

It has been slow lately in our stores. It usually is this time of the year. People complain that there's nothing to photograph. That's not entirely true, but people stop shooting anyway. During such a slow time, we tend to spend more time with each of you, going over your pictures and equipment. We've seen too many unsatisfactory images, and I've therefore decided to use this space to help you avoid some of them.

Earlier today a woman was in with very underexposed negatives of her son's basketball team shot with flash in a dimly lit gym. The print was dingy, grainy, flat, and off color. She needed it enlarged for a presentation. Not too happy. Here's what went wrong. She was using a compact point & shoot camera with a long zoom (prox. 35-140) and had the lens zoomed out. She stood further back to compose, and the team, standing 3 deep on the bleachers, occupied about 1/3 of the picture area. Everything was VERY underexposed. Had she set the zoom at the wide angle, gotten close enough to almost fill the frame with the team members, and then shot, she would have been within flash range, and gotten a decent exposure. Just a few seconds of thought could have saved that shot.

Another person also had flash problems. This time with red eye. A man bought a supplemental flash for his AF SLR camera to get the flash further from the lens, thereby eliminating red eye. He was tired of getting red eye from the camera's built in flash. He joyfully went to a wedding with his new rig, and shot away. He was aghast when he saw red eye in his prints. Why? It never sunk in that he had to turn off the built in flash, which still fired and gave him red eye. We had explained it to him when he bought the unit, but it never sunk in. In retrospect, he knew the integral flash was the cause but never thought to disable it.

Mrs. "Smith" is a class mother. She recently accompanied her daughter's class on a field trip to New York City. Along the way, she took several pictures through the bus windows of the snow-covered terrain. When she got her pictures back, she couldn't find those shots, but instead had several pictures with a sunburst near the center and streaks of light outside the sunburst. She thought maybe she had X-rayed film or the lab blew the processing. Neither. Although she was shooting with her high quality compact, auto everything camera, she never realized that all the automation was the cause of her problems. Most of these cameras (including Mrs. Smith's) have a landscape or infinity setting. By pushing the button, moving the switch, or whatever your camera has, you can disengage the autofocus, which instructs the camera to focus to infinity and extinguish the flash (which doesn't quite reach an infinite distance). In use, her camera focused on the reflection in the window, saw the scene was dark and used the flash. Sometimes less is more.

Joe was outside one snowy night taking pictures of his toddler playing in the snow. It never occurred to Joe that the falling snowflakes would reflect the flash from his camera. It was snowing pretty hard and there were more white blobs in his picture than there was toddler. If water and ice reflect light, it stands to

reason that snow does as well. The next night, Joe finished the roll of film by taking the same pictures after all the snow had fallen. These looked great. Joe now knows not to shoot flash pictures when the snow is falling between the subject and the camera.

Mr. S. is a “rail enthusiast”. He likes to shoot locomotives and rolling stock, but sometimes has to shoot from outside a chain link fence set back from the tracks. Standing across the counter from him when he gets his slides back with all the crosshatched patterns the fence makes is not fun at all. Especially when he shoots flash pictures at night. We had to teach Mr. S. how to “disappear” the fence. We instructed him to get his camera right up to the fence, and shoot at the largest aperture his lens would allow. This created very shallow depth of field

A customer who believed that her case was too small to hold her AF SLR and new, large, shoe mount flash recently confronted me. She selected a case designed to hold a small camcorder and attachments and went on her way. The next day she returned, not as confident about her selection. Although the size was right, we discovered together that the partitioning in the case was inappropriate for her equipment. We tried a couple of other cases, which were larger, and of different styles. She originally liked a slimmer “vertical” bag. I pointed out that where the case could work, she might have problems with its design. She looked at a similar sized “boxier” case, where the camera and flash had good compartmentalization, but with more apparent room going unused. I suggested she try loading each one and wearing them around the store. She did, and preferred the slimmer “vertical” case. I asked the customer if she preferred working out of the bag with it over her shoulder, or after putting it down. Her reply was over the shoulder. I had her load her equipment in each bag and try removing the camera while in motion. That told the story! For her use, the “boxier” case worked – the other was clumsy. She selected the case for its utility for her. What she might never know is that she probably has saved her camera from a costly repair while making her life easier. This was a problem avoided as opposed to a problem cured.

On other fronts:

Kodak is ceasing its support for Photo CDs. The newer Picture CD format is greatly outselling the older format. Although the printing industry has long used the .pcd format, R.I.P. Photo CD.

I came across a well-written article about the art of “seeing”, which is about why our pictures might not look as good when we see them as they did when we took them. You can link directly to the article at www.apogeephoto.com/march2001/miller032001.shtml.

I'm sure most of you have seen at least one issue of a U.S. photo magazine. One of the world's best publications is now available to you online at www.bjphoto.co.uk/index.shtml . The British Journal of Photography has been around a long time, and makes wonderful reading.

Did you know that at our websites, we offer photo hints every month, you can find a link from the welcome page at www.photosummit.com or www.madisonphoto.com.

Happy picture taking, and remember to SET YOUR CLOCKS FOR DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME!

Jerry & Lynne