in the city (above). Once on site, Hayden changed into the dress, put on heels,



and Casallas photographed her in various spots around the fortress. “We made the day out of it,” he recalls. “It’s something that’s always been part of our relationship, just doing photo shoots. It’s something that I think we’re going to do until we can’t anymore.”

### FUN WITH LIGHTING

When it comes to communicating a narrative, one of the most important tools in Casallas’ photography toolkit is lighting. “It’s a really, really important part of my vision,” he says. Photographing weddings helped him hone his ability to balance ambient and artificial light. He and Hayden, a model and makeup artist, also pursue personal projects to push them creatively. “I take the lessons from my personal shoots and apply them to my commercial shoots,” Casallas says. One of his favorite photos was inspired by the art of kintsugi, the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with lacquer dusted with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. To mimic the look (right), Hayden applied makeup to her face and torso. For the background light, Casallas used a 6-foot umbrella with diffusion and a blue gel. He blew out the background while keeping the blue coming through. “That backlight helps outline the crown and adds blue tone into the shadows,” explains Casallas. “I also used an optical snoot to light her face while keeping the shadows cool and blue.”

A photo that Casallas entered into PPA’s 2026 International Photographic Competition came about because Hayden wanted to experiment with neon body paint (left). Rather than use a black light during the making of the image, which would have given the skin “this ugly color,” explains Casallas, he used four UV lights to activate the paint and added a constant RGB light with blue light to control the skin tone while keeping the UV effect. He placed two magenta strip lights on each side of Hayden’s body “to push the glowing



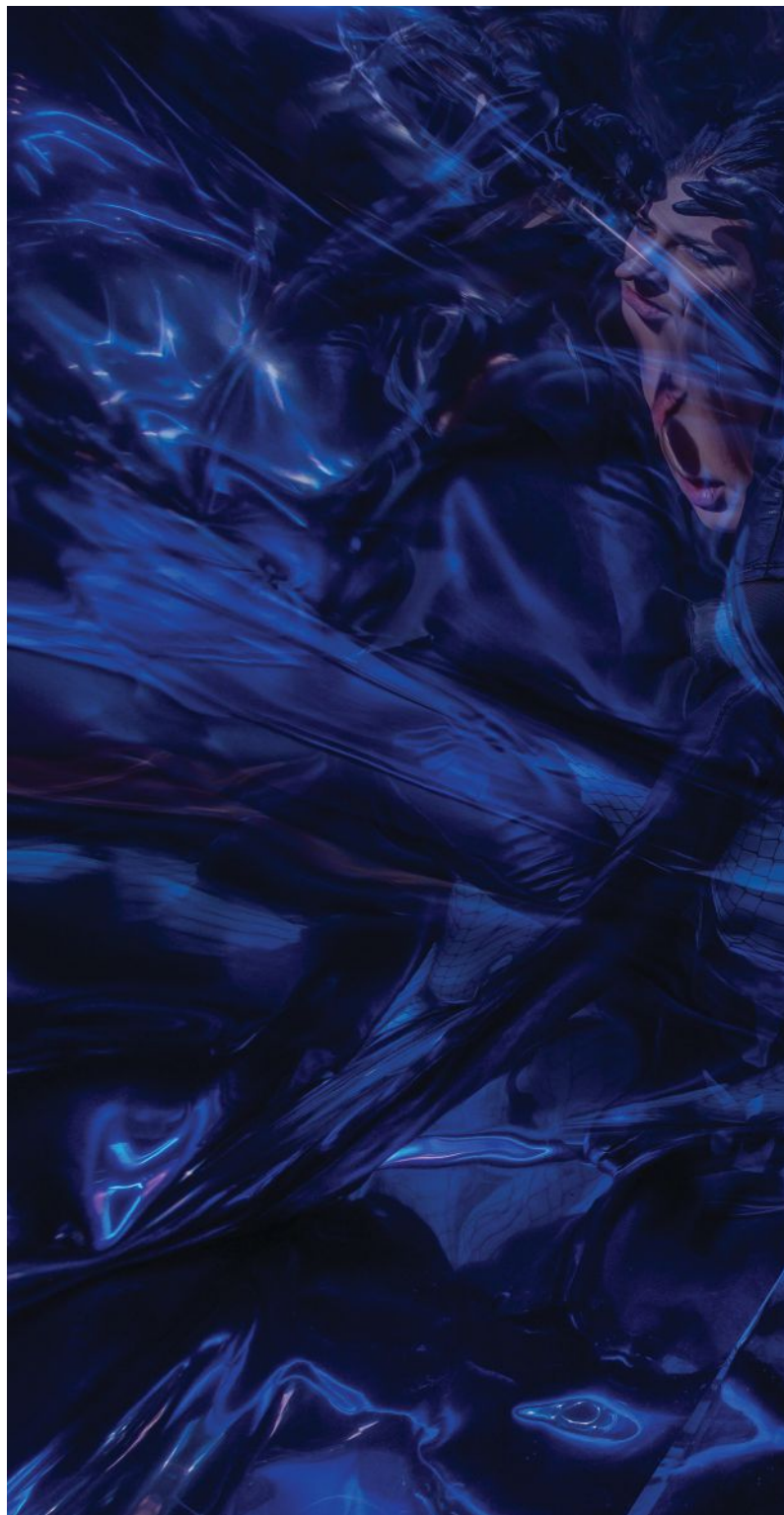
feeling,” Casallas adds. He used an optical snoot with a gobo behind Hayden to add the pattern to the background. The image, titled “Electric Awakening” placed in the top 32 in the illustrative portrait category.

For another project with Hayden as the model, Casallas manipulated Mylar film by wrapping it around light stands and pulling it wide. Because Mylar “reflects everything,” he adds, he dressed in all black and did the session at night. He added a blue gel to his strobes and set them on low power, and used a snoot to light Hayden’s face (right). He also used a 60mm lens to make the image more dynamic, “a little bit crazier, just having a bit of fun with it,” Casallas explains. As much as he likes to experiment with lighting, he also knows when to keep

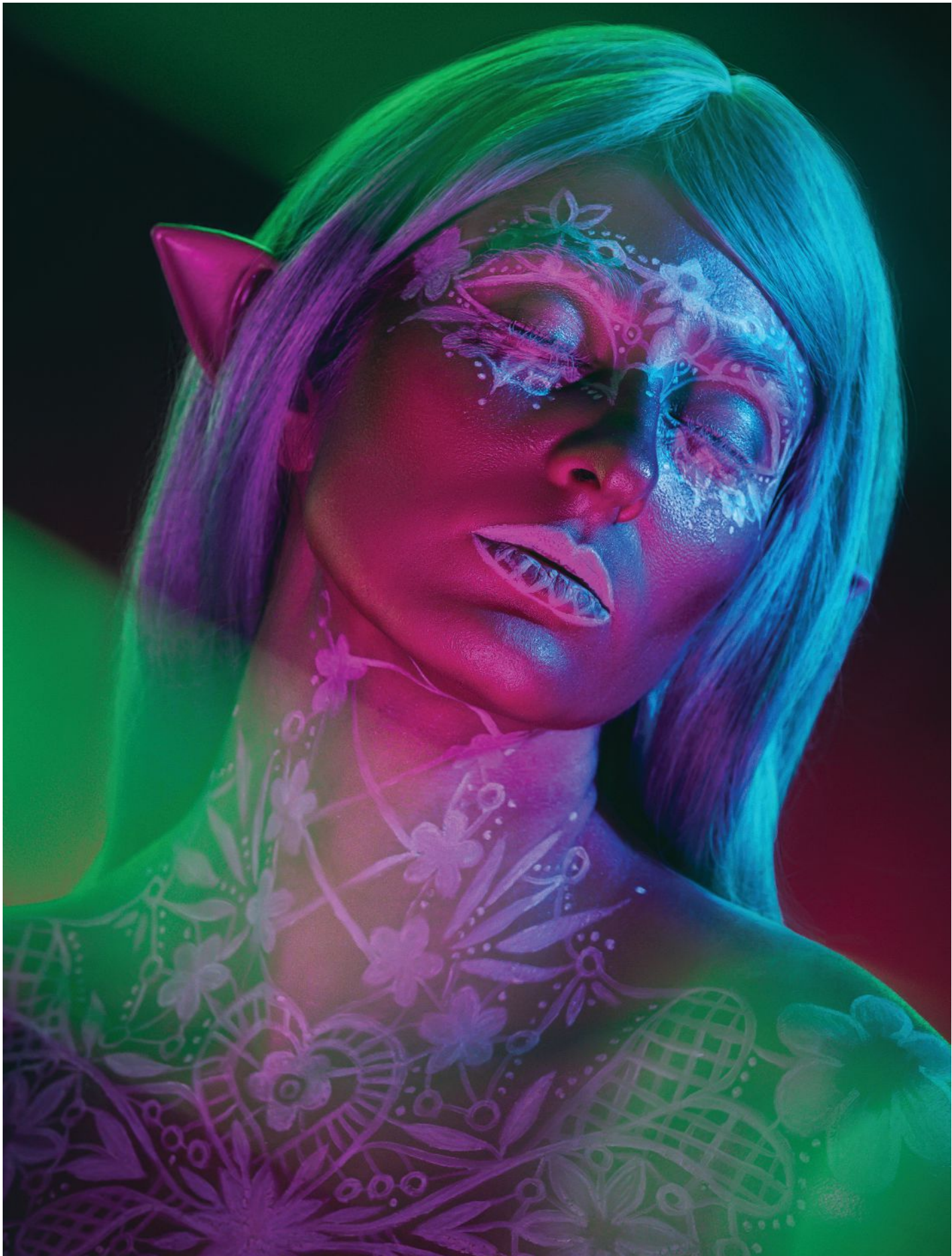
it simple. For a session with a subject who was smoking a cigar, for example, he used a single strobe to capture the cigar smoke and create a dramatic look (left). “It’s about being intentional,” he notes.

