

A Song for the Asking
The Electronic Newsletter of
EarthSong Photography
and

Photography with Heart Workshops: Walking in Beauty

August 31, 2008

Volume VI, Number 3

Hello to All

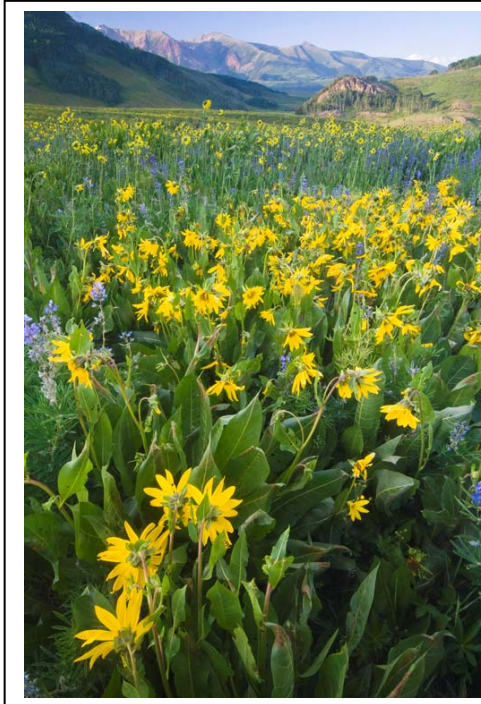
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Do each act as though it were your last, freed from every random aim, from willful turning away from the directing Reason, from pretense, self-love, and displeasure with what is allotted you.

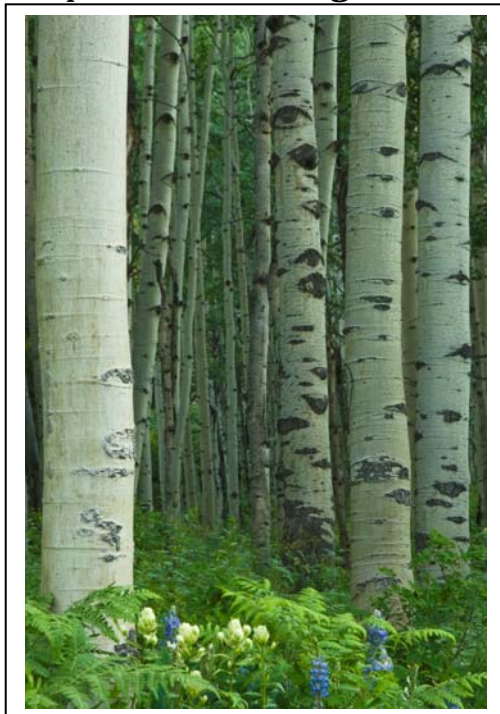
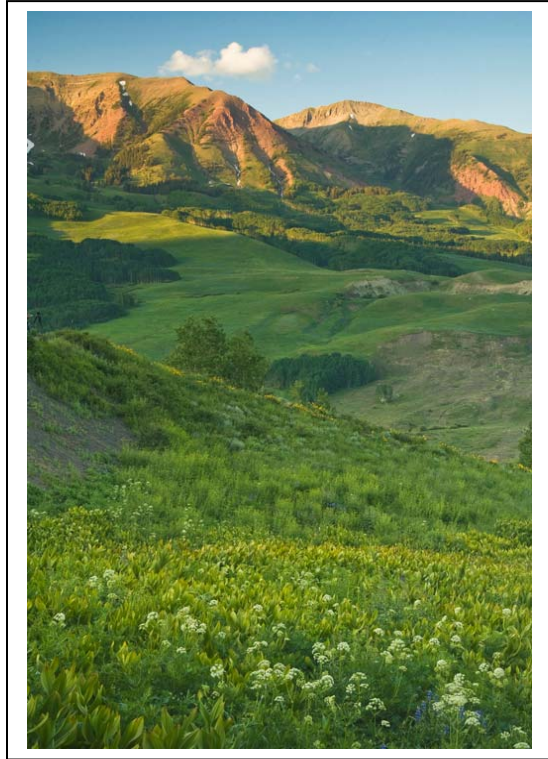
Marcus Aurelius
121-180 A.D.

Today is Friday, July 25, 2008. It is estimated by the Bureau of Vital Statistics that 6,646 men, women, and children will die today in these United States. They will die from a variety of causes – illnesses, traumas: unintentional and otherwise. Approximately every 13 seconds one of these events will occur and another human being will be gone from among us. But this is not a story about death, the world is full of stories about dying and the sufferings of mankind; rather, it is about one of the most life-affirming accounts of humanity I have ever known. It is the story of a life well- and fully lived, a cause for reflection and celebration, a chance to remind ourselves, yet again, of what is truly important in this thing we call “life”; and, perhaps, in that act of reminding, to move ourselves closer – if only by some fractional amount – to the immolation of, and not merely the applause for, what we see.



