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Newsletter from Kim Westerskov

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Newsletter #48 - July 2016

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This newsletter goes out to many photographers in New Zealand and overseas - and to anybody who asks to go onto the mailing list. If you know anybody who would like to be on the mailing list, please get them to email me. It's free and they can unsubscribe at any time, of course.



1. THE “BETTER CAMERA SYNDROME”

A common, but under-reported affliction affects many photographers. Does the condition “Better Camera Syndrome” ring a bell? No, I didn’t think so – I just made the name up five minutes ago to talk about something close to the heart of photography – **how much does your camera matter?** The answer may at first seem obvious, but to me – and many other serious photographers, it’s not quite so simple.

The obvious answer often runs something like “to get good photos, you need a good camera, and to get great photos you need a great camera”. It’s never phrased quite that bluntly [photographers usually put their desire for new equipment far more eloquently], but I know many photographers feel this way. Another way of phrasing it is “I’ll obviously be a better photographer when I get a better camera. Which camera should I buy Kim?” You are very welcome to ask me this - as many of you do – and I’ll give you the best advice I can. Sometimes my answer will include something like “A better camera or lens will make you the owner of a better camera or lens, but won’t necessarily make you a better photographer by itself. What **will** make you a better photographer is more passion, more effort, and more knowledge – about life, photography, and cameras [in that order]”. The main thing a new camera or lens does is give you the ability to get a technically better image – if you get everything else right.



A somewhat unexpected benefit of new gear is not really about the equipment itself, but more about the “other stuff” I often talk about. A new camera [or lens] usually gives your photography a boost mostly because it gets you “out there” more often. You’ll spend more time with your photography, put more thought into it, and so your photography will almost certainly get better. Almost like a photographic placebo effect.



“Kim, are you trying to talk me out of getting a new camera or lens?”. No, not at all. Go for it.

But realise that it’s not the whole answer to becoming a better photographer. And becoming a better photographer is what we all want to do [me included]. It’s why you are reading this newsletter.

Through most of my career in photography I’ve never had enough income to get all the photography equipment I wanted, or even most of it. Out of necessity, I’ve always worked on the principle of making the best use of whatever equipment [and opportunities] I had.

Case in point: one of the biggest boosts to my career early on was a great run of successes in the world’s largest nature photography competition, the BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition. One of the five First Prizes that came my way was an underwater photo of *Macrocystis*

kelp dancing in the underwater current, and framing a Blue Moki. It was taken at an offshore reef in the cool seas off the Otago Peninsula coastline. The photo was taken using a **very** basic camera body, a Nikonos 2 – and an equally basic wide angle lens. Wide angle lenses are pretty much compulsory for many kinds of underwater photography. The good news about my one was that it was cheap



enough for me to own it. The bad news was that it was not sharp. Well, it was reasonably sharp in the centre, but nowhere else. Towards the edges, the sharpness was horrible. Knowing this, my job was to make sure that whatever mattered was somewhere near the centre of the photo and – equally – that whatever was out near the edges didn't [from a composition point of view] attract the viewer's attention too much.

Incidentally, that photo not only won the Underwater World section of the competition, but the competition organizer told me that it was one of the two finalists for the overall prize. Kinda cool. Unfortunately for me, the other finalist – a photo of an African wild dog hanging onto the snout of an about-to-be-killed-and-eaten wildebeest, got the nod.

The main point of this story is that it's not so much the equipment you have, but what you do with whatever you have. Get to know its good points, get to know its weak points - and then play to its strong points. It's the same for businesses or sports teams for that matter. If your rugby team doesn't have much flair or ability in the backs, but your forward pack is big, tough and intimidating, then keep the ball in the forwards as much as you can. The game might not be great to watch, but you stand a better chance of winning.

So..... what can you do with the camera [and lenses] you currently have? What fresh and creative – and occasionally great – photos can you come up with? Find out. Surprise yourself.