#### FAVORITE GEAR

Casallas uses a Canon EOS R6. His favorite lens is a 135mm f/1.8, but he also likes the versatility of his 28-70mm zoom. For lighting equipment, he generally brings a mix of Godox AD300Pro and AD100Pro strobes to a job “because they’re compact, they’re small, and I can use it to light anything from a portrait to a bigger space,” he says. “They’re not too big that they’re going to be a hassle.” He also carries a Godox V1 or V100 in case he needs on-camera flash.







Hayden, who handles most of the post-production, uses Capture One software. They also use Evoto, but sparingly—mostly to remove flyaway hairs and clean up backgrounds. Casallas' photographic goal is to “come really close to the end product” when he's shooting. For him, post-production is “mostly cleanup and boosting the colors a little bit, contrast here and there,” he says.

Commercial portrait photography itself is quite a contrast from wedding photography, Casallas says. With weddings, pricing is relatively cut and dried. Commercial sessions are often not so straightforward, he explains. To understand how to charge for that work, Casallas asked a producer from the video production company for which he'd worked. He wanted to know how to deal with elements such as commercial rights, talent, and stylists, and how they fit in alongside the photography. He learned from his mentor—and from experience—that each client and each job is different, depending on the brand and the purpose of the photographs and campaign, he explains. His pre-production interviews and research help him approach the client with an educated estimate of what a project will cost. That early groundwork is worth the effort, he says, as he sees his commercial and portrait photography as becoming more lucrative than wedding work. “Less jobs,” he reflects, “but bigger jobs.” He and Hayden also plan to show their personal work in galleries.

He offers his own advice to photographers looking to find their niche. “Just keep trying. Shoot a little bit of everything until you figure out where you fit in,” he says, adding that building his skills in posing, lighting, and composition makes him a well-rounded professional. “There's a lot of ways to go into the business.” •

*Writer and photographer Allison Shirreffs works with various organizations and publications.*







# *For Beauty's Sake*

REBECCA PICKREL BRINGS HUMAN CONNECTION TO HER ART

*By Janet Howard*



*As a new empty nester* in the 2010s, Sheridan, Wyoming-based Rebecca Pickrel, M.Photog., CPP enjoyed many creative pursuits—painting, interior design, music. It was her husband’s gift of a camera that ultimately sparked an interest in photography, which she quickly built into a business. “At the beginning, I realized I knew nothing about photography at all. I didn’t know what any of the buttons on the camera did,” Pickrel remembers. After researching the best educational opportunities, she joined PPA in 2015, and earned her CPP in 2017 and her master of photography degree in 2021. Last year, Pickrel won the Diamond Award in the sports category in the International Photographic Competition and became president of the Wyoming Professional Photographers Association, one of PPA’s Community Networks. “Our local organization is really what has caused me to become a better photographer,” she says. “If nothing else, just for the sense of camaraderie, and knowing I’ve got the help available, and the mentoring.”

#### JOY IN VARIETY

Photographers are often advised to find one niche and stick with it, but Pickrel says that strategy doesn’t suit her personality. Her life





*“I like to do conceptual portraits. I like street photography. I like pet portraits. I find there’s just too much beauty to photograph, in everyone and everything.”*



©TONYA BENNETT

REBECCA PICKREL



is full of variety, reflected in everything from her home décor to her fashion sense. “Sometimes I wear cowboy boots, sometimes I wear Birkenstocks,” she explains. “I like diversity in my life. If I see something pretty, I just want to photograph it.” Her business, Pickrel Photography, covers a wide range of genres: family, headshot, event, fashion, branding, and fine art. Most of her work is in headshot, event, and family photography. “I like to do conceptual portraits. I like street photography. I like pet portraits,” she says. “I find there’s just too much beauty to photograph, in everyone and everything.”

Her editing style is also eclectic. “I might want moody or I might want

bright,” she says, adding that she often asks clients what look they prefer and customizes her edits to reflect their styles. “I like to edit. That’s part of the fun of what I do.” Pickrel’s approach during sessions is to over-capture, which allows her to catch spontaneous moments, she explains. “When I’m scrolling through [images after a session], there’s that one unexpected image, and that’s the one I want to land on,” she says. “Even if the clients are posed, I still want there to be life in the image.”

The outtakes from a session often become treasured. “A couple years ago, I did a family session. We’re outside, and I got this beautiful picture of them all,” she recalls. “Then the next minute, the wind came in. The hair is blowing everywhere, and they’re squinting, and it’s one of my favorite pictures because it’s so Wyoming. This is what we are here.”

Pickrel runs her business out of her Wyoming ranch at the base of the Bighorn Mountains. Wyoming offers beautiful vistas across the state, but her favorite location is her own backyard. “We go to the hayfields, or down by the reservoir, or up the mountain. We have an almost 180-degree view of the mountains,” she says.

With all the beautiful outdoor locations to choose from, Pickrel could easily stick with natural light photography. But true to her nature—and for flexibility—she also photographs in studio, though she does not have her own anymore. She brings backdrops and lighting to rented studio space, an office, or even a client’s home, so she can decide in the moment what will make a good photo. “Originally, I was a natural light photographer. Then I realized that if I was going to progress, I needed to know how to use lights. I started out with a really easy Paul C. Buff system,” Pickrel explains. “Now I use Godox, and love





the diversity of what you can create with the light. And the funny thing is, once I learned the light, I still find at times that I don't want to use it. I sometimes prefer to go back to the natural light."

### MORE THAN PHOTOS

For Pickrel, her work is not just about capturing photos but about the experience and the human connection of the session. Pickrel and her husband were pastors at a church when their children were young, and today still take mission trips, primarily to support a nonprofit scholarship organization called The Mission Haiti. Pickrel photographs the students there and sponsors several of the about 1,000 Haitian children who participate in the program. Her years in ministry and her work in Haiti influence her perspective on what connections mean to people. "I just want people to know that I see them and hear them. I want people to leave feeling better for hav-

