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# Newsletter from Kim Westerskov

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## Newsletter #70 – October 2018

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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.*



One of my very special places in Antarctica's Dry Valleys

## 1. THE TRUTH & PHOTOSHOP

A big problem with Photoshop is simply its name and what that name has come to mean to most people: the ability to change any photo to pretty much anything a Photoshop user wants to change it to. Want to add a rainbow and dolphins to that photo? NO problem. You could even find a mermaid somewhere to add if you wished. Want to add Marilyn Monroe to that photo of Kim Kardashian so it looks like they're talking together? NO problem. Want to add or delete pretty much anything? NO problem. And therein lies the problem. It's not that Photoshop isn't a good product - it's a wonderful programme [so too is its offshoot Lightroom] which has been the main programme used by photographers for decades - simply because it's the best. No question. I use it pretty much every day.

So yes, photos can lie, and Photoshop is a useful tool for anyone wanting to make photos "lie", but then again, ever since the start of photography, photos have had an uneasy relationship with the truth.

Photography became commercially viable in about 1839. A mere 16 years later an enterprising photographer called Roger Fenton - hoping to become famous and make a lot of money - got himself [plus a large wagon filled with the primitive photographic materials and chemicals of the day] from England to the Crimean Peninsula. He wasn't present for the "Charge of the Light Brigade" [immortalized in Tennyson's poem of the same name] but he did photograph a group of survivors of that flawed, pointless, and fatal charge. It's a photo I use in many of my presentations. He also photographed a small shallow treeless valley with a road and dozens of cannonballs lying everywhere. His photo was taken a few kilometres from "the" deadly valley, but what's interesting is that there's two versions of this photo. They are identical apart from the number and arrangements of cannonballs lying scattered around. Fenton didn't need Photoshop, just strong arms to move those heavy cannonballs around.



So - has photography ever told the truth? "Yes and no" is the short answer, but not a very satisfying one. The longer answer is much more nuanced and interesting. First of all, what is "the truth"?

A photographer [you, me, anyone] chooses what to photograph, where to stand, which focal length to use, when to press the shutter etc. In so doing, the photographer is recording a visual representation of what was in front of the camera the moment the shutter was pressed. Does that make it "the truth"? "A truth" perhaps, but never really "the truth".

It's not unlike a TV camera crew looking for a story in a war-torn country. Violence and confrontation make "news". People going about their daily lives don't make "news". So the TV camera crew typically looks for the "good bits" [= the bad bits, the violence] if and when it happens. Sometimes, shamefully, they even set it up to make it happen. But leaving aside the bigger question ["has photography ever told the truth"?], let's

go back to Photoshop. My career as a professional photographer has been based on “real photos”, the kind you would expect to see in New Zealand Geographic magazine. Real, documentary, nothing changed. I would look for and try to capture special moments that told stories in single images, often in special places, but they were all real. And I was totally happy with that.

However, I also have a fine arts background from way back and so in recent years have enjoyed exploring how art and photography might enrich each other. “Photo Impressionism” is one result, and I now run workshops sharing what I’ve learned. So I now have two main approaches. If it’s a “Real Photo” and I want it to stay a real photo, I use Photoshop conservatively. There’s a line in the sand that I don’t cross. I don’t want anyone looking at that image to think “Aaah, Photoshop!”

When I’m in “Art” mode I have a different philosophy, and here Photoshop is just a tool, a special kind of paintbrush perhaps, and I’m totally happy about crossing that line in the sand.

**So what should you do?** Whatever you’re most comfortable with. If you want to be a photographer who takes only “real” photos, then read the next tip [below] and keep in mind that what you want to hear is “Great photo! Well done! You’re obviously a good photographer” [or any version of that]. What you don’t want to hear is “Great photo! You obviously know your way around Photoshop”.

