

Who knows, we might actually get some snow this month. If we do, here are some frequently experienced problems, and hints on taking pictures on snow.

The biggest problem is that almost all automatic cameras can't handle a situation like taking a picture of junior or your cat in snow. This is because the scene has too much contrast for a meter to understand. OK, what does that mean, and is it really important? Yes, it is very important, even for snapshot photographers. So, let's try to make a complex subject easy to understand. The explanation takes a fair amount of words, so bear with it for a few minutes.

Years ago, some astute scientist reasoned that in order to measure the amount of light falling upon a subject, you must eliminate the variety of colors that the human eye sees. In order to quantify (measure) light, one has to disregard its quality. As we were taught when we were little, white is the combination of all visible light, and black is the absence of visible light. Gray, therefore, is the middle ground between black and white. As you know, there are a lot of grays in between the two extremes, and some specific gray was selected as a baseline, or photographically standard gray. It's "name" is 18% reflective gray. You can consider it a relatively dark gray.

All photographic light meters, electric eyes, or whatever you choose to call them scramble all the light that falls on it into a neutral gray, and compares that new gray with the known, standard, 18% reflective gray. This shouldn't be hard to imagine, but it gets a little stickier from here ...

Pretend it is a dull, cloudy day. There are no harsh shadows very bright or very dark areas in sight. In fact, it's kind of blah. If we measure the intensity of just the brightest spot we can see, and the darkest spot as well, there is not a significant difference between them. This is also referred to as "flat" lighting. It doesn't take much to scramble this scene into a gray, because it's sort of gray to begin with.

Now imagine a bright, sunny day. There are very bright highlights, and very dark shadows. There is much greater (higher) contrast. It is more difficult to scramble these varying intensities into a neutral gray.

We are now called on to do something we hoped to avoid when we bought our new, highly automated picture machine – think!

Without much difficulty, we can imagine that our subject is darker than a "middle gray", so we have to find a way to ADD additional exposure to our film to stop our camera from exposing for what it considers an average exposure in a typically lit situation. We have to add exposure because if we don't, the (darker) subject will be underexposed. Here are 3 ways to do this:

- 1> Move up close to your subject so that the metering cell will only see the subject without the much brighter background. If you are shooting a person standing up, shoot a vertical. Just this rotation of the camera will help your exposure by eliminating a lot of background. If you are 30 feet away, YOU ARE TOO FAR AWAY! GET CLOSER! Then, GET CLOSER AGAIN! Then take your picture.
- 2> Stay within flash range and use your flash. This will ADD LIGHT (exposure) to your subject. If you are 20 feet away, re-read #1 above.
- 3> If your automatic camera has a meter lock provision, zoom out or walk up very close to your subject and engage your meter lock. Then go to your vantage point, compose and shoot.
- 4> If your automatic camera has a setting that looks like "+1.5" or similar, use that setting. It causes your camera to add exposure. If it doesn't add enough light, your picture will still be noticeably better.
- 5> If you can manually meter your camera, do so in either a spot mode or move in or zoom in so your meter will not see the background. Set this exposure manually. (When you return to your vantage point, the meter will indicate improper exposure because the meter can't think. Your exposure, however, will be correct.)

Also keep in mind that snow is blue to the same extent that water in lakes and oceans is blue. Do not be upset when pictures of snow scenes aren't a neutral white.

Whew, that was tough. At least tougher than usual.

There's not a lot to photograph in February, at least compared to other months. Something we should photograph is the commonplace items we take for granted every day – our home and its contents.

We all know everyone in our families, but most other people don't know them at all. If you were missing a loved one, whether human or pet, do you have a recent picture to show to others? If someone was missing, wouldn't it be better to have a recent photo of that person to give to the police instead of one taken 4 years ago, while on vacation, with a sunburn, with 5 or 6 other people in the shot? Of course. Take a picture of everyone at home every month or so. It doesn't have to be fancy, but a clear recognizable image.

On the same token, do you think you could recite, in say 6 hours, ALL the contents in your home? It's very doubtful – most people can't. Insurance companies take a lot of our money expecting you could not remember or prove what you own. Premiums are expensive. Get your money's worth.

Once every month or so, take a picture of each wall in each room in your home. These pictures will not make you remember everything you have, but will remind you of new additions, or things no longer there. If you do a relatively complete photographic inventory during this upcoming February, the monthly pictures should be all you need to do.

Start with your living room. Take a picture of each piece of furniture, each wall hanging, your curtains, blinds, etc. If there is a desk in the room, take a picture of the contents of each drawer. If you have a stereo, piano, TV, etc., take a picture close enough to read the brand names or models. If you have any storage units, photograph the contents. These don't have to be artistic, or technically perfect - they are merely a record of your property.

In the dining room, lay out all your dishes, all your flatware, and all your glassware. Remember to include serving items, ice buckets, and everything else you'd want the insurance company to replace. While covering the kitchen, remember how expensive it is to buy good pots and pans and pot covers. Small appliances, like can openers, toasters and such are easily overlooked, and add up in price if you have to replace everything at once. Photograph everything.

Not all cameras are good for photographing jewelry. Some just can't get close enough. Photograph jewelry on a dark, solid color (preferably black velvet) non-reflective cloth or mat. Photograph one item per picture. Most people have better success shooting this subject on a tabletop by a window, as opposed to using flash (most jewelry is highly reflective).

Take a picture of your tools – they're more expensive to replace than you think. Take a picture of your furnace, water heater, and air conditioner(s). These are things many people forget when filing an insurance claim.

When you bring us your film to be processed, get 2 sets of prints and a picture CD. Store one set of prints at home, and review them occasionally; keep one set with a relative who lives somewhere else, and keep the CD at work, or some third place. Avoid Safe Deposit boxes, as the courts can seal them after a death.

What's that old saying, "an ounce of prevention is worth ..."

From time to time a website crosses our monitor worth mentioning. Such a site is www.zonezero.com. It might be a little serious for some, but it has very good illustrations as well as accurate photographic information. We hope you enjoy it.

Minolta has a revolutionary concept in a new digital camera. It employs a zoom lens, which never protrudes from the camera body! It's not very expensive, and

will be available in March. You can read about it at www.minoltausa.com. By the way, you can fit 2 or 3 of them in your pocket at one time.

Near the end of this month, the Photo Marketing Association International will hold their annual trade show and convention. Our March newsletter will include a report from the show.

Happy Shooting!

Lynne and Jerry