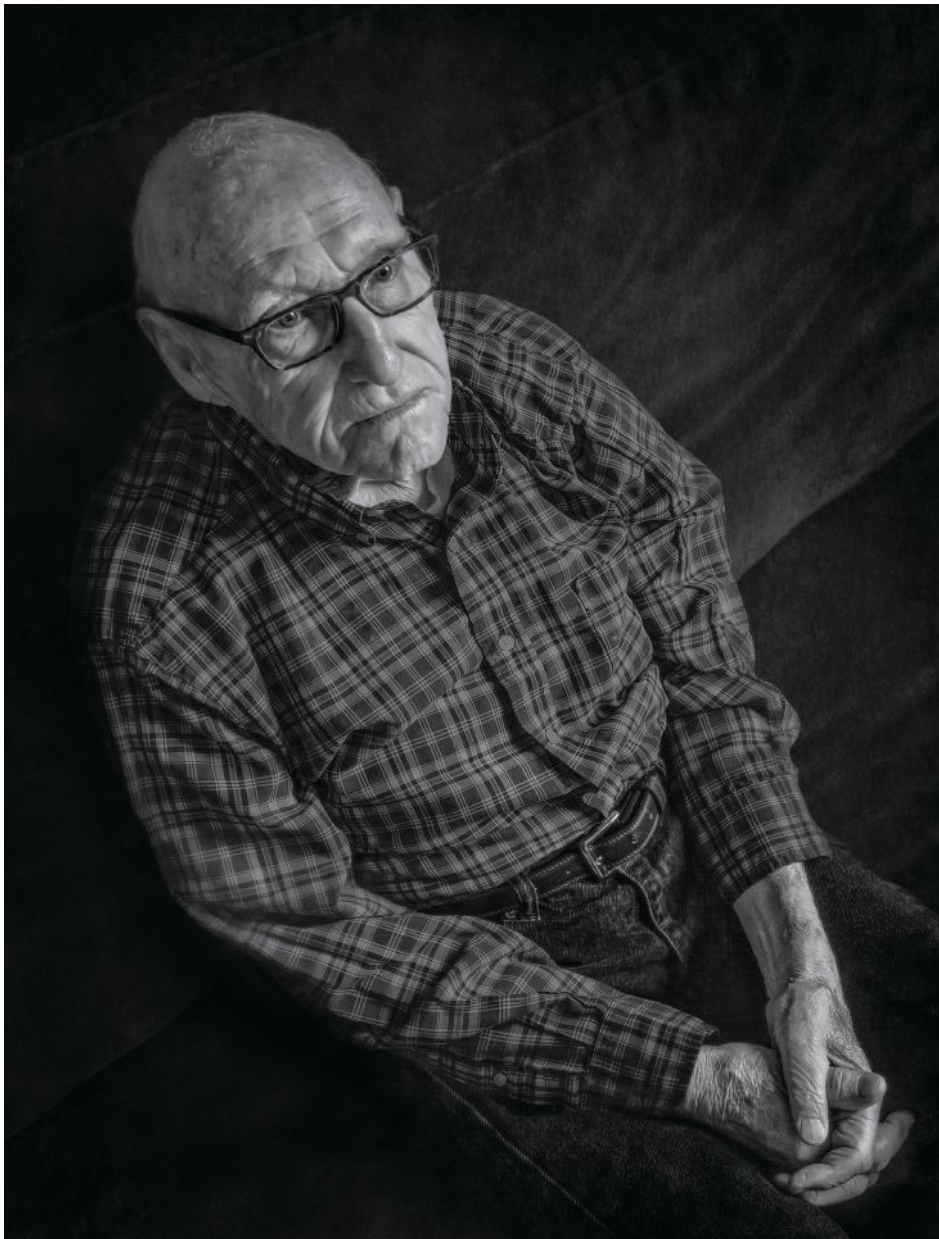
ing been through a session with me," she says. "Photography can be incredibly healing and uplifting. This is where I try and excel the most as a photographer. My primary goal is to help people feel as good about themselves as I see them. It takes nothing to encourage someone about their beautiful eyes, smile, or how they chose their outfit."

Pickrel says she tries to make a personal connection with every client. "When I am taking photos, I won't be disingenuous, but I will frequently look at the back of my camera and tell someone how beautiful they look, or how natural they are in front of the lens. It's not uncommon for someone to say, 'Thank you for making me feel pretty. It's been a while.'"

Part of creating a safe space for clients is being willing to be vulnerable herself. "I did a self-portrait project just to practice using a remote and lights, and posted it on my social media page," she says. "They weren't my favorite photos of me, but they still



*“I just want people to know that I see them  
and hear them. I want people to leave feeling better  
for having been through a session with me.”*



showed something raw and honest.” Her post moved a local woman to reach out, Pickrel recalls. “It struck a nerve in her and where she was in her life, and she wanted to do something that portrayed those emotions.” After the client’s photo session, Pickrel says, “she said it felt healing to let those emotions out.”

Pickrel remembers another transformational experience with a client. “I had a mom ask if I’d take photos of her teen daughter, who was going through some really tough things emotionally. She wanted her daughter to have something special to reflect

on, not just the hurtful things,” she says. “It was so empowering for her daughter to see the photos, and it changed some perspectives for her about herself. She’s a stunning girl but just letting her be a model and try some new things brought her out of her shell. Her images are some of my favorites from this past year.”

#### ALWAYS GROWING

With her CPP and M.Photos, credentials secured, Pickrel is eyeing her next level: PPA’s master artist degree. “I love that process of something being much more artistic than just a portrait,” she

says. “I want to have my work feel like art.” Pickrel is also comingling her previous art hobby with her photography by embellishing some of her photos with paint. “I took a picture of two of our Highland cows and then painted it with acrylics,” she explains. “It’s different and fun.” She is also selling her fine art photographs through a local art gallery and is currently setting up an online shop.

Pickrel has won many photography awards, including Wyoming PPA Master Photographer of the Year. In 2018 in PPA’s International Photographic Competition, she placed second in the Grand Imaging Awards. “That was exciting to me, yet that’s when I realized what imposter syndrome was all about,” she remembers. “I was standing on the stage, and my community of photographers were excited and hooting and hollering, and the whole time I was standing up there in dread. Inside I was just shriveling up, thinking, *Everybody’s wondering why I’m standing up here.*” While photography is subjective, Pickrel says her goal with her images is to evoke an emotional response from viewers, whether positive or negative. “I think we are so critical of our own work, and so, when somebody says, ‘Wow, that’s really great,’ our first instinct is to say, ‘No, it’s not,’” she says. “I have to keep reminding myself that art is different for everybody.”

Having started photography later in life, Pickrel says it is important to keep growing and learning. “Photography opens the world back up. As we age, the risk is that our world begins to shrink. But photography expands those boundaries again,” she says. “Every time I take on a client or create art just for beauty’s sake, it’s with the intention of continuing to mature and develop my skill set and hopefully encourage others to do the same.” •

*Janet Howard is a photographer, author, and business coach based in Atlanta.*





IMAGES ©JARED PLANTÉ / jaredplantephotography.com



# *Into the Great Outdoors*

JARED PLANTE IS AT EASE IN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

BY MARK EDWARD HARRIS

New Hampshire-based Jared Plante, M.Photog., makes it a point to record the magnificent flora and fauna of his adopted state and its neighbors. The Maine-born, self-taught wildlife and nature photographer began capturing images while on a work trip with a very different job description.



JARED PLANTE

Plante was working toward a BA in business at the University of Southern Maine when he decided to change careers. He took a job as a civilian employee overhauling and modernizing submarines at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. “I’ve always had an interest in photography, and I love the camera’s ability to eternalize a moment in time,” he says. So, in 2016, just before a four-and-a-half-month post in Virginia, Plante bought his first camera, a mirrorless with interchangeable lenses. “But believe me, I was lost,” he recalls. He turned to YouTube for technical tutorials and ventured out for training in the field. In 2018, he joined the local camera club in Rochester, New Hampshire,



met some members of the New Hampshire Professional Photographers Association, and started attending photography workshops. "This in-depth training and feedback on my work was invaluable," Plante says.

Over the past 12 years, Plante has continued his day job with the Navy while pursuing photography on the side. Not that he doesn't find the idea of being a full-time nature photographer appealing. "I would do it in a heartbeat, if I could do that, and be very comfortable for the rest of my life," he says.

"It would be so enjoyable. What I'm doing now as a supervisory physical science technician is also a rewarding career, working for the Navy making sure that what we put back to sea sails safely."

Plante's aptitude for technology has been a benefit in his photography journey. "I understood how the mechanics worked, though aperture was kind of confusing because the smaller the number, the bigger the opening," he says. "I used to be a pipe fitter, and I didn't quite understand that concept, because that's backwards from