This morning, during one of those 13-second intervals, **Randy Pausch** left us.

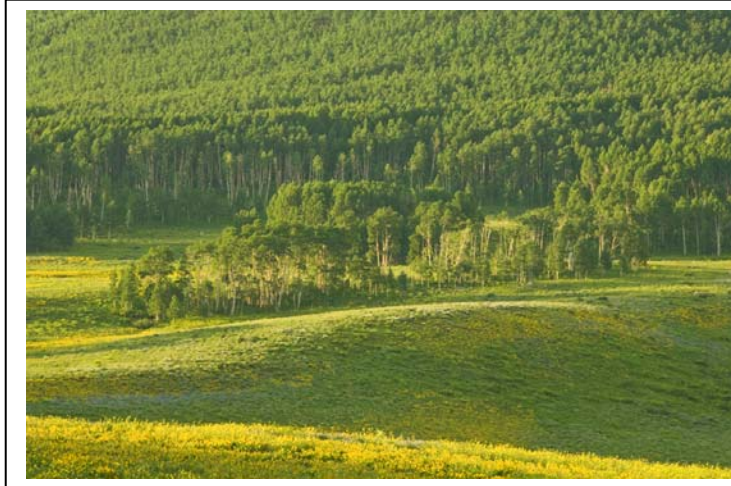
Dr. Randolph Frederick Pausch was 47. I do not know if he ever read any of the writings of **Marcus Aurelius**, but I somehow suspect that he did, and I believe, as well, that they would have liked each other. Marcus Aurelius, in case you've forgotten from your knowledge of the history of Western Civilization, was the Emperor of Rome from A.D. 161-180. He was the last of a succession of Roman rulers known as the "Five Good Emperors." By nearly all accounts he was a good man, even a wise one; as well as a Stoic philosopher of fair significance. He preserved his musings on a wide range of life's dilemmas in a small volume simply entitled **Meditations**; required reading for every teenage boy caught in the existential angst of impending adulthood. Randy Pausch was a "PhD"- doctor, rather than a medical one; and whenever his mother would introduce him, it was always as "...my son. He's a doctor, but not the kind who helps people" – as a reminder, he said, of the importance of humility. Today, I feel quite certain of **Virginia Pausch's** awareness of just how many lives were touched by her son's in a helpful way.



Randy Pausch and I never met formally, but I have known him since I was a child and years before he was ever born. Over the course of the six decades I have been around this planet, I have seen his presence in the lives of a few – sadly too few – others, whose names may not have been the same, but who were he, nonetheless, just as he was they. The names brighten and then fade, and what remains are the qualities reflected through those lives that once held them forth, examples to all of us as to what is noble and worthwhile in our species, as to that to which we can aspire, if we will but choose to do so. Randy Pausch served as one of the examples.

When I was six years old I was given a birthday present of a membership to the Athens, Georgia YMCA, one of the most coveted wishes any Athens boy could be granted. For not only did one have the

opportunity to participate in the major sports three times each week in whichever season was in play, one could also go swimming each of those days as well; but, as I soon came to appreciate, the director of the “Y” was a man whose greatest desire was to see, and to help foster into being, the positive growth and maturing of every young man in his charge. So profound was the impact of **Coburn Kelley**

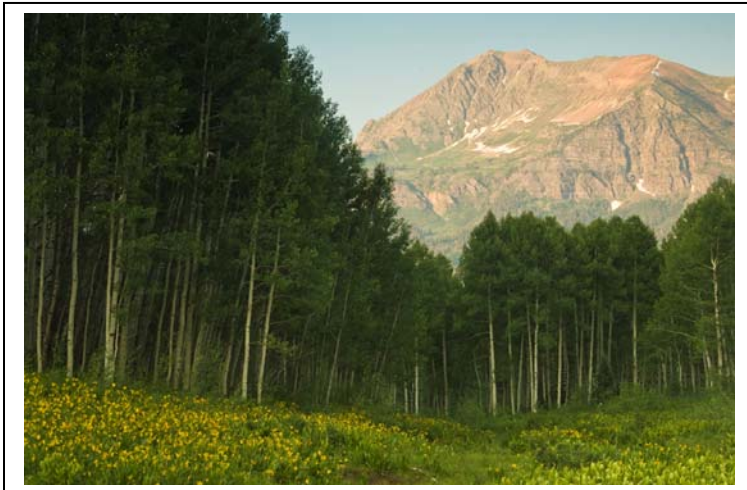


on the lives of an entire generation of Athens’ youth that when the new, modern, and greatly expanded “Y” facility was built some years later, it was named and dedicated in his honor, and remains today an on-going testament to the esteem in which he was held in that North Georgia city. In fact, this year, both the institution and the

community celebrated the fortieth anniversary of Kelley’s untimely passing at the age of 54. I consider it a singular distinction for which I shall be forever grateful to have been one of Kelley’s boys.