However, if you want to explore how art and photography might marry, then there are no rules. Art is whatever you make it, and your images will be judged on the results, not on how you achieved them. Or something like that 😊



## 2. DON'T PUSH THAT PHOTOSHOP SLIDER TOO FAR

### Kim's tip of the day: Don't push that Photoshop/Lightroom slider too far!

As a general principle, it's an excellent one, but first of all: go right ahead and push that adjustment slider right to the end [the right-hand end], at least briefly. Doing this lets you see the bad stuff that often comes along with the good stuff when using Photoshop/Lightroom sliders such as Saturation, Dehaze, and Clarity. These are all great sliders and I use them regularly, but mostly [unless I'm creating “Art” rather than “Real Photos”] I try to keep the end result looking “Good, but real”, not “Good but clearly Photoshopped”.

Having pushed the slider too far, the “bad stuff” jumps out at you e.g. if you push the Saturation slider too far, the greens and blues might look fine still, but skin tones become a horrible red colour. Having noted the “bad stuff” [skin tones in this case], I then pull the Saturation slider back until the skin tones look OK. Or, more often, I'll use the Vibrance slider to begin with - it can usually be pushed a long way to the right without any problems, and then maybe use the Saturation slider a little bit, playing around with the two until the end result looks about right.

Another example of pushing sliders too far: if you push the Clarity slider too far to the right, you may get haloes around objects. You may not even notice them until someone else [perhaps the judge of that photo competition you've entered] points it out. Checking your images at 100% enlargement every now and then will alert you to this so you can do something about it [pulling the Clarity back] before it's too late and you've locked the unwanted haloes into your finished version further down the track.

### 3. FROM KIM'S FIELD DIARIES - 14 HOURS IN ANTARCTIC HELICOPTER



“Hi Kim, Rob. The weather’s cleared and should be fine for the whole day over in the Dry Valleys. We take off at 0900 hours”.

Antarctica, though uniquely and starkly beautiful, is an unforgiving place, where the weather can change suddenly, and often does. Blue skies on a windless day can change without warning into snarling, swirling wind gusts and zero visibility. Zero visibility and blustery windstorms are definitely not good. Scary. Dangerous. No place for the faint-hearted. But Rob’s flying skills and safety record were and are outstanding. I couldn’t have had a better pilot. For two decades, Rob McPhail of Helicopters New Zealand clocked up 4,000 hours of time in the Antarctic air, a remarkable record.



I was in Antarctica on contract to Christchurch International Airport Ltd, ticking off a long list of photos needed for the Antarctic Visitor Centre, being built at the time. It was now late summer. The Americans had already dismantled their helicopters. Only the Kiwis were still flying.

The photos not ticked off were over in the Transantarctic Mountains, mostly in the Dry Valleys. I’d been there earlier that season, but a mechanical problem with an American helicopter had resulted in me being stuck in Bull Pass for nearly all of my allocated time until we were rescued by another helicopter.

That mechanical issue forced the grounding of all the American helicopters in Antarctica for the summer, so that looked like being the end of my allocated 15 hours. But Kiwi helicopters and pilots came to the rescue and moved most of the increasingly-disgruntled scientists around our small part of Antarctica. Helicopters are pretty much the only way of getting to most of the places that scientists want to get to.

I ended up staying in Antarctica a month longer than paid for in my contract, waiting and waiting for a break in the weather. It was a long time coming, but eventually Rob’s Squirrel helicopter lifted off into the clear cold air and headed over McMurdo Sound towards the Dry Valleys, some 80 km away. I planned to spend some time in the Wright and Taylor Valleys but knew that the most spectacular landscapes would be found in the Beacon Valley.