2. PHOTOSHOP [& LIGHTROOM] TIP - SMALLER IS BETTER

Here's another simple but very useful Photoshop/Lightroom technique I use every day. It's tempting to always view the photo you're working on as big as you can on your monitor. For much of the time you're working on the photo, that's absolutely fine, but often – too see how I'm doing overall – I will unzoom the photo, making it considerably smaller on the monitor, occasionally tiny. This allows me to see the overall composition, colour balance, and general impact much better. As the photo will often eventually be viewed small – whether on Facebook or as thumbnails on Getty Images or other photo library website [as in my case], the small view is how others will see it, at least initially. Try it. You might be surprised – as I often am – how the smaller version doesn't look as good as the big version – the colour balance isn't quite right, or the contrast or something else could be better. So I make whatever adjustments are needed, and then carry on, often going back to a larger version to work on.

3. FROM KIM'S FIELD DIARIES – MINUS 50°C



Antarctica in midsummer isn't any real hardship. It's not exactly warm but then it's not all that cold either. But the rest of the year is cold. Often very cold. I found that I could work outside all day long at temperatures down to about minus 30°C. It wasn't always pleasant, but photography was what I was there for, and to get the good photos I had to be outside, often for days at a time.

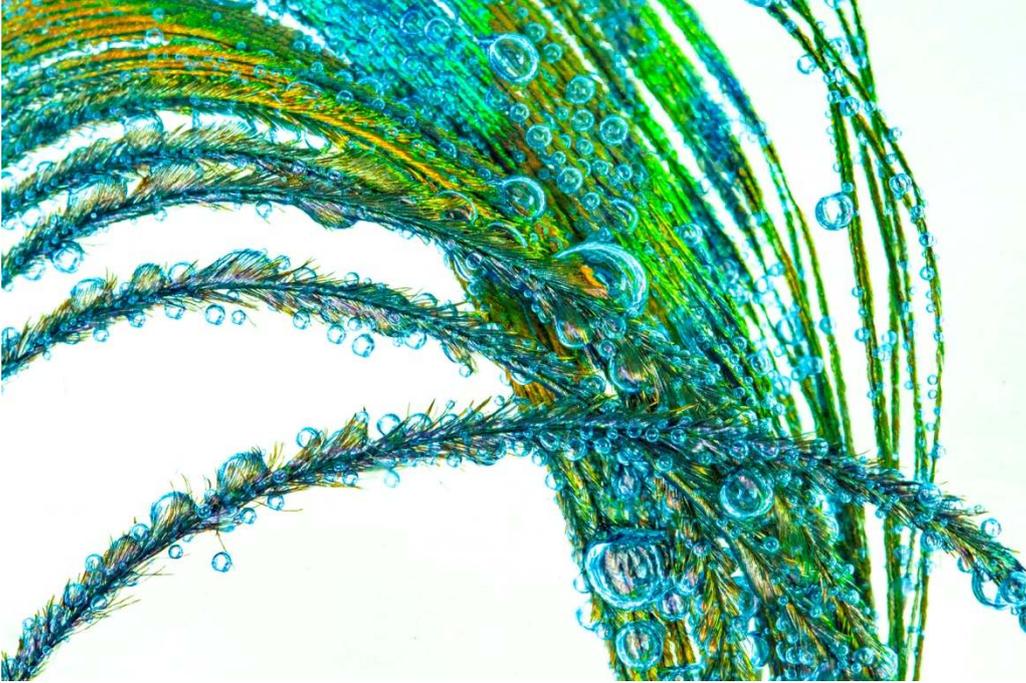
For a landscape photographer the best time to be in Antarctica is spring. The sun has returned after a four months absence and it now peeps above the horizon at midday, tentatively at first, then higher and higher, longer and longer. Because of the latitude, the sun comes up and goes down at a small angle, so the sunrises and sunsets are wonderfully long. Spring is the coldest time of the year, and the most beautiful. Some days in spring the rare and beautiful Nacreous Clouds [also called Mother of Pearl or Polar Stratospheric Clouds] form in the stratosphere, 15-25km above the earth.