I became aware of Randy Pausch back in November of 2007 when a headline on my Internet Service Provider alerted me to an article about a young college professor, dying from pancreatic cancer, who had given an amazing “last lecture” as part of a school tradition which provided for such occasions. It did not escape me that the title of the lecture had been “**Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams**”, interesting choice for a dying man. In researching the story further I learned that a book, entitled ***The Last Lecture***, had been published as an

outcome of the event. Finding the book was easy enough, but what I was not prepared for was the depth of wisdom and understanding that flowed from its pages. I was immediately taken back to my years in Athens and my time with Kelley, as well as to my reading of Marcus Aurelius, and the lessons both of their words had



imparted. For I heard in Randy’s description of his childhood and the path of his assimilation of what is important in life echoes of similar voices from my

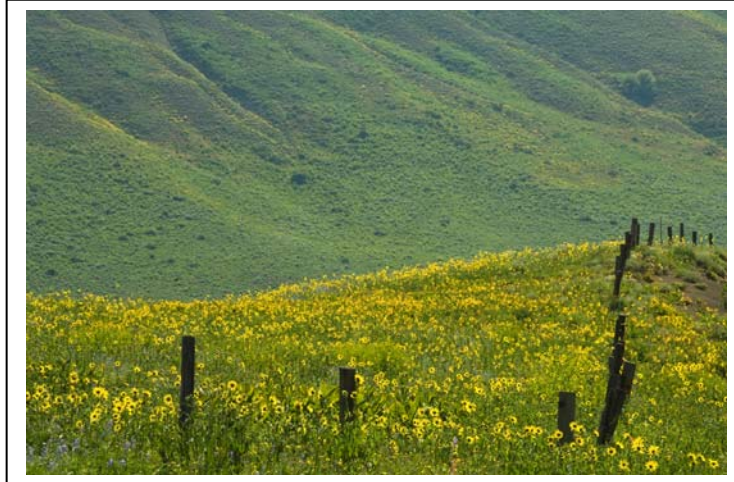
own past. It was almost as if we had experienced the same teachers, and I was drawn closely to the story of his life and to the now unfortunate circumstances in which he found himself.

Pausch was born and grew up in Columbia, Maryland, on the outskirts of Baltimore in the direction of Washington, DC.

His father, a World War II medic, owned a small auto insurance business; and his mother was an English teacher, whom he described as “old-school.” My own education in our interesting, and sometimes complex language included such an instructor, and there is hardly a day that passes when I do not thank



my good fortune that she was a part of my life. Capriciousness and precociousness will nearly always find ways to express themselves, even without a great deal of encouragement, but left unchecked often lead to harmful results; and between Betty Farr and my mother, my own proclivities were reined in sufficiently enough to keep me alive. Randy Pausch seems to have benefited from the same tough love and to have thrived within it. Perhaps it isn't a panacea for

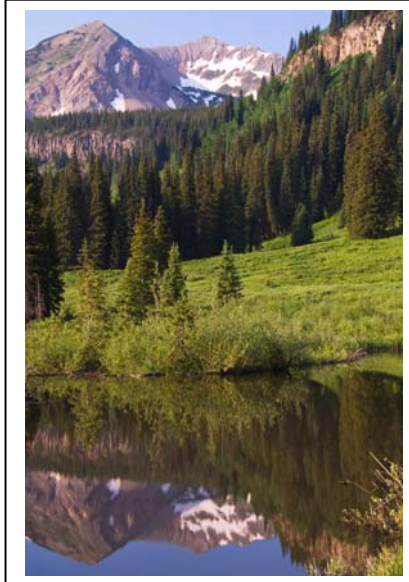


the difficulties of growing up in a complicated world, but I somehow sense that it could well be much more the norm than it is and our society would be the better for it.

Children, more than anything else, need to know that they are loved, but indulgencies are, I believe, best meted out in moderation. A couple of Marcus Aurelius

observations are noteworthy here: “From my mother I learned piety and beneficence, and abstinence, not only from evil deeds, but even from evil thoughts; and further, simplicity in my way of living, far removed from the habits of the rich.... In my father I observed mildness of temper and unchangeable resolution in the things which he had determined after due deliberation; and no excessive pride in those things which people call honors; and a love of labor and perseverance; and a readiness to listen to those who had anything to propose for

the state; and undeviating firmness in giving every person according to what they deserve; and a knowledge derived from experience of the occasions for vigorous action and for remission.... He was also easy in conversation and made himself agreeable without any offensive affectation.... There was in him nothing harsh, nor implacable, nor violent.”