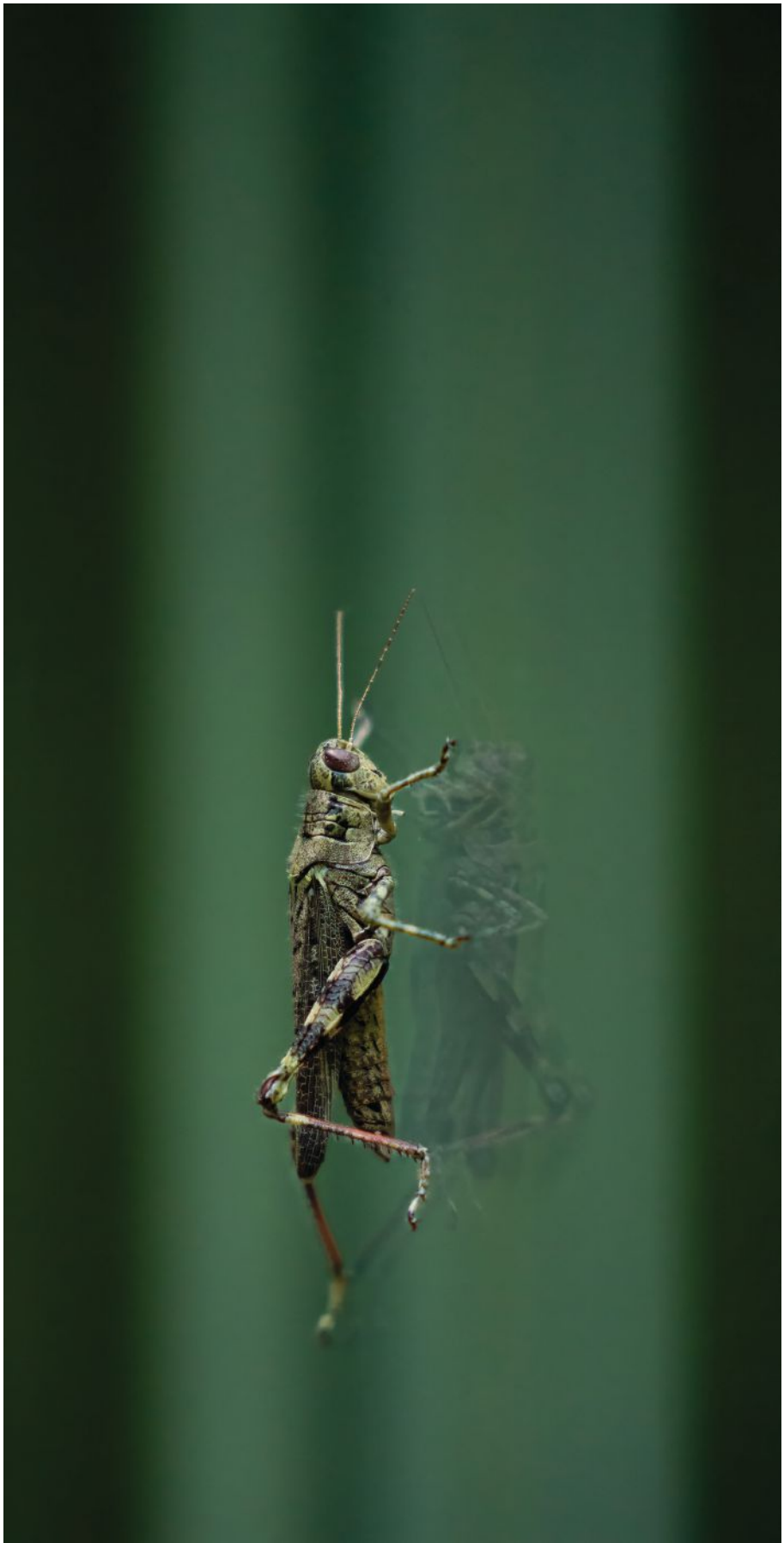
## ANATOMY OF AN IMAGE

**Camera and lens:** Sony a7R III, Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G lens

**Photographer's note:** "This photo of raccoons was about a year and a half in the making. I had been looking at the little hole in the tree every time I passed it hoping to see an owl make it its home. Days, weeks, then months went by. I love photographing birds, mostly birds of prey, saying, *One of these days, there'll be an owl in there.* I was driving back from Dunkin' Donuts with my son, and I looked up at the tree, and *Oh! There's something up there!* I rolled down my window, and could see a little head in the back, and it was a little raccoon. I rushed back home, grabbed my Sony a7R III with a 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 lens and got myself set up on a high knoll. I'm looking at this one raccoon, then all of a sudden another head just popped right out in front and looked at me. So I was like, *This is going to be such a good day.*"

**Editor's note:** This image made it to the Elite 8 in the 2026 International Photographic Competition in the Wildlife category.





my technical thinking, so that took me a little while to learn. But the rest of the mechanical portions of it I caught on pretty quickly. Through a lot of trial and error, I developed my techniques and found my photographic focus.”

**KEEN AWARENESS**

On another work trip in Hawaii, Plante visited the Peter Lik Gallery and fell in love with Lik’s work. “I spent many days in there, viewing the immersive images that he had created,” Plante says. He also admires David Yarrow’s photography. “He sets up some really cool scenes that include people, and often uses a wide angle when photographing wildlife that’s kind of unique,” Plante says. “That means he has to get really close to his subjects, including lions and elephants.”

Plante shares stories about his award-winning photos on his website to help viewers and potential clients understand what happens behind the scenes. One of his favorite photos, “Lush” (top right), made in Washington’s North Cascades National Park, is an example of his analytical awareness. The intricate plant in the image is called false hellebore, which prefers wet soil in meadows and along stream beds, Plante explains. “The leaves spin around the main access, and as it goes up, it creates this little pinwheel. There’s a lot of symmetry in that,” he says. “The overlapping leaves covered the ground beneath them, leaving little light to pass through. And I love the texture of the leaves, because they’re very smooth, but they have these ridges that can catch the light. I shoot a lot in shade, and then I bring out some of the highlights to create a sense of depth in the photo.”

He combined several techniques, including focus-stacking, to create his image, “Budding” (right). “I started with the bud, and I worked my way out,” Plante explains. “I was hoping to get some beautiful morning natural light, but behind







me, there were a lot of trees and cover that caused some crazy shadows. So, I ended up bringing in a couple of small Aputure MC continuous lights so you can see some textures and help my overall image.” The lights allowed Plante to fine tune his color temperature, dial in the color balance, and keep the scene looking natural.

For his image “Autumn Birches” (top left), which offers a wide view of patterns in nature, he stitched together five or six vertical images using Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop to create a panoramic image. “I love finding birch trees with character,” he says. “Their bright white bark allows them to stand out amongst the gold leaves behind them in autumn.”

Plante says photographing panoramas in landscape mode can be restrictive. “I have too wide a field of view, or too much of the image left to right, and I really want to be focusing on the top and bottom,” he explains. “I want to have that additional information from the top and bottom, so that when I overlap the images, I have the ability to crop if necessary.” This method ensures there’s no distortion or missed

pixels, he adds, and the resulting large file size means he can print “Autumn Birches” or another favorite image, “Harvest Time” (bottom left), at 20x60 inches. “I’m a big panorama guy. I want to be able give myself a 20x60 print if I have the opportunity,” he explains, “but from a single frame, I might not be able to blow it up that much without losing some clarity in the image.”

At home, Plante can print images up to 13x19 inches on Epson’s Signature Worthy Hot Press fine art matte paper with his Canon Pro-10, and he uses Bay Photo lab for larger images. He does his own mounting and builds his own frames out of walnut, oak, maple, and cherry, choosing the wood based on what looks best with the image.

## WHEN THE ELEMENTS ARE JUST RIGHT

Occasionally Plante will incorporate a human-made element into his nature photography. “Built for the Storm” (above) is one example. “That’s a very popular lighthouse in Maine called Whaleback Lighthouse,” he says. “It’s at the mouth of the Piscataqua River on a rocky outcropping, and it’s a

## IN HIS BAG

MindShift BackLight  
26L backpack  
Sony a7R V  
Sony a7R III  
Sony A6000  
Sony FE 16-35mm F2.8 GM  
Sony Vario-Tessar T\* FE  
24-70mm F4 ZA OSS  
Sony FE 70-200mm F2.8  
GM OSS  
Sony FE 200-600mm  
F5.6-6.3 G OSS  
Samyang AF 14mm F2.8 FE  
Gitzo Mountaineer tripod  
with ballhead  
Sirui Carbon Fiber  
Gimbal Head  
2 Aputure MC RGBWW  
LED Lights  
LEE100 Filter System  
LEE100 Polarizer Filter  
LEE Little Stopper ND Filter  
(6 stop)  
LEE Elements Big Stopper  
ND Filter (10 stop)  
LEE Soft Edge Graduated ND  
(1 stop)  
LEE Soft Edge Graduated ND  
(2 stop)  
LEE Soft Edge Graduated ND  
(3 stop)





really neat little spot because you get some great sunrises there and also these really big storms with intense waves. It's really about sitting and waiting for the right waves with the right light."

It took longer for all the elements in Plante's "Autumn's Cascade" (left) to come together. "This was a couple years in the making," he says of the photo. Peak foliage was critical. "I

*"He's looking right at me, I'm looking right at him. And he was unbothered. He was just happy hanging out there."*

wanted to photograph this waterfall in the White Mountain National Forest when there was autumn yellow. And it only happens for about a one-weekend period, and then it's all gone. There's an overlook perched up nicely to see this waterfall, and it's really brilliantly framed with all these little yellow leaves." He used a Lee polarizer to capture vibrant colors as well as reduce the reflection on the water, "so I could get those deeper blacks in the water and at the same time you get those bright whites in the waterfall."