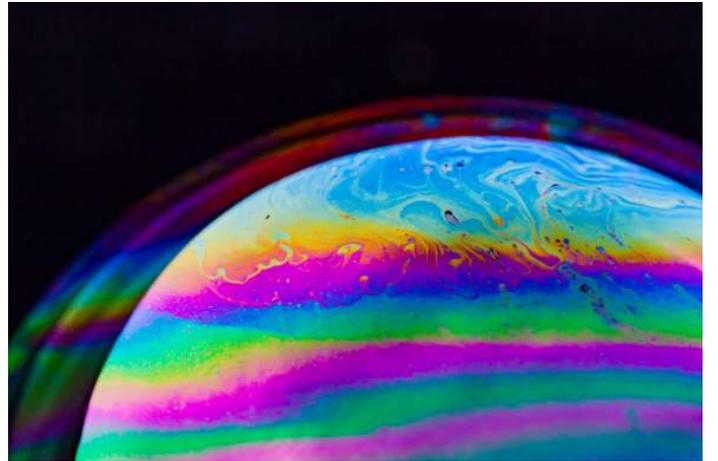
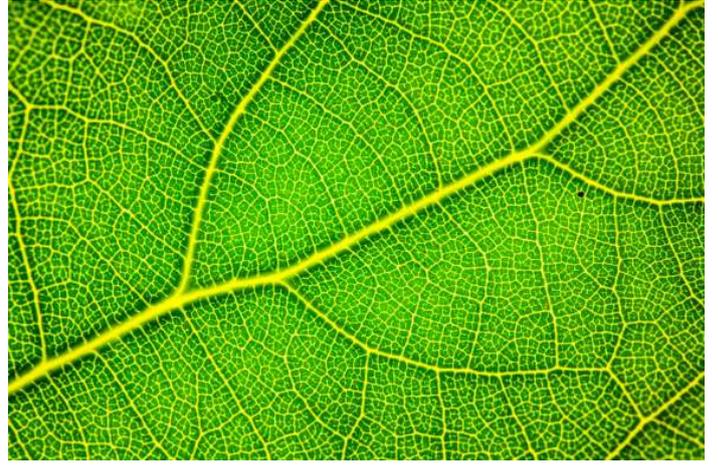
So minus 30°C on a windless day is OK to work in [my cameras often disagreed with that statement but that's another matter], but minus 40°C or 50°C [the coldest I experienced] was another matter. Malcolm Macfarlane and I ventured out of Scott Base one freezing spring night to photograph the full moon over the ice pressure ridges. It was minus 50°C. We took our moon and ice photos, took a few photos of each other [that's me in the main photo] and then hurried back to the warmth of Scott Base.