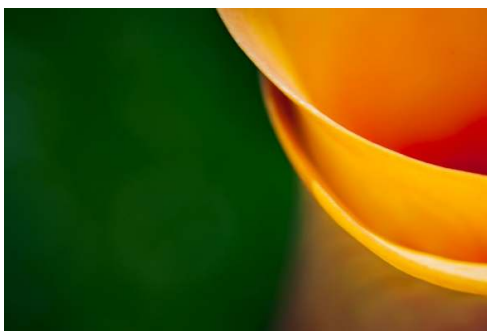
A light dusting of snow highlighted the patterned landscapes at higher altitudes in the Beacon Valley. Perfect. I was using both my standard Canon 35mm film cameras and a big, very expensive, awkward-to-use Linhof Technorama 617 camera. The Linhof gave beautiful large 6x17cm transparencies when you got it right, but a lot of effort went into getting it right. No auto-focus. Manual film wind. Only 8 photos per film. No light meter, and as transparency film [Velvia and Provia in my case] didn’t give you any real room for error, a lot of exposure bracketing was required. A lot of wasted exposures were needed to make sure that one was just right.

It was an amazing day. A very privileged day. A very tiring day, both for photographer and pilot. Finally, 14 hours later, it was time to head back over McMurdo Sound. We flew along the seaward edge of the Ross Ice Shelf. “Killer Whales ahead of us Kim. Want to take a look?” ... but that’s another story.

#### 4. "GOOD PHOTOS, GREAT PHOTOS - ANYTIME, ANYWHERE" - 6<sup>th</sup> October

Will that overseas trip to Africa or Europe – or anywhere – make you a better photographer? Probably not. You'll take more photos than usual, but will they do the trip [the expense, the time, the effort, the early starts] justice? Those big trips are precious, so you owe it to yourself to bring back the best photos you can. The best approach is to become the best photographer you can BEFORE you leave on your big trip. A new camera or lens may or may not make much difference either, but a collection of new skills definitely will. And that means getting to know your camera better, the principles of photography better, and – most important of all – developing your vision – being able to "see" photos everywhere. There is no simple "secret setting" for this but it can be learned. That's what this workshop is about – "seeing" photos wherever you are. "Finding" photos wherever you are, whatever the light.

This workshop will explore the idea that you can find and take [or create] good photos wherever you are. Right where you are at the moment! Right here, right now will do just fine. Or within





walking distance or 30 minutes' drive at the most. Or anywhere else. We will dispel the myth that "I would get great photos if only I could go to Paris or Africa or Antarctica .... or somewhere interesting". We explore the idea of "seeing photo possibilities", seeing and getting good [and sometimes great] photos wherever you are. LOTS of techniques, approaches, tips, ideas, inspiration, lists of "get yourself going" ideas for you to try.

**Assignment ["homework"]**. At the end of the workshop, I'll give you some "homework" [or you can choose your own], a series of assignments that will help consolidate what you've learned. Photographers report that they find this really useful.

**Follow Up meeting** We meet again [at a time that suits everybody, probably a weekday evening 2-3 weeks later] to look at and evaluate your assignment photos. This evaluation can be done by email if you're from out of town.

**Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> October. 9.00am – 5.00pm.**

**Cost:** Full course fee [which includes tuition, hand-outs, Vivienne's yummy catering, assignment, and follow-up evening] **\$295** - or **\$245** for Early Birds [if you register before 28<sup>th</sup> September]. Fulltime students with ID **\$145**.

## 5. 2018 PROGRAMME

### OCTOBER

- Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> October. "Photos & Coffee" informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> October. "Good photos, great photos – anytime, anywhere" workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.
- **Saturday-Sunday 13-14 October. "Great Photography Weekend" workshop.** Weekend + follow-up.

### NOVEMBER

- Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> November. "Photos & Coffee" informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Saturday 24 November. "New worlds with your camera" workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.

### DECEMBER

- Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> December. "Photos & Coffee" informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.