Children are like tiny reservoirs, and just as the larger lake drains and is informed by all of the surrounding watershed, so children absorb their environment and become a reflection of it.

Interestingly, Randy Pausch’s primary reason for agreeing to give the last lecture was that it would be a part of how he would teach his own three children some of what he would have taught them over the next twenty years. That he was entirely focused on the welfare of his family in his absence shines through clearly from the book’s pages. But it is the context in which he goes about it that is, in my mind, so telling, for the ultimate framework of his remarks is woven around the notion of the power of our childhood dreams, the courage required to pursue them with diligence, and the

joy, even the bliss, that derives from achieving them in our everyday lives; and how it is the process of that diligent pursuit that illuminates and divulges the character of who we are.

Randy Pausch was a storyteller, as all good teachers are, and as I sank more deeply into his unfolding tale of aims and means, I could not avoid pondering the differences, as well as the similarities, with which we had walked our paths. Pausch had been quite specific about what he wished to find at the conclusion of his dream state: He wanted to be in zero gravity, to play in the National Football League, to author an article in The World Book Encyclopedia, to be Captain Kirk (you know, from Star Trek), to win big stuffed animals at the fair, and to be a Disney Imagineer. And, in one way or another, he succeeded in all of them. From the time I was younger than a teen, I have had the undeniable realization that I have a purpose in this world, that I am here for a reason,



and that if I would be willing to undertake the journey of discovery required to come face to face with that purpose and to follow its trail, without cease, through whatever obstacles there may be, I would one day come know it and to have the opportunity to live it. Thus, the journey that I have been on is of a general nature, in contrast to Pausch’s specificity, and my dream has been to find my purpose. Both, I believe, are valid approaches; for both, as I see it, lead one to oneself.

What I have no desire to do in any way is to compare myself to Randy Pausch, save for the purpose of my own edification. As I said in the beginning, Randy is

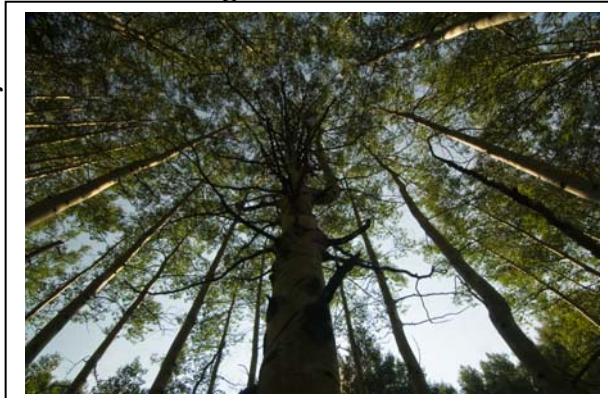


one of the examples, one of those rare beings who by their integrity and the sheer weight of their character serve as beacons to all of us and in so doing light the shadows of our faltering attempts to become conscious and awake in the world. Perhaps, you recall Stephen Grellet, the French Quaker Missionary, who, during his travels to this country in the nineteenth century, said this, “ I

expect to pass through this world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it for I shall not pass this way again.” Years later, an anonymous poet adapted Grellet’s statement into this:

Through this toilsome world, alas,
Once and only once I pass,
If a good deed I may do,
If a kindness I may show
To a fellow suffering man,
Let me do it while I can,
No delay for it is plain I shall not pass this way again.

And, even as a believer in reincarnation, I have no argument with the literal truth of this sentiment. I am here/now only once. Randy Pausch lived, in 47 years, a life that most of us will never live, even if we live to be a hundred; but he did not see himself as special or unique in any way, except to the extent that he had learned to be so from the lessons he had received from teachers, including his parents, who cared enough to expect and demand his best efforts. He gave that degree of effort in return, and then he passed those same expectations on to his students and to the millions of people around the world who have been touched by the words of one last lecture. And he, himself, took all of this a single step further: he lived these teachings in each moment as if that moment would be his last.



What’s Now?

As I look beyond the glass and wood, beyond the walls of this small home that

perches above Sandy Mush and its gentle valley inclining ultimately to the run of the mighty French Broad to the north, and above Beaverdam Valley as it pours its creek into the venerable Pigeon to the south, which will, itself, become one with the French Broad many miles through the mountains to the west, I am uplifted by the sound of falling water; water that has descended steadily – sometimes heavily – for the past twenty-four hours. The sound of rain is a sound I have not regularly heard in recent months. In my corner of Western North Carolina we are facing a current deficit of 13” for this year. This rain won’t overcome that deficit, but it will certainly help, and the sound of its falling is music to my ears.