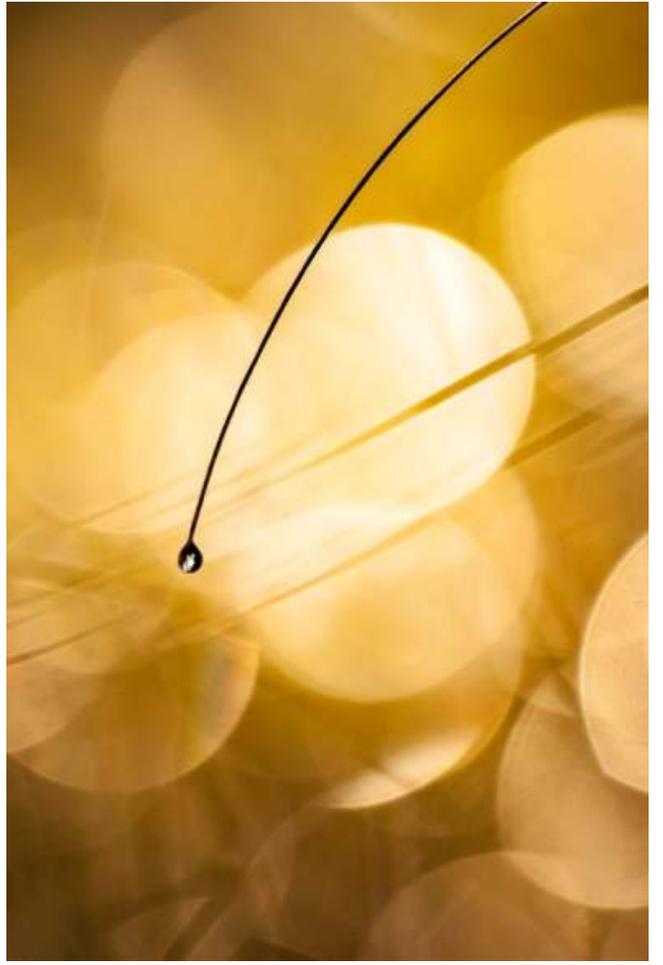
The other photo is of one of my field companions on a multi-day sea ice reconnaissance trip in late spring or early summer. We travelled on Skidoos [snowmobiles] across the sea ice, mapping and noting the condition of the sea ice between Ross Island and the Antarctic mainland. Over the following weeks and months, scientific and logistical parties would be travelling over this frozen sea and they needed to know where best to cross the sea ice. We had chosen a period of fine calm weather for this reconnaissance, but even so, at temperatures between minus 20 and minus 30 travel by Skidoo was well, cold. At times like that I often thought about the explorers from the Heroic Age: Shackleton, Scott, Amundsen, Mawson - and their men. They didn't have our modern hi-tech clothing or weather forecasts, and they were there for months, sometimes years on end. Field expeditions took weeks, or months. What was life really like for them? They were of necessity a tough bunch. They have my admiration, and some sympathy.

4. "CLOSE UP PHOTOGRAPHY – WITH OR WITHOUT A MACRO LENS" workshop
Saturday 16 July

Intimate Encounters with our world - finding magic.









A whole new world opens up for you when you & your camera get up close and personal with the world we live in. I've been exploring both documentary ["real"] and creative [artistic/impressionist] close-up photography for some time now. Next weekend I'll run my first ever Close Up Photography workshop. The good news – as well as the fact that it's rewarding and fun - is that you don't need to own a special "macro lens". For most readers, you already have lenses that can get close enough to enter the wonderful and exciting world of close up.

The workshop will first of all introduce you to the principles of close up photography – and to the technical stuff. Then we'll get on to finding magic and creating magic. All of the accompanying photos were taken here on our property [where Anne and Gareth and Viv and I live], all within 20 metres of where you will be sitting in the workshop studio. I will take you, step by step, through how I got these photos [and more] - and then in the afternoon it will be hands on. Cameras in hand, we will find and/or create magic. You will go home [hopefully] inspired and with your head buzzing with ideas and techniques. It should be a lot of fun.

"What level is this workshop for?" Any level. All levels.

Saturday 16 July 9.00am – 5.00pm plus assignment and follow-up evening 2-3 weeks later for assignment evaluation [at a time that suits everyone]. The follow-up can be by email.

Cost: Full course fee [which includes tuition, hand-outs, Vivienne's yummy catering, assignment and follow-up - **\$ 245**. Fulltime students with ID **\$150**.

5. BLACK & WHITE MAGIC” workshop – now Saturday 23 July

There’s been considerable interest in this workshop, but the initial date [26 June] didn’t work for most – so we’ve moved it to Saturday 23 July.

“When you photograph people in color, you photograph their clothes. But when you photograph people in black and white, you photograph their souls!”

Ted Grant



There’s something special about black and white photography. Good black and white photos have a classic, timeless quality. They often seem more “artistic” than colour photos. Some black and whites have an almost surreal or dreamy quality about them. And they often somehow look cleaner than colour images – although black and white can do “gritty” even better than colour e.g. photos of victims of war or famine or other misfortune.