For Plante's type of outdoor photography, it is vital to be aware of the weather, the sun's position, and the location of the stars. He uses the Photographer's Ephemeris app and PhotoPills, he says, to figure out where the light's going to be that day, or when the galaxy's going to rise. While wildlife photography often requires long lenses and faster shutter speeds, capturing landscapes is often best with the opposite end of the lens

spectrum, Plante explains. He doesn't mind getting dirty if it means coming away with a more dynamic photo. That includes sharing a patch of mud at the base of a maple tree to make eye contact with a gray tree frog (below). "His eyes were just so captivating," says Plante, "with all the texture in them. He's looking right at me, I'm looking right at him. And he was unbothered. He was just happy hanging out there. I like to be able to freeze a moment in time like this to share." Like the tree frog, Plante is happy simply spending time outside. "I've always been a big nature, outdoors person. I love being out in the woods hiking, fishing, watching wildlife, just spending time in quiet places," he says. "So, photography in the outdoors was a natural fit that started off as a great hobby for me and is now a successful part-time business." •

*Mark Edward Harris is an award-winning photographer and writer based in Los Angeles.*



# A Future Built Together

A 30-YEAR PPA PARTNERSHIP COMES TO AN END



©ALEX THE PHOTO GUY

PPA CEO David Trust, left, and COO and CFO Scott Kurkian, Hon.Cr.Photog., right, accept their Lifetime Achievement Awards from Mark Campbell, M.Photog.Hon.M.Photog.Cr., CPP, PPA president, at Imaging USA 2026 in Nashville, Tennessee.

At the end of this month, PPA will bid farewell to its longtime CEO David Trust and its COO and CFO Scott Kurkian, Hon.Cr.Photog., as they retire after more than three decades.

At Imaging USA 2026, Trust and Kurkian were honored with PPA's Lifetime Achievement Award. A timeline of their many accomplishments, many mentioned here, was on display, and in speeches, the two reflected on their legacies and expressed gratitude to the organization.

## BACK FROM THE BRINK

In 1993, Kurkian's PPA career began when he was hired as director of finance. He helped the association and a few of its employees relocate from the Chicago area to downtown Atlanta. In the years that followed, Kurkian made some difficult financial decisions to ensure PPA's survival, including closing the Winona School of Photography in Illinois.

"None of us would have jobs or be here if Scott Kurkian didn't come on

the scene and take a stand," says Trust. "Scott was the one who had the courage to say, 'You have to shut this down yesterday or we're going out of business.'"

Four years after Kurkian took the job, PPA was debt-free. In 1998, Trust, a former TV reporter and head of corporate marketing for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, was hired as PPA's director of marketing. Trust's initiative and strength of spirit did not go unnoticed by PPA's

board of directors that year, as it began a search for a new CEO. Trust was promoted in 1999.

### AMBITIOUS GOALS

That year, PPA's annual conference, held in Atlantic City, was so poorly attended that it was clear to Trust it was time to rethink the event. The board of directors agreed. "They gave us carte blanche and said, 'Go ahead, use all the creativity you can find and rebuild this event,'" Trust recalls. In 2000, the convention was renamed Imaging USA, and a record 4,000 photographers attended. Within two years, PPA membership grew from 10,500 to 14,000, and Imaging USA moved from mid-summer to early in the year. PPA introduced new member benefits, such as PhotoCare Equipment Insurance, in 2011. Membership increased 25% that year alone.

While Trust worked on Capitol Hill—partnering with the group that became the Copyright Alliance and helping launch PPA's early lobbying efforts to protect creators' rights—Kurkian was laying the groundwork for members' financial success. In collaboration with then-PPA President Ann Montieth, he developed the association's first Financial Benchmark Survey Analysis, published in 2005, which used data from 150 successful photography businesses nationwide to identify key traits of profitability.

With PPA financially healthy and gaining members, it was becoming more well known internationally. A delegation of about eight Chinese photographers visited its headquarters to learn more about the association, which led to Trust,

Kurkian, and Montieth visiting China to explore the feasibility of a presence there. In 2006, PPA opened PPA China with a staff of five, launched an international event known as PPA Asia, and worked with photographers in Shanghai and Beijing. Though the China initiative



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Kurkian (left) and Trust (right) with interim executive director Donna McMahon in 1999.

ended in the early 2010s, Trust calls it a defining moment of growth for PPA. "It's a good example of what it means to have financial security," he says. "We had reached a level where we could take strategic chances."

### BUILDING CONFIDENCE, WEATHERING DISRUPTION, AND MOVING FORWARD

As PPA's confidence and credibility grew, so did its influence on Capitol Hill, as the organization took on photographers' and other creators' rights. In 2016, the U.S. Copyright Office changed its rules to allow for group copyright registration. That momentum continued in 2020, when Congress passed the Copyright Alterna-

tive in Small-Claims Enforcement (CASE) Act, which makes it easier and more affordable for creators to resolve copyright disputes. In January 2025, the Federal Interior Land Media (FILM) Act was signed into law, making fees and permitting rules for photography and videography on federal lands and in national parks more equitable.

Even amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Trust and Kurkian guided PPA through the crisis, helping thousands of members apply for and receive critical government relief funds. In 2021, more than 10,000 photographers connected in online classrooms and chatrooms during Imaging USA: Right at Home, proving that in adversity, the community could continue to learn, grow, and move forward together.

In November 2025, PPA launched PhotoVision, a dynamic content and education platform designed as a daily destination for professional photographers. Ultimately, Trust believes PhotoVision strengthens not just individual photography careers but the profession as a whole, a philosophy he and Kurkian have shared in their three decades elevating the industry. "I'm proud to be leaving PPA in much better shape than how we found it," says Kurkian. "When I got here, it was almost out of business, and now it should be set to be around for a long time."

Without Kurkian's financial tenacity and Trust's innovative leadership, PPA's story could have ended in the last century. As they begin their own new chapters, the community they served so faithfully wishes them a well-earned and happy retirement. •

# Imaging USA 2026 Highlights

COMMUNITY, CREATIVITY, AND CONNECTION IN NASHVILLE

In January, photographers from across the U.S. and abroad gathered in Nashville, Tennessee, for PPA's annual conference and trade show, Imaging USA.

Author and nonprofit founder Matthew Emerzian kicked off the show with a rousing keynote followed by the signing of his book, "You Matter" (St. Martin's). On Sunday evening, attendees mingled at Networking Avenue, where high-top tables were labeled by photography niche, including—for the first time—boudoir photography, which also had its own education track. Also new this year were Spanish-speaking instructors, who led both pre-conference and main conference education sessions. Both English- and Spanish-speaking attendees enjoyed real-time translation of all sessions via the Interprefy app, and Spanish-speaking volunteers were on hand with "Habla Espanol" pins and ribbons to assist.

PPA's new online content and education platform PhotoVision was created to educate, inform, entertain, and inspire photographers, and the new site did just that at Imaging USA. The PhotoVision Theater featured PPA-produced films and videos by PhotoVision content creators. PPA staff at the PhotoVision booth on the expo floor demonstrated to attendees how the site works. On the last day of Imaging USA, the PhotoVision Showcase brought together nine of the platform's top educators to share their wisdom, followed by a prize giveaway



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sponsored by Fujifilm and Adobe.

The conference honored photographic excellence at the International Photographic Competition, and newly credentialed PPA members at the award and degree ceremony, which included a poignant send-off for this year's Lifetime Achievement Award recipients, PPA CEO David Trust, and CFO and COO Scott Kurkian, Hon. Cr.Photog., who are retiring at the end of April.



Imaging USA 2027 will take place at the Charlotte Convention Center in Charlotte, North Carolina, Jan. 31-Feb. 2. As excitement builds for next year, visit PhotoVision on [ppa.com](http://ppa.com) and tune into PPA's new webinar series, The Exchange Calls. •

# COMMUNITY NETWORKS DIRECTORY

When you get together with other photographers in your area, you'll see a world of opportunities open up to you.

One of the best ways photographers hone their craft is through peer interaction. Finding a mentor, meeting with like-minded people in your area, and relying on a network of business friends are keys to your success. Thanks to the Community Networks program, you can easily find and connect with professional photographers near you.

PPA has Community Networks across the United States. No matter where you live, odds are there's a Community Network to welcome you.