It is late summer in the Smokies. The end of August’ “Dog Days” is practically in sight, and if the drought that has parched these Blue Smoke Mountains for the entire season will leave with them, it will be none too soon.

In scouting the Park over the past several days prior to yesterday there was one outstandingly noticeable fact: water levels in the streams on both sides of Newfound Gap were very low. The levels in the Oconaluftee watershed did not seem quite as low as those in the Little and Little Pigeon drainages - but it was only a matter of degree. In the fifteen years I have lived in these mountains, I have never seen the water in Middle Prong of Little Pigeon, as it exits Greenbrier, as low as it has been; and while the rain that has fallen in the past day is more than welcome, it was so hard and

so concentrated in time that I fear much of it will be run-off and offer minimal long-term relief. Of course, low water levels mean more than the obvious; plants are also stressed, and they show it. Many hardwoods have begun shedding leaves that have dried from lack of moisture, and while I don’t yet believe that the fall leaf season will be adversely impacted by this, it’s certainly not an encouraging sight.

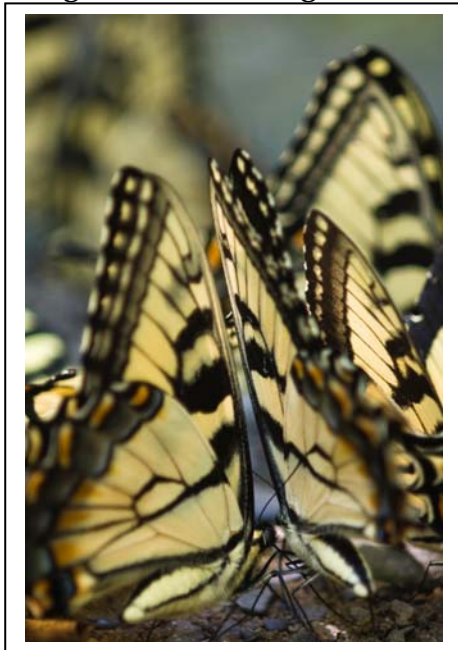
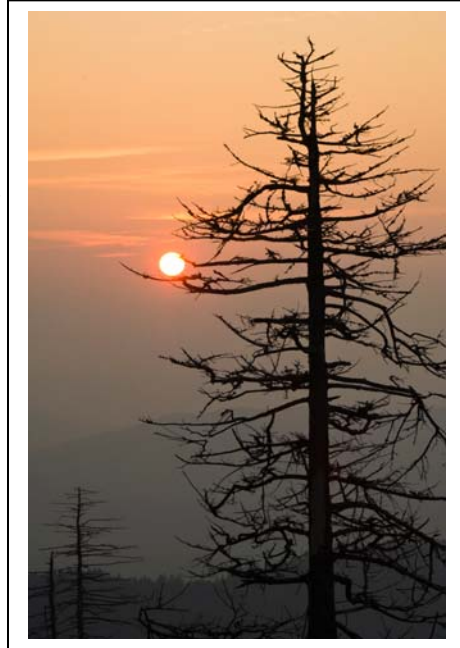
From an image-making standpoint, there is always something to photograph when it comes to Smokies water, and now is no exception. There are rocks and rock strata exposed that I have never seen, and these certainly create new opportunities. Pools exist where water is usually moving, and this gives rise to new chances for reflections. Little River in the late afternoon, after 4:30 p.m., is an excellent choice, as is Middle Prong of Little River in the Tremont area.



Greenbrier can be a good location, but here low water levels have reduced opportunities in some places, such as the Porter’s Creek-Ramsay Cascades Road

intersection, where Porter's Creek and Middle Prong converge. The water level in Big Creek is certainly low, but it doesn't seem as severely impacted as Greenbrier; and the short mile-hike that takes you up Big Creek Trail toward Midnight Hole and Mouse Creek Falls can be worthwhile.

For about one more week the sun will set in such a position that a sunset from Morton Overlook is viable; after that, the west end of Clingman's Dome parking lot will be the best choice. The Dome is also now a better choice for sunrise. This is because during the month of September the sun rises at Luftee Overlook so far to the left of the parking lot that it is behind the crest of the ridge. By the time it clears the crest, it has nearly lost its early warmth. Of course, under certain conditions such as a low, broken partial overcast, a Luftee sunrise can still be a spectacular event, but one that will emphasize color and light without the sun. Likewise, late afternoon light at Morton can be wonderful, but the image will not include a setting sun ball. In September, sunrise times range from 7:06 a.m. to 7:28 a.m., and sunset times from 8:02 p.m. to 7:19 p.m., rising later and setting earlier as we approach and then pass the vernal equinox.