“So what’s the big deal? Can’t I just select the black and white mode in my camera? Or just desaturate all the colour in Photoshop or Lightroom” Well, yes, of course you can, but you won’t get **good** black and white photos that way, let alone **great** photos. And this workshop is all about getting great black and white photos.

Most of the equipment and some of the techniques needed for good black and whites are the same as for colour, but there are important differences. Two of the biggies are [1] learning which subjects and approaches work well in black and white and [2] post-processing – the Photoshop/Lightroom bit. So we will look at both of these in detail.

My recommendation is that you do NOT use the black and white setting in your camera, but rather capture colour images and then convert these to black and white in post-processing. This can either be in Photoshop/Lightroom, or in standalone programs [or their





Photoshop/Lightroom plugins]. We'll look at both. The good news [among lots of other good news] is that one of the very best programs is not only clever and easy to use, but also totally free. So there doesn't have to be any upfront financial outlay to get you going in black and white. Just some learning and some time getting used to the new ideas and new techniques. You will end the workshop confident and with a level of competency in black and white that you'll be pleased with.

We'll cover not just pure black and white photography but also toned black and whites - as well as monochrome photography. And we'll look briefly at infrared black and white photography too.

As photographers, most of us are looking for ways to make our photos stand out from the crowd. Black and white photography is one of the very best ways of doing exactly that.

The plan for the day is that we spend more time "hands on" than other workshops. After lunch we'll start the afternoon at a local park taking photos and then head back to the workshop studio where we will process our new photos into black and white. It should be a rewarding and fun day. Join me?

Saturday 23 July 9.00am – 5.00pm plus assignment and follow-up evening 2-3 weeks later for assignment evaluation [at a time that suits everyone]. The follow-up can be by email.

Cost: Full course fee [which includes tuition, hand-outs, Vivienne's yummy catering, assignment and follow-up -**\$ 245**. Fulltime students with ID **\$150**.

6. ILLUSTRATED CONVERSATIONS ["SLIDE SHOWS"]

We used to call them "slide shows" – 40-60 minute long illustrated presentations – or "illustrated conversations" – photos projected onto a big screen at the front of the room, plus a commentary to go with the photos. I've given many of these over the years, mostly here in New Zealand but also in London and New York. I enjoy sharing my photos, adventures and thoughts with audiences, and find myself giving quite a few this year – three in the last month. On Wednesday 24 August I will be presenting "Attacked by an Octopus, Cuddled by a Whale" at the Puke Ariki Museum in New Plymouth, and on Wednesday 14th September I'll be at the Whangarei Library presenting "The Power of Photography". If your club or group might be interested in hosting one of my presentations, please get in touch.

7. PROGRAM FOR 2016

JULY

- **Saturday 16 July. “Close Up Photography – with or without a macro lens” workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.
- Thursday 21 July 7.00pm. “In-depth Photo Critiques & Tuition”. Details below
- **Saturday 23 July. “Black & White Magic” workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.

AUGUST

- Tuesday 2 August. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Sunday 14 August. “Photo Impressionism” workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.
- Thursday 18 August. 7.00pm. “In-depth Photo Critiques & Tuition”. Details below

SEPTEMBER

- Tuesday 6 September. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Saturday 10 September. “Landscape Photography” workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.
- Thursday 15 September. 7.00pm. “In-depth Photo Critiques & Tuition”. Details below

OCTOBER

- Tuesday 4 October. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Saturday-Sunday 8-9 October. “Great Photography Weekend” workshop.** Weekend plus follow-up.
- Thursday 20 October. 7.00pm. “In-depth Photo Critiques & Tuition”. Details below.

NOVEMBER

- Tuesday 1 November. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Sunday 6 November. “Good photos, great photos – Anytime, Anywhere” workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.
- Thursday 17 November. 7.00pm. “In-depth Photo Critiques & Tuition”. Details below

DECEMBER

- Tuesday 6 December. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.

8. QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“It is perilous for photographers to believe too strongly in their own talents. It too often leads to beautiful pictures of worthless ideas. Beautiful pictures are not an end in themselves. I know plenty of photographers who have more talent than me—and I often marvel at their ability to make pictures of the most mundane subjects. But at the end of the day you have to ask yourself—what do the pictures say? How do they serve the story? Do they say something important, or are they just artifacts of the photographic process, the meaningless byproduct of unguided talent?”

Jim Richardson [one of the very best, Jim has photographed over 30 stories for National Geographic]

9. NZ GEOGRAPHIC PHOTO COMPETITION – closing 13 July

Got some recent photos you're rather proud of? Entries will be closing soon for the annual New Zealand Geographic Photographer of the Year competition. This is New Zealand's largest and most prestigious photography competition. And the richest. There's \$5,000 in real hard cash up for grabs, as well as an expedition voyage and some other great prizes. Entries close 13th July. There's a new category too – Aerial [from drones, helicopters or planes].

<https://www.nzgeo.com/photography/photocomp/>

10. GREAT PHOTOS – TREAT YOURSELF

Here's a great link for you, a superb collection of photos from all around our wonderfully diverse planet. One of the best portfolios I've seen. Keep clicking on the arrow at the right of each photo, and you will be taken on a fascinating journey of stunning photography ["Gosh, is that the time? I'd better get back to work!"]

<http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/photographer-of-the-year-2016/gallery/winners-all/1>

11. MENTORING

"Mentoring" is a bit hard to define exactly, but it's **the ongoing process of inspiring, advising, guiding, teaching, critiquing** ... whatever is needed for the ongoing development of a photographer. It's one-on-one, so it's different for each person, as every photographer's needs are different. One month it may be about equipment or Photoshop, next month it may be "I just want my photos to have more 'Wow' in them", the following month it may be about exhibitions or "Should I go pro?"

Photos of Kim by Tony Whitehead



Who is mentoring for? Anybody, at any level. At present I'm mentoring both established professional photographers and amateurs.

Details in the next newsletter, or contact me.

12. IN-DEPTH PHOTO EVALUATION & TUITION EVENINGS

A good and cost-effective way of moving your photography ahead rapidly. Think of these evenings as a cross between private tuition and workshops, with lots of targeted feedback based entirely on **YOUR photos**. You bring along some photos you'd like evaluated and I critique them, both pluses and minuses, in considerable depth. Not just "how can we improve this photo in Photoshop or Lightroom?", but what can you learn about photographing a similar subject next time: maybe changing the timing, lens selection, depth of field, aperture/ISO/shutter speed choice, composition, lighting etc. – anything and everything that helps **you** on **the road towards better and better photos**.

The next In-Depth Evening will be on Thursday 21 July, starting at 7.00pm. Book by email. Cost: \$55 for the evening.

13. KIM'S PHOTOS & COFFEE EVENINGS

We meet on the first Tuesday of each month [every month of the year except January], chat informally about photography, and view some of the recent photos we've taken. It's **free [no charge], supper is served**, and there's no obligation of any kind. **Please email me if you'd like to come** [it's not a big room so I need to keep an eye on numbers]. These evenings are always fun and friendly - there's usually many smiles and laughs. It's a great way of meeting up with like-minded people, **being inspired by the creativity of our group of photographers, and coming away with news ideas and tips**. There's a wide range of interests and abilities – so for those of you who have not been before, you're very unlikely to feel out of your depth. There's also a small "library" of photo magazines you are welcome to borrow from. Bring photos if you wish, but there's no obligation to bring any. Some people do, some don't.

The next one will be on Tuesday 2 August. starting 7.00pm. 18 Greerton Road, Gate Pa, Tauranga.

14. PRIVATE TUITION

Yes, like you I'm usually busy doing "other stuff" too, but I can nearly always fit private tuition in, and am very happy to do so [I enjoy teaching and mentoring 😊]. So – if you'd like some tuition, give me a yell. First 2 hours: \$80 per hour, after that \$70 per hour [forever!]

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