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Shooting *in the* summer

Seasonal tips for photography

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Bits & BYTES

With the first summer holiday behind us, here are a few tips for helping you capture better images and to hold onto fond memories.

If your summer plans involve flying, don't check your camera and batteries, keep them with you, not only for theft prevention, but also because there are new travel rules about what batteries can be checked into luggage. Investigate before heading to the airport. Don't worry about x-ray screening; it does not affect digital cameras.

Hopefully if you have gone digital, you are no longer one of those shooters who had two different sets of Christmas pictures on the same roll of film. Once your camera is paid for, it essentially doesn't cost you to take more images, like the old film days. So go ahead and take lots of pictures. Often times it is a matter of beating the odds to get a picture where everyone is looking good and not blinking. Experience has shown me that taking extra shots helps ensure a good image is captured.

There is nothing more frustrating than running out of power or storage, just when you want it most. Stock up on extra batteries and memory cards. Many camera batteries are proprietary, so you won't be able to pick one up at just any store. Having an extra battery will keep you shooting while the other one charges. And, a little power inverter kept in your car can have you charging batteries while you travel to your destination. Memory cards have become very cheap, so stock up. Compared to what was spent on film for the same number of pictures just a few years ago, the cost of taking more pictures is essentially free as the cards are reusable.

Speaking of cars, don't leave your camera in a hot car. In addition to the damage that may be done to the electronics, extreme heat can also melt lubricants inside lenses causing them to run onto the glass of the lens making requiring a repair that could easily exceed the lens or camera's value.

If you go from an air-conditioned building into the hot humid air, check your lens before shooting. Frequently the lens will fog and take several minutes to clear. If you have pictures that look hazy, this might be the reason.

Think twice about taking your camera to the beach. Salt, sand and moisture are not good combinations for electronics or lenses. Keep the camera in a bag when not in use. Avoid opening the camera for a lens, card, or battery change which can let in these corrosive elements. Try to do this in a more camera friendly environment.

Remember your flash isn't just for when it is dark. The technique called "fill flash" is used to fill in shadows created by strong sunlight. Forcing your camera to flash, even when it is very bright, can fill in shadows caused by hats and make put a sparkle in your subject's eyes.

And speaking of hats, if your camera does not have a viewfinder and you only compose by viewing the LCD screen. Wearing a hat may help you be able to see your image better.

PHOTO PROVIDED

Learning how to use your self timer along with a mini tripod will allow you to be part of your family get together images.

Take the time to learn more of your camera's features, particularly the self-timer and the pre focus control. A little tabletop tripod and using the self timer will allow you to get in the picture for those family group shots. Mastering the control of pre focus, which is pushing halfway down on the shutter button to have it prepare to shoot, will get you more predictable imagery especially sports images.

As much as you may be tempted to delete pictures you don't like, it is always better to delete them after they have been copied to your computer. I can relate many stories of clients who have come to me for card recovery who tried to delete just one image and ending up erasing them all. Again, don't recycle your pixels in the camera.

Here's one tip that doesn't involve your camera. No matter how much vacation time you are using this summer, don't give your printer one. Inactivity is one of the quickest ways to develop blocked inkjet nozzles. The time and ink spent in clearing them out can be more costly than if you had used the printer to make a few images. Make sure you use your printer every few weeks.

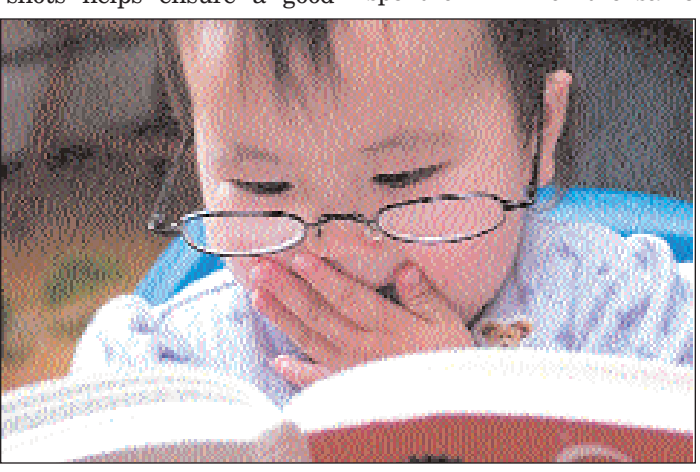

PHOTO PROVIDED

This young reader has discovered a new technique for improving her images.

Digital Summer School

As mainstream as digital imaging has become, it is still a relatively new medium, which is continually evolving. Digital photography has become quicker, better, easier and cheaper. You can now get prints made with the same ease as you once did with film, but if you have more than a casual interest in photography, you know the success behind a good picture is more than just pointing the camera, pressing a button, and hoping you captured something good.

Good photographs are not just accidents, but are part of a creative process. Part of the process is knowing how to use the equipment. Another part of that process is knowing how to take raw images from the camera and to turn it into what you envisioned. Any experienced photographer knows the creative process doesn't stop when the shutter is pressed. Digital imaging has forced photographers into not only learning how the camera works, but also the computer and digital imaging software.

Effectively using cameras, computers and software all require additional education. Some of this can be learned through trial and error, but more often, outside sources might be more effective. Let's explore some of the options.

Books abound on all facets of photography and the digital darkroom. There are books written for almost all major make of camera and an Internet search for Photoshop books, the industry standard software for photo editing, can bring up 1,000's of titles alone. Books are written in many different formats, from an all-inclusive encyclopedia to hand holding step-by-step tutorials. You might want to read reviews on various titles before purchasing.

If you are one of those who gave up cracking books when you got out of school, there are perhaps just as many instructional videos available on DVD. The instructional DVD market has exploded in recent years, as they are cheaper to produce than printed materials. Please note that some of these DVDs are for computer use only. So if you had plans of getting an education from the comfort of your easy chair, you should investigate whether the DVD will play in a home player.

If you prefer live instruction, software and camera manufacturers, as well as professional photographers, offer seminars and are frequently touring the country. On a local level, the Susquehanna Valley Shutterbugs, a local amateur photography club now in its 15th year, can be a great source of information and camaraderie. Even this humble writer is an instructor of digital imaging classes at the Workforce Development and Continuing Education department of the Pennsylvania College of Technology.

However the biggest source of information for a continuing education is right at your computer desktop and is found on the Internet. There are more sites offering advice than I can possibly list. Every company that produces a magazine, book, or photo-related product, usually has a companion Web site with plenty of free tips and tricks. The same can be said for every famous photographer or Photoshop guru that teaches seminars or writes books. Even many lesser known experts will post information just to develop a following. Simply search for what it is you are trying to learn and you may turn up dozens of sites offering free advice. Please note, many sites will provide a certain amount of free information with the idea of hooking you into paying for a subscription that will give you access to the entire site's offerings.

Whichever method you choose, the more you expand your knowledge; the more you will enjoy your photography. Never before have the possibilities of controlling your photographic results been so accessible, you just may have to spend some of your summer learning how.