September is a month of changes in the Park. Daily temperature fluctuations are extended, bringing the increased possibility for morning fogs and low-lying mists. Pay attention to the late forecast, and if the overnight temperature is forecast to be within a degree, or two, of the dew point, and the wind is projected to be fairly calm, then you know that pockets of fog are quite likely. Cades Cove and Cataloochee Valley are both great locations when this happens. The Pioneer Farmstead at Oconaluftee Visitor Center is also a good place to be when this occurs; but so, too, are some of the high-elevation overlooks where good views of low-lying valleys can be had.

September is the month when the elk (*Cervus canadensis*) rut in Cataloochee is in full swing and it can be an awesome experience to see, as

the magnificently-antlered bulls vie for dominance in the herd. Remember that approaching these critters can not only be dangerous, but that it may well be viewed as wildlife harassment by the rangers and result in a fine as such. Meanwhile, in Cades Cove, it is common to find black bears (*Ursus americanus*) gorging themselves on various mast crops in the valley, including cherries,

walnuts, and acorns. There are often mothers and cubs, so again, a high level of diligence and care is called for, and respect for the animals goes without saying. The whitetail bucks (*Odocoileus virginianus*) will also be active in the Cove during September. Their rut does not get into high gear until late-October~early-November, but they will be scraping and otherwise testing the air as the season

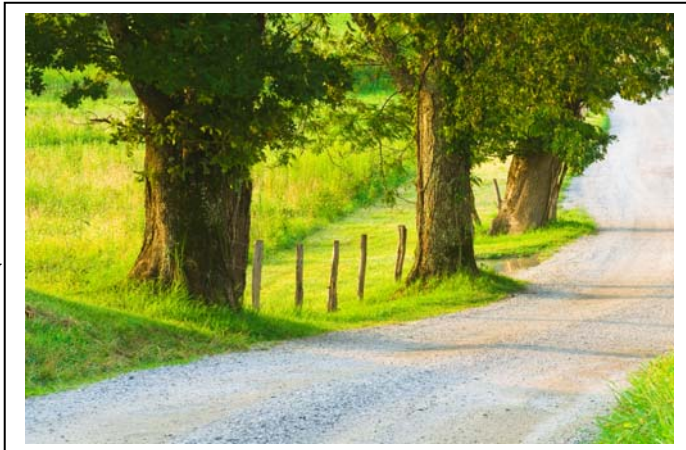


draws near.

Perhaps the biggest change ushered in by the coming month is the directive issued by the deciduous trees to their leafy extremities to cease the production of chlorophyll in anticipation of the coming cold weather. It is the operation of this directive, insuring as it does that hues other than green will quickly come to dominate each leaf's inner workings, which

will ultimately give us the colorfest of fall. The vascular plants as well – which include most of our wildflowers – employ a similar strategy, so that by September most of the blooming is done. There are, however, a few notable exceptions. Two beautiful small orchids, crane-fly orchid (*Tipularia discolor*) and nodding lady's tresses (*Spiranthes ceruna*), can be found well into September in low-elevation moist woodlands such as Cades Cove and Deep Creek. Indian pipe (*Monotropa uniflora*), a saprophyte that grows in all elevations, is common now. Tall rattlesnakeroot (*Prenanthes altissima*), a delicate member of the aster family, can be found in the higher elevations along roadsides and trailsides. The

fragile, Chinese-lantern beauty of mountain gentian (*Gentiana decora*) can be found in mid-elevation places like Rich Mountain Road. Members of the *Solidago* family, the goldenrods, can be found throughout the Park, especially now in the higher elevations. Along the Boulevard Trail and the Appalachian Trail near Ice-water Springs, during the early days of the month, the tall



loveliness of monk's hood (*Aconitum uncinatum*) is a common sight. There are also several members of the aster family (*Asteraceae*) that can be found in September. The floral display of late summer may not be as lushly prolific as that of spring, but its beauty cannot be denied, and the marvelous imagery it inspires serves as constant reminder that in "Wildflower National Park" the Earth, as

Emerson said, “laughs in flowers.”

As I watch late-summer in these old mountains, standing just on the cusp of leaning into fall, I can’t help but be reminded of the eternal dance that moves between sameness and change. These Mountains of the Blue Mists appear to some, every day, the same as they always have, immutable and changeless. To see only sameness is to exist in a rigidity that ultimately cannot endure, for all rock is ultimately worn away to dust; while to see only the constancy of change is to overlook and deny the eternal laws of nature which reassert themselves over and again without end. There is always rock somewhere becoming dust, just as there is always dust somewhere becoming rock. To live in accord with the laws of nature is to be neither sameness nor change; it is to be the movement of the dance itself.

