

IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

Periodical Letter #35
February 2024

from
FREEMAN PATTERSON



Because I'm a mammal, I sleep considerably longer in the short days of winter than I do in the spring and summer, but I'm still an early riser by most people's standards, and soon after saying "Hello" to the darkness, I ease into my comfortable kitchen easy chair to nurse a coffee or savour a cup of jasmine tea. It's warm and cosy there, conducive to meditation or simply being present, a time to give myself to myself.

Superficially, it's the complete opposite in late May and June when the azaleas and rhododendrons are a panoply of colour. Moments after waking I'm dashing out the door, camera in hand and tripod waiting near the garden, to make photographs in that special hour of soft light before the sun rises high enough behind the eastern forest to flood the garden with brilliant light that creates harsh, contrasting black shadows. My purpose, of course, is the same – a gift to myself that matters.

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Oak leaf on snowdrift (circa 1960, Kodachrome, ISO 10)

Kodachrome film was introduced in 1935 and was by far the most popular colour slide film for years, even though Ektachrome (also by Kodak) was brought on line in the 40s. Kodachrome 2 (ISO 25 and less contrasty) became available in 1961, one year before Agfachrome (not colour stable for me.) Fujichrome hit the market in 1990. I used only Kodachrome from 1958 until 1961. The first photo I made on Kodachrome 2 (on the family farm) is on the next page.



"Maybe Maggie Left It!"



Several years ago my long-time teaching partner, André Gallant, provided me with the best guideline for eliminating pictures from my files. "Ask yