

Iowa caucuses, New Hampshire primary, and now Groundhog Day; life is certainly full and rich... and this weather, all this stark weather... nothing colorful, just light and dark areas... time to put the camera away ...

Wrong!

Not all photographs need color to be successful. Tons of black and white film is sold every year and millions of b/w pictures are taken. Generations have loved good black and white images. Ever stop to wonder why?

Sometimes color plays tricks on us. We see an image and are blown away by how colorful it is, but fail to notice that it has no subject. We might see a different picture of peeling paint, or a shot of tree bark. These last 2 pictures need no color; they rely on shape and texture to communicate. With all the contrasty lighting and shadows we have available this time of year, capture images that would escape us when colors abound as the seasons progress.

Don't be afraid to compose such pictures tightly. If, for example, you want to photograph a pile of firewood, or fallen branches, move in close enough to remove conflicting backgrounds. If the firewood is alongside a driveway with two parked cars, stand close enough to the wood so that it occupies ALL your photo, not just part of it. Bend those knees and squat down to shoot into the woodpile, not over it. Shoot from an angle that supplies some shadows, which will give dimensionality to your photo. You won't miss the lack of color in the picture – the detail and texture will more than compensate.

The worst time to accentuate textures is when the light is coming from directly behind the camera, or directly above the subject. When the subject is lit from the side (creatively called "sidelighting") textures are brought out to their fullest. With strong sidelighting, very mundane subjects can become fascinating. Something like molding around a window frame can have great texture and shadows when the sun lowers in the sky. You can get rid of details from what's outside the window by puffing your warm breath onto the cold glass, obscuring the great outdoors. Try adding something like a holiday ornament to this close up picture, and you've got a head start on next year's holiday greeting card.

Try not to let cabin fever dull your imagination. There are great subjects to photograph during this off season. Record some everyday things you usually never spend the time to see. There's beauty in animal tracks in freshly fallen snow. Icicles from a rooftop or handrail make great subjects. Scarcity of food brings birds, squirrels and other small animals close to your windows. Take advantage of their willingness to get close for food to keep your camera busy.

Here's an example of a beautiful picture taken by P. Kozlkowski , entitled "Frozen City" which illustrates what shape and texture can do in the absence of color.



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Later this month the photo industry has their annual U.S. convention and trade show. Some companies have already mentioned some new products including 8 megapixel digital cameras (Nikon and Olympus), high end (Canon, Nikon) and introductory level (Nikon) digital cameras. Most lens manufacturers will introduce very wide angle lenses, with lower prices anticipated. New film based camera introductions will probably be few and far between, with digital cameras ruling the roost. A full report will be in next month's newsletter.

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During 2003 we were all exposed to some excellent photographs. Check out <http://www.fifth-essence.com/archive/bestpix2003/index.htm> to see some of the very best. Nothing makes for better photography than looking at great pictures. These are truly marvelous shots. Enjoy them!

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Last month the world lost an internationally noted photographer, Helmut Newton. Mr. Newton was renowned for his high contrast nudes, in which shape and texture were the essential elements of his life's major work. Like his work or not, his use of form over color influenced other photographers for decades.

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February is a short month, and so is this newsletter. Keep warm, and take pictures. Record your memories for others and enjoy something that most of us take for granted – the changing of the seasons.