[ppa.com/community-networks](http://ppa.com/community-networks)

## INTERNATIONAL

### American Society of Photographers

Mel Carlil  
23745 Del Monte Dr. #152  
Valencia, CA 91355  
(661) 775-3375  
[info@yourasp.org](mailto:info@yourasp.org)  
[yourasp.org](http://yourasp.org)

## MEXICO

### Escuela de Fotografía y Publicidad George Eastman

Alvaro Balderas  
[abc261273@yahoo.com](mailto:abc261273@yahoo.com)  
[georgeeastman.com.mx](http://georgeeastman.com.mx)

### Sociedad Mexicana de Fotógrafos Profesionales

Alvaro Balderas  
Privada del Florecer 10  
Residencial Las Americas  
Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico 91098  
(814) 442-6136  
[alvarobalderas@gmail.com](mailto:alvarobalderas@gmail.com)  
[facebook.com/smfpac](http://facebook.com/smfpac)

## ARIZONA

### Arizona PPA

Thomas Cheswick  
14842 North 45th Way  
Phoenix, AZ 85032  
(602) 493-1833  
[tomcheswick@cox.net](mailto:tomcheswick@cox.net)  
[arizonaappa.com](http://arizonaappa.com)

## ARKANSAS

### Arkansas PPA

Mike Kemp  
1435 Norbert Cir.  
Conway, AR 72034  
(501) 472-0678  
[mike@mikekempphoto.com](mailto:mike@mikekempphoto.com)  
[arkansasppa.com](http://arkansasppa.com)

## ARKANSAS, MISSOURI, OKLAHOMA

### PP of the Ozarks

Jackie Strain-Mahar  
1025 Parkway  
Conway, AR 72034  
(501) 472-9447  
[ppozarks@gmail.com](mailto:ppozarks@gmail.com)  
[ppozarks.com](http://ppozarks.com)

## CALIFORNIA

### Channel Islands PPA

Michael Mercadante  
4410 Chesapeake Dr.  
Oxnard, CA 93035  
(408) 504-3592  
[mmjmercadante@gmail.com](mailto:mmjmercadante@gmail.com)  
[cippa.org](http://cippa.org)

### Inland Empire PPV

Troy Miller  
6857 McKenzie Ct.  
Eastvale, CA 91752  
(951) 818-4582  
[troy@ieppv.com](mailto:troy@ieppv.com)  
[ieppv.com](http://ieppv.com)

## PP of California

Marcy Dugan  
466 Foot Hill Blvd. #357  
La Cañada Flintridge, CA 91011  
(661) 429-3640 Ext 1  
[president@ppconline.com](mailto:president@ppconline.com)  
[ppconline.com](http://ppconline.com)

## PP of Los Angeles County

Mel Carlil  
23745 Del Monte Dr. #152  
Valencia, CA 91355  
(661) 904-3612  
[mel@scvpphoto.com](mailto:mel@scvpphoto.com)  
[pplac.com](http://pplac.com)

## PP of Orange County

Duane Murphy  
1240 E. Ontario Ave. Ste 102-138  
Corona, CA 92881  
(714) 863-2126  
[duane@shashinphotography.com](mailto:duane@shashinphotography.com)  
[ppoc.org](http://ppoc.org)

## PP of Sacramento Valley

Jeff Galinovsky  
890 John Murray Way  
Folsom, CA 95630  
(916) 705-0110  
[president@ppsv.org](mailto:president@ppsv.org)  
[ppsv.org](http://ppsv.org)

## PP of San Diego County

Cindie Wolf  
1750 Lotus Ln.  
El Cajon, CA 92021  
(619) 208-1282  
[ppograms@ppsd.com](mailto:ppograms@ppsd.com)  
[ppsd.com](http://ppsd.com)

## PPA of Santa Clara Valley

Roberto Gonzalez  
2929 Ocala Ave.  
San Jose, CA 95148  
(408) 460-7549  
[nuevafoto@sbcglobal.net](mailto:nuevafoto@sbcglobal.net)  
[ppscv.com](http://ppscv.com)

## PP of Wine Country

Norah Burrows  
7610 Bately Ct. #3  
Sebastopol, CA 95472  
(707) 327-7570  
[norahburrows@gmail.com](mailto:norahburrows@gmail.com)  
[ppwc-online.org](http://ppwc-online.org)

## West Coast School

Tim Meyer  
[tim@meyerphoto.com](mailto:tim@meyerphoto.com)  
[westcoastschool.com](http://westcoastschool.com)

## COLORADO

### PP of Colorado

Jessica Vallia  
10252 Deer Meadow Cir.  
Colorado Springs, CO 80925  
(719) 232-4275  
[president.ppcolorado@gmail.com](mailto:president.ppcolorado@gmail.com)  
[ppcolorado.com](http://ppcolorado.com)

### PPG of Colorado Springs

Carrie Cleghorn  
15631 Agate Creek Dr.  
Monument, CO 80132

(571) 389-7334  
[carriecleghornphotography@gmail.com](mailto:carriecleghornphotography@gmail.com)  
[ppgcs.com](http://ppgcs.com)

## DELAWARE

### Mid-Atlantic Regional School

John Capone  
[director@marsschool.com](mailto:director@marsschool.com)  
[marsschool.com](http://marsschool.com)

## FLORIDA

### Bay PPA

David Graham  
2228 Bahia Vista St. C3  
Sarasota, FL 34239  
(941) 302-4495  
[bayprofessionalphotographers@gmail.com](mailto:bayprofessionalphotographers@gmail.com)  
[bppaff.com](http://bppaff.com)

### Florida PP

Dana Niemeier  
720 E. New Haven Ave. Ste 8  
Melbourne, FL 32901  
(321) 446-5236  
[dananphotography@gmail.com](mailto:dananphotography@gmail.com)  
[thefpp.org](http://thefpp.org)

### Florida School

Kevin Boller  
[kevin@kevinbollerphotography.com](mailto:kevin@kevinbollerphotography.com)  
[thefpp.org/2026-fl-school-of-photography](http://thefpp.org/2026-fl-school-of-photography)

### Image Creatives

Sherri Dove  
6177 Nobility Way  
Ave Maria, FL 34142  
(516) 306-0519  
[sherrimarkdove@gmail.com](mailto:sherrimarkdove@gmail.com)  
[imagecreatives.com](http://imagecreatives.com)

## PP of Central Florida

Javier Morales  
2410 Temple Grove Ln.  
Kissimmee, FL 34741  
(689) 777-8913  
[javier@letsjump.media](mailto:javier@letsjump.media)  
[theppcf.com](http://theppcf.com)

## PP of North Florida

Jonathan Lee  
2658 Westport Dr.  
Green Cove Springs, FL 32043  
(352) 647-5955  
[jon@jwleemedia.com](mailto:jon@jwleemedia.com)  
[theppnf.org](http://theppnf.org)

## PPA of Palm Beach

David Summers  
231 Moccasin Trail W.  
Jupiter, FL 33458  
(561) 310-1035  
[ppapalmbeach@gmail.com](mailto:ppapalmbeach@gmail.com)  
[ppapalmbeach.com](http://ppapalmbeach.com)

## PPG of Florida

Veronica Tejera  
9355 SW 8th St. Ste 101  
Boca Raton, FL 33428  
(561) 699-1360  
[vtejera23@gmail.com](mailto:vtejera23@gmail.com)  
[ppgf.com](http://ppgf.com)

## Tallahassee PPG

Kate Bellflower  
2148 Orleans Dr.  
Tallahassee, FL 32308  
(904) 614-5234  
[kate.bellflower@gmail.com](mailto:kate.bellflower@gmail.com)  
[tallahasseeppgphotographers.com](http://tallahasseeppgphotographers.com)

## Tampa Area PPA

Darin Heinz  
109 W. Hanlon St.  
Tampa, FL 33604-4023  
(813) 324-1230  
[mdarin@heinzfoto.com](mailto:mdarin@heinzfoto.com)  
[tappa.org](http://tappa.org)

## GEORGIA

### Georgia PPA

Lisa Hill  
1371 Cornell Rd. NE  
Atlanta, GA 30306  
(404) 226-1451  
[info@gppa.com](mailto:info@gppa.com)  
[gppa.com](http://gppa.com)

## HAWAII

### PP of Hawaii

Dwight Okumoto  
2878 Pahoehoe Pl.  
Honolulu, HI 96817  
(808) 591-9044  
[s3fx@aol.com](mailto:s3fx@aol.com)  
[pphawaii.org](http://pphawaii.org)

## IDAHO

### PP of Idaho

Michael Collins  
5503 S. Stromboli Pl.  
Meridian ID, 83642  
(805) 588-0376  
[ppofidaho@gmail.com](mailto:ppofidaho@gmail.com)  
[ppofidaho.com](http://ppofidaho.com)

## ILLINOIS

### PPA of Northern Illinois

Carrie White  
25201 W. Indian Boundary Ct.  
Plainfield, IL 60544  
(708) 254-7583  
[info@carriewhitephoto.com](mailto:info@carriewhitephoto.com)  
[ppani.org](http://ppani.org)

## INDIANA

### Daguerre Club of Indiana

Sarah Parent  
1200 Fawn Ridge Dr.  
West Lafayette, IN 47906  
(765) 532-9417  
[daguerrein@gmail.com](mailto:daguerrein@gmail.com)  
[facebook.com/daguerreclub](http://facebook.com/daguerreclub)

### Indianapolis PPG

Tami Mohs  
3552 Mockingbird Dr.  
Columbus, IN 47203  
(812) 371-8801  
[tamimohsphotography@gmail.com](mailto:tamimohsphotography@gmail.com)  
[ippgonline.org](http://ippgonline.org)

## IOWA

### PP of Iowa

Jaimy Ellis  
PO Box 315  
Knoxville, IA 50138  
(319) 430-2703  
[info@ppiowa.com](mailto:info@ppiowa.com)  
[ppiowa.com](http://ppiowa.com)