A Tip is Worth...?

“It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful, but it is more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. We are tasked to make our lives, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of our most elevated and critical hour....

“I learned this at least by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of (one’s) dreams, and endeavors to live the life which (one) has imagined, (one) will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”

~**Henry David Thoreau**~

One of the great rewards of being a nature photographer is the opportunity to travel to beautiful places in the name of creativity. If you are familiar with ideas I have stressed in past issues of *“A Song...”*, or have been with me in workshops, then you know the importance I place on familiarity with place, on becoming



intimate with the land I am photographing, on making connection between myself and the world around me.

But what about the first time; what about when I’ve never been to the place where I’m headed; what then?

Planning for the first time to photograph in a new location can be a lot of fun; it’s sort of like deciding what the pieces of an

unknown puzzle look like and then deciding how they fit together.

The first thing I usually try to do is locate someone I can talk to who’s been there: a fellow photographer, a friend, a friend of a friend, a member of the local

tourism board or chamber of commerce, anyone who can give me information from ground level. I have a list of stock questions to ask, once I've determined each person's degree of familiarity, covering a wide range of topics from locations and times to lodging and restaurants.

The next place I go is to the Internet to see what I can flesh out from my initial conversations with real people. **Google** is my friend, and I try to think of as



many key words and phrases as I can that might involve aspects of where I'm going. I create an actual manila folder and print out the more salient findings from on-line to go in it. I begin to gather magazine articles from a variety of sources, not just photographic ones. I start a basic library of books, both on the history and natural history of the place,

particularly its flora, fauna, and geology; and this includes local and regional field guides as well. So before I even set the first foot in the direction of my destination I am fairly well-armed with information, and sometimes I've even read most of it.

And all of this is just the first step. Once I arrive in the area I begin scouting specific locations as soon as possible, especially the places on which I have received the most favorable recommendations. If lots of other folks like them, I don't need to try to re-invent the wheel right off the bat. Besides, even if a gazillion other photographers have



photographed them, they will be new to me; and my eyes will see them through my own perception and experience. Once I have covered the major areas of concentration, I will explore the lesser ones. Quite frequently I discover that there are gems in those places just waiting to be mined.

When I am scouting, I always have with me the relevant guide books and other articles of information. The other things I always carry are a compass and a map. A good GPS unit can also be an invaluable tool, even though in my own personal approach, I tend to be more like Lewis and Clark than NASA.

In each location I try to imagine the light at various times of the day, especially early morning and late afternoon. I visualize the path of the sun across the sky and try to understand how various elements that might be part of my

compositions will be lit at those various times.

I try to get a feel for how various compositions will look through a variety of focal lengths, from wide-angle to telephoto. If feasible, I carry a camera with a good street lens, such as the Nikon 18-200mm, so that I can actually frame possible compositions as I scout.

The final part of my planning is straightforward: I arrive at the location early; if possible, a half-hour to an hour earlier than my projected time to begin shooting. This way, if there are any last-minute changes or other considerations, I can build them into my experience in such a way that they, hopefully, work to the benefit of my imagery.



As I apply these ideas to one place on the earth and become so familiar with them that they are enacted without conscious thought, I begin to apply them everywhere. In the intimacy with place that arises from this I can also start to allow for serendipity, so that sometimes I am structured in what I do when I photograph and sometimes I act on whimsy, but it is a whimsy that knows that beneath the surface of any place there are images waiting; and it is only the deep knowledge of that surface that reveals what is waiting below.

For those of you old enough to remember the famous old comedy team of **(Bud) Abbott** and **(Lou) Costello**, you may recall one of their most memorable routines called *“Who’s on First”*, one of the great comedic sketches of all time. Whenever this skit comes to mind it always makes me think about the importance of planning, because it highlights the interface between what is known and what is unknown with respect to any given situation, whether it be baseball, natural history, or the process of photography. To the extent that I can, I want to know who’s on first, and second, and third; after all, I’ll probably want to make their picture.

As for Photography with Heart...

Constantly regard the universe as one living being,
having one substance and one soul;
and observe how all things have reference to one perception,
the perception of this one living being;
and how all things act with one movement;
and how all things are the cooperating causes of all things which exist;
observe, too, the continuous spinning of the web
and the interconnections of all its parts.