## 6. "GREAT PHOTOGRAPHY WEEKEND" 13-14 October



If you're thinking something like "hmmm, maybe I'd like to go to one of Kim's workshops sometime, but which one?" then this is the one I'd most recommend. Over two days we'll cover enough to inspire you for the next 12 months and well beyond. And it's different from all the other workshops I run. Instead of covering just one topic, we spread our wings wider, touching on many of the topics covered in my workshops & tuition over the last 10 years. "Will I learn a lot?" "Yep". **"Will it be fun?" "I'm afraid so!"**

This is the biggest workshop I run, **a full weekend of workshop, field trips and people photography, followed by an assignment and an evaluation evening** 2-3 weeks later at a time that suits everyone. Learning is via many paths: a creative mix of modules with detailed hand-outs, live demonstrations, screen-projected images, questions answered, and taking real photos in the field.

It's a weekend of a bit of most things. We'll try our best to squeeze the following in:

- Landscapes & seascapes
- Wildlife photography
- Photographing people
- Travel photography
- Composition, depth of field
- Which lens to use? Telephoto vs. normal vs. wide angle. Using each for best effect
- Wedding photography
- Going professional or semi-professional - or not
- Photo competitions – should you enter? What do the judges look for?
- Copyright, legal stuff, model and property releases
- Specialised techniques for night/dusk photography and aerial photography
- Digital workflow, backing up, archiving
- That troublesome triangle of ISO/aperture/shutter speed - often not understood well [if at all] but absolutely vital if you want real control over your photography
- Photoshop & Lightroom
- Manual or Auto or ....?
- What makes powerful photos powerful?
- Harnessing & developing your creativity
- Silky waterfalls, long exposure photos
- Dealing with problem foregrounds... and more



**\*\* Cost:** The standard price is **\$475**, reducing to **\$425 for EarlyBird** registrations [for booking before 5<sup>th</sup> October. The price includes the two full days of workshop, follow-up meeting, detailed hand-outs, and yummy catering [courtesy of Vivienne] on both days. **You will feel well looked after.** Special rate for **full-time students** with ID **\$225**.

For anyone living outside the Tauranga area, there are three good motels [and various eating establishments] within 10 minutes' walk of Kim's studio. The workshops are held at Kim's comfortable studio at 18 Greerton Road, Gate Pa, Tauranga.



## 7. 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. First 2 hours: \$80 per hour, after that \$70 per hour. If you come again, it's \$70 per hour right from the first hour. Think not just about cost, but "value" – it's one-on-one with an experienced photographer and teacher and we cover a lot each hour.

Or – for just the cost of a full-day workshop [with Early Bird discount] - \$245 – you get my full attention - one-on-one - for 4 hours. This can be out in the field or at my studio, looking at your photos on my computer, going over your camera functions, looking into specific techniques, or all of the above and more – whatever you want to do. I'm here for you. For only \$475 you have me for the whole day.

## 8. MENTORING

"Mentoring" is 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. 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?". **Who is mentoring for? Anybody. I mentor both established professional photographers and amateurs.** Minimum of 6 months. Talk to Kim about what would work best for you. **Expensive?** Not really. You may be surprised. Ask.



Photos of Kim by Malcolm Macfarlane & Tony Whitehead

## 9. 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 new 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<sup>nd</sup> October, starting 7.00pm. 18 Greerton Road, Gate Pa, Tauranga. Free, but please book by email.

## **10. PHOTOGRAPHING ARTWORKS, PHOTOSHOPPING, PHOTO RESTORATION**

As well as teaching photography and mentoring photographers, I also offer photo restoration, Photoshopping, and “Photographing your Artworks” services. \$50 per hour [we usually get a lot done each hour].

## **11. INVITATION TO ALL CAMERA CLUBS & GROUPS**

If your club or group might be interested in hosting one of my presentations - or workshops - or “Field Trip + Photo Critique” days, please get in touch.

## **ABOUT KIM**

- **Passionate about photography and passionate about inspiring, guiding, and supporting photographers.**
- Over 30 years as a professional photographer
- Five First Prizes in the BBC “Wildlife Photographer of the Year” competition, the Olympics of nature photography worldwide
- 18 books published – written and photographed by Kim. Five are currently “in print” still
- Teaching photography for over 10 years now