## KANSAS

### Kansas PPA

Cindy La Barge  
404 Poyntz Ave.  
Manhattan, KS 66502  
(785) 539-3690  
[cindy@jcmaging.com](mailto:cindy@jcmaging.com)  
[kppa.org](http://kppa.org)

### Kansas School

Cindy La Barge  
[cindy@jcmaging.com](mailto:cindy@jcmaging.com)  
[kpps.com](http://kpps.com)

## MAINE

### Maine PPA

Emily Small  
11 Peters Cove Ln.  
Westport Island, ME 04578  
(207) 882-5001  
[info@maineppa.com](mailto:info@maineppa.com)  
[maineppa.com](http://maineppa.com)

## MARYLAND

### Maryland PPA

Lidia Miller  
1741 Castle Rock Rd.  
Frederick, MD 21701  
(301) 524-2910  
[president@marylandppa.com](mailto:president@marylandppa.com)  
[marylandppa.com](http://marylandppa.com)

## MASSACHUSETTS

### PPA of Massachusetts

Cassandra Sullivan  
53 Main St. Apt 223  
Wareham, MA 02571  
(508) 335-2369  
[president@ppam.com](mailto:president@ppam.com)  
[ppam.com](http://ppam.com)

## MICHIGAN

### Detroit PPA

Danuta Ranek  
2847 Bywater Dr.  
Troy, MI 48065  
(248) 247-0986  
[president@dppa.net](mailto:president@dppa.net)  
[dppa.net](http://dppa.net)

### Great Lakes Institute of Photography

Amanda Scott  
[fae@laumephoto.com](mailto:fae@laumephoto.com)  
[glijp.org](http://glijp.org)

### PP of Michigan

Pamela McCormick  
60586 Gary Ct.  
South Lyon MI 48178  
(248) 342-4749  
[president.ppfmi@gmail.com](mailto:president.ppfmi@gmail.com)  
[ppfmi.com](http://ppfmi.com)

## MINNESOTA

### International Society of Animal Photographers

Lisa Asp  
6129 France Ave. S.  
Edina, MN 55410  
(952) 303-3619  
[info@isaasp.com](mailto:info@isaasp.com)  
[theisap.com](http://theisap.com)

### Twin Cities PPA

Emily John  
16526 Temple Cir.  
Minnetonka, MN 55345  
(612) 229-9334  
[president@tcppa.org](mailto:president@tcppa.org)  
[tcppa.org](http://tcppa.org)

## MISSOURI

### PPA of Missouri

Jennifer McCall  
417 Fort Saratoga  
Saint Charles, MO 63303  
(314) 705-0056  
[develop@moppa.com](mailto:develop@moppa.com)  
[moppa.com](http://moppa.com)

## MONTANA

### Montana PPA

Andrea Reiger  
5919 US Highway 12  
Ismay, MT 59336  
(406) 971-5834  
[andreareigerphotography@gmail.com](mailto:andreareigerphotography@gmail.com)  
[montanappa.com](http://montanappa.com)

## NEBRASKA

### PP of Nebraska

Cory Loomis  
122 N. Broadway  
Bloomfield, NE 68718  
(402) 604-0969  
[cory@coryloomis.com](mailto:cory@coryloomis.com)  
[ppofn.com](http://ppofn.com)

## NEW HAMPSHIRE

### New Hampshire PPA

Nicki French  
PO Box 4085  
Manchester, NH 03108  
(603) 345-8739  
[arby.nickifrench@gmail.com](mailto:arby.nickifrench@gmail.com)  
[nhppa.com](http://nhppa.com)

## NEW MEXICO

### New Mexico PPA

Donita Privett  
222 W 2nd St.  
Portales, NM 88130  
[donita@portales.com](mailto:donita@portales.com)  
[ppanm.org](http://ppanm.org)

## NEW YORK

### Capital Champlain PPSNY

Robert Near  
1 Greensburgh Ct. Unit 1217  
Athens, NY 12015  
(518) 698-2967  
[rjnear3256@gmail.com](mailto:rjnear3256@gmail.com)  
[capitalchamplain.com](http://capitalchamplain.com)

### Dutchess Regional PPA

Eli Sloves  
6 Drum Ct.  
Poughkeepsie, NY 126903  
(845)227-2266  
[esp377@optonline.net](mailto:esp377@optonline.net)  
[drpp-ny.org](http://drpp-ny.org)

### Hudson Valley PPS of New York

Steve Moses  
617 Twin Arch Rd.  
Rock Tavern, NY 12575  
(845) 401-8774  
[steve@stevemosesphotography.com](mailto:steve@stevemosesphotography.com)  
[hvppsnys.org](http://hvppsnys.org)

### PPS of Central New York

Amy Davis  
1386 Riverbend Dr.  
Baldwinsville, NY 13027  
(315) 383-8958  
[amy.davis@yahoo.com](mailto:amy.davis@yahoo.com)  
[pps-cny.com](http://pps-cny.com)

### PPS of New York State

Timothy Daley  
15 Robinson Dr.  
Westfield, MA 01085  
(646) 509-1609  
[timothy@daleylight.com](mailto:timothy@daleylight.com)  
[ppsnys.org/about](http://ppsnys.org/about)

## NORTH CAROLINA

### East Coast School

Ann Norment  
[ann@annormentphotography.com](mailto:ann@annormentphotography.com)  
[eastcoastschool.com](http://eastcoastschool.com)

WORKSHOP INSTRUCTOR SPOTLIGHT

# Learning Without Limits

ALYSIA VARGAS LEADS HER FIRST PPA WORKSHOP

Next month, Alysia Vargas, CPP, will be teaching her first PPA workshop, “Mastering Studio Maternity Portraits,” from her Jacksonville, North Carolina, studio, Pleasantly Captured Photography.

A self-described visual thinker with a love for comic books, Vargas has always been drawn to creative expression. When she became a mother, she started crocheting and selling her creations through Facebook groups, which is how she met a local photographer. The two decided to explore their creativity together. By 2020, Vargas was making images part-time, and then started teaching photography. As someone with ADHD, she tells students that “Learning doesn’t have to be rigid. It can be fun and flexible.” Vargas encourages photographers in her classes to embrace the weird, experiment with personal style, and approach life with empathy. As she points out,

“Everyone has a story or situation they’re dealing with.”

In her PPA workshop, Vargas plans to guide students through capturing maternity portraits in a studio using artificial light, covering workflow from wardrobe selection and styling to color theory and props. Vargas says

“LEARNING DOESN'T HAVE TO BE RIGID. IT CAN BE FUN AND FLEXIBLE.”

she hopes to revive interest in studio photography, as she has witnessed many studios in her community close due to rising costs and the area’s transient nature.

Explore the PPA workshops near you May 4-18, 2026. •

[ppa.com/events/photography-workshops/find-a-workshop](https://ppa.com/events/photography-workshops/find-a-workshop)



ALYSIA VARGAS



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### Photographic Society of the Triangle

Cecil Hudgens  
104E G St.  
Butner, NC 27509  
mchudgins@nc.rr.com  
facebook.com/  
groups/32259093485

### PP of North Carolina

Ann Norment  
102 Laurel Cir.  
Fort Mill, SC 29715  
(803) 322-2701  
ann@anormentphotography.com  
ppofnc.com

### Prof. Imaging Group of Eastern NC

Kimberly Moore  
2243 Cobb Rd.  
Kinston, NC 28501  
(252) 560-0664  
kdotmoimagery@gmail.com  
pigoenc.com

### OHIO

#### PP of Northeast Ohio

Eric Arnold  
5600 Windfall Rd.  
Medina, OH 44256  
(330) 203-1460  
president@ppofneohio.com  
ppofneohio.com

#### PP of Ohio

Danica Barreau  
2612 McClain Ct.  
Grove City, OH 43123  
(614) 678-3058  
staff@ppofohio.org  
ppofohio.org

### OKLAHOMA

#### Metro PPA

Brent Fuchs  
501 Bento Rd.  
Edmond, OK 73034  
(405) 471-1231  
hello@metroppa.com  
metroppa.com

#### PP of Oklahoma

Michael Scalf, Sr.  
PO Box 1779  
Blanchard, OK 73010  
(405) 485-4456  
michael.scalf@ppok.org  
ppok.org

#### Tulsa Area PPA

Bob Holder  
8990 S. Sheridan Rd. Ste B-205  
Tulsa, OK 74133  
(918) 417-2170  
inppa.tres@gmail.com  
tulsaareappa.com

### OREGON

#### Oregon PPA

Thea Martin  
10234 NW Alder Grove Ln.  
Portland, OR 97229  
(503) 706-3239  
sunstramals@gmail.com  
oregonppa.org