~**Marcus Aurelius**~

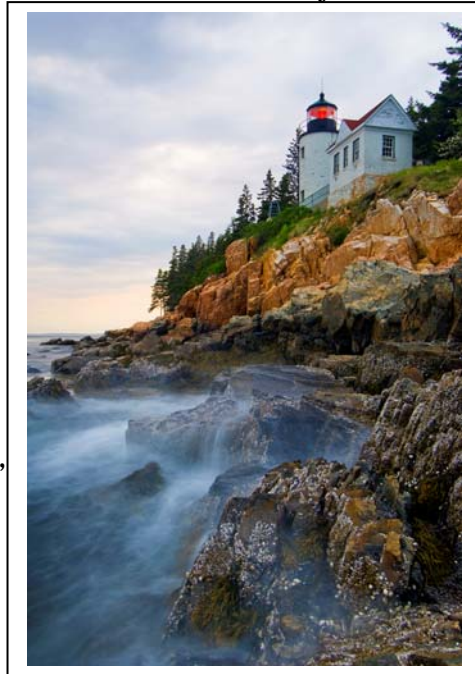
Meditations: IV: 40

It has been six months since I have written an issue of *“A Song for the Asking.”* Other than scattered single months, that’s the longest interval between issues since I began doing the newsletter five years ago; and the only explanation I can offer up is that **Photography with Heart** has been so busy I simply have not had a sufficient period of time to give an effort concentrated enough to create something I would have considered worthy enough for you to read.

By the time I have scouted the Park in order to let you know what’s happening there, and have done the research for a lead article, and then considered what I might offer as a photographic tip, it soaks up about a week’s worth of days from the month; and when I was revisiting, a few days ago, where the year has gone, it occurred to me that I have not been home for more than about 10 days at a time since March. Be careful what you wish for, young man.

Actually, it has been an absolutely wonderful year, thus far; and it’s far from being over with; so I decided it would be prudent to do a new issue of *“A Song...”* before I take up my Willie Nelson persona again.

Coming up in September-October are the Photography with Heart workshops in **Michigan’s Upper Peninsula** and **Acadia National Park**. Although both of these events are full, it would not be a bad idea, if you’re looking for a last minute fall adventure, to contact **Kris Morgan** at kris@naturaltapestries.com to have your name added to the Waiting List for either of them. We do sometimes have last-minute cancellations.



In November we’ll be in the Southwest for nearly the entire month, most of which will be involved with the **Zion National Park** Workshop and the **Southwest Tour**. The Zion event is full, but there are a few openings for the Southwest Tour; so if you have ever thought of catching **Zion, Bryce, Upper Antelope Canyon, and Monument Valley** all in the same breath, come along and join us. Kris can give you all the information.

And if you’re already planning your **2009** photo adventure schedule, you might want to see where we’ll be going next year. We have some great journeys planned, both to **new places**, as well as locations where we’ve been but which remain so special that we wanted to return. We hope you’ll be able to join us somewhere along the way. Check out the upcoming year at www.PhotographywithHeartWorkshops.com.

Finally, as many of you know, I do a workshop every year with my good friend **Kendall Chiles**. This past June, we had a wonderful time in Acadia National Park with a spring event in a marvelous setting. I had photographed Acadia in the

fall, and knew how amazing that experience could be; but I was not prepared to be blown away by the beauty of an Acadian spring. Now I can appreciate the magnitude of both seasons there.

For **2009**, Kendall and I have decided to do a **Fall in Acadia Workshop**. The details are incomplete at the moment, but it will be sometime in **mid-October**. When the planning is done this event will be posted on my website, www.EarthSongPhotography.com; so if you're looking ahead to a beautiful autumn experience in the coming year in one of the truly beautiful locations on the east coast, join Kendall and me in Acadia in October '09.

Until next month...may the Spirit of Light guide your shutter release.

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Sunrise, Purchase Knob

Hunt's Specials

Canon 50D Now taking preorders. Scheduled to ship next month. \$1399.99 for BODY.

Nikon D700 bodies in stock \$1799.99

Canon XTI Factory refurbished bodies \$389.99

Canon XT with 18-55 lens. Factory refurbished \$349.99

Canon 18-55IS lens Factory refurbished \$134.00

Canon 55-250IS lens Factory refurbished \$199.99

Canon 75-300 f/ 4-5.6III lens Factory refurbished \$155.00

Adobe "Lightroom 2.0" Upgrade \$99.00 and no shipping

Anybody interested in pricing on the Canon 5D, or G9 replacement when it comes out, send me your Name, Address, and Phone Number; and I will notify you when I have info.

I also revised our website www.wbhunt.com your comments and suggestions are welcome.

Please email them to digitalguygary@wbhunt.com

I can be reached at 1-800-221-1830, Ext. 2332; or email me. If I am not available, ask for Ora, Keith, Katherine, or Ray and they will be able to assist you.

Best, Gary