### PENNSYLVANIA

#### Northeast Pennsylvania PPA

Joshua Rose  
20671 State Route 706  
New Milford, PA 18834  
(575) 226-7676  
jrose@omegaimagephoto.com  
facebook.com/  
nepaphotographers

#### PPA of Pennsylvania

Ronald Bookwalter  
20671 State Route 706  
New Milford, PA 18834  
(717) 249-6366  
ronfoto4u@comcast.net  
ppaofpa.org

### SOUTH CAROLINA

#### PP of South Carolina

Jennifer Curtis  
PO Box 1003  
Simpsonville, SC 29681  
(864) 430-5286  
curlygirlphotography@gmail.com  
ppofsc.com

### SOUTH DAKOTA

#### South Dakota PPA

Joshua Sweets  
PO Box 88733  
Sioux Falls, SD 57109  
(605) 759-2299  
joshweets@msn.com  
facebook.com/SDPPA

### TENNESSEE

#### PP of East Tennessee

Liz Salem  
751 Foxridge Ln.  
Caryville, TN 37714  
(865) 712-9658  
liz@lizzyllovephotography.com  
ppetn.com

#### PP of Middle Tennessee

Michael Gustafson  
135 Forest Retreat Rd.  
Hendersonville, TN 37075  
(615) 569-9222  
m.g.photography@comcast.net  
ppmtonline.com

#### Tennessee PPA

Karen Fox  
6604 Shouse Cemetery Rd.  
Lyles, TN 37098  
(615) 939-6151  
kfox@kfpimages.com  
tnppa.com

### TEXAS

#### Dallas PPA

Kenny Richard  
1405 Comanche Dr.  
Allen, TX 75013  
(214) 789-8610  
minvi.dallasppa@gmail.com  
dallasppa.com

#### Fort Worth PP

Andy Lay  
6101 Greenfield Rd.  
Fort Worth, TX 76135  
(817) 475-5301  
andylay@andylay.com  
fwppa.org

#### PP of San Antonio

Trey Homan  
17222 Classen Rd.  
San Antonio, TX 78247  
(210) 827-2933  
trey@ehoman.com  
ppgsa.org

#### PPG of Abilene

Steve Morrow  
1817 Meadowbrook Dr.  
Abilene, TX 79603  
(325) 513-2514  
steve@stevemorrowphotography.com  
facebook.com/  
groups/1939706649889107

#### PPG of Houston

Duane Blocker  
15707 Bryan Creek Ct.  
Houston, TX 77044  
(425) 320-8229  
dbblocker@comcast.net  
ppgh.org

#### South Plains PPA

Cris Duncan  
2402 Slide Rd.  
Lubbock, TX 79407  
(806) 781-2747  
dee@cjduncan.com  
westtexasphotographers.com

### Texas PPA

Steve Kozak  
5323 Fig Tree Ln.  
Grand Prairie, TX 75052  
(972) 601-9070  
steve@stevekozak.com  
tppa.org

### Texas School

Cris Duncan  
cris@texasschool.org  
texasschool.org

### UTAH

#### Intermountain PPA

Brian Russell Ford  
3022 W. Mt. Logan Way  
Taylorsville, UT 84129  
(801) 867-3652  
brford64@gmail.com  
intermountainppa.org

### VERMONT

#### Vermont PPA

Jonathan Adams  
219 Lake Rd.  
Milton, VT 05468  
(802) 355-2435  
jon@jonadamsphoto.com  
vtprophoto.org

### VIRGINIA

#### Virginia PPA

Deborah Fisk  
3433 W Point Ct.  
Richmond, VA 23235  
(804) 748-8722  
debbie@reallifeevents.net  
vppa.org

### WASHINGTON

#### PP of Washington

Faye Johnson  
27088 Ohio Ave. NE  
Kingston, WA 98346  
(360) 509-6994  
office@ppw.org  
ppw.org

### WASHINGTON D.C.

#### PPS of Greater Washington

George Singleton  
11113 Luttrell Ln.  
Silver Spring, MD 20902  
(301) 873-5382  
george.singleton6@verizon.net  
ppsgw.com

### WEST VIRGINIA

#### West Virginia PPA

David Bruffy  
114 S 3rd St.  
Oakland, MD 21550  
(304) 282-0363  
daveb@smokenphoto.com  
ppww.org

### WISCONSIN

#### Wisconsin PPA

Jamie Steeno  
2933 Lineville Rd.  
Green Bay, WI 54313  
(920) 655-4380  
wppajamie@gmail.com  
wppa-online.com

### WYOMING

#### Wyoming PPA

RJ Pieper  
109 E 17th St. Ste 6091  
Cheyenne, WY 82001  
(307) 389-2822  
wyomingppa@gmail.com  
wyoppa.com

# COMMUNITY NETWORK SCHOOLS

## EDUCATION NEAR YOU

Looking to update your photography education and skills? Find inspiration, knowledge, and camaraderie by attending a Community Network School. These schools typically provide photographers with educational opportunities on a statewide or regional basis during one week of the year (and participating is a great way to befriend your fellow photographers).

Many Community Network Schools offer scholarships. As schools differ in tuition and housing arrangements, contact each school directly.

### EAST COAST SCHOOL PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKSHOPS

#### NORTH CAROLINA

Contact: Ann Norment  
ann@anormentphotography.com  
eastcoastschool.com

### FLORIDA SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY

#### FLORIDA

Contact: Kevin Boller  
kevin@kevinboller.com  
thefpp.org/2026-fl-school-of-photography

### GREAT LAKES INSTITUTE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

#### MICHIGAN

Contact: Amanda Scott  
fae@laumephotography.com  
glip.org

### KANSAS PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS SCHOOL

#### KANSAS

Contact: Kathleen Pearce  
kathleenrockers@hotmail.com  
kpps.com

### MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL SCHOOL (MARS)

#### DELAWARE

Contact: John Capone  
director@marsschool.com  
marsschool.com

### TEXAS SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY

#### TEXAS

Contact: Cris Duncan  
cris@texasschool.org  
texasschool.org

### WEST COAST SCHOOL

#### CALIFORNIA

Contact: Tim Meyer  
tim@meyerphoto.com  
westcoastschool.com

## 2026 COMMUNITY NETWORK SCHOOL DATES

### TEXAS SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY

April 25-May 1, 2026

Renaissance Hotel and Conference Center, Addison, Texas  
texasschool.org

### LAST CHANCE TO REGISTER!

### MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY

May 3-8, 2026

Hyatt Place, Dewey Beach, Delaware  
marsschool.com

### LAST CHANCE TO REGISTER!

### GREAT LAKES INSTITUTE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

May 11-15, 2026

One Wenonah Park Place, Bay City, Michigan  
glip.org

### WEST COAST SCHOOL

June 7-11, 2026

Tahquitz Pines Retreat, Idyllwild, California  
westcoastschool.com

Orlando, Florida-based senior portrait photographer Jenny Lamy, owner of Jennifer Rebecca Studios, was on a mission: to find the best location for a client-requested session in a sunflower field. She found one owned by “Sunflower Bob” in Lake County, Florida, about 30 miles northwest of her homebase, where year-round, “there are always sunflowers in various stages of growth and bloom,” Lamy says. “I positioned the both of us in the middle of a row, where I could get a nice depth of sunflowers both in front of and in back of my senior,” she adds. “I was hoping to get one or two in soft focus in front of and/or behind her.”



© JENNY LAMY, JENNY REBECCA STUDIOS / jennyrebeccastudios.com



KELLY BRENNAN

Lamy calls her first session in a sunflower field “magical” and fun. Her senior’s mother captured the behind-the-scenes image. “Once in a while we had to dodge a bee,” Lamy recalls, “and there were chickens running around too. It was a lovely location.” •

SHARE YOUR BEHIND-THE-SCENES IMAGES WITH US AT [EDITORS@PPA.COM](mailto:EDITORS@PPA.COM)

# 30 UNDER 30

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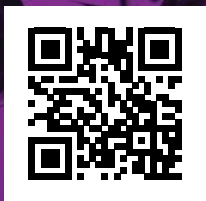
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Community Network  
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# Stronger Together

## Join Your Local Association

Photographers helping photographers is what Community Networks are all about. These local creative communities nurture and provide the support and tools to help you grow. As a member of your local Community Network, you will:

- ◆ Connect with peers and mentors
- ◆ Sharpen your skills by competing in your local image competitions
- ◆ Earn merits towards your PPA degree by attending or speaking at a PPA Merit Program
- ◆ Get recognized, build credibility, and set yourself apart
- ◆ Give back to your photographic community
- ◆ And much more!

There's never been a better time to get involved. After all, it's together that we thrive.

Find a Community Network Association near you:

[PPA.com/Community-Networks](https://ppa.com/Community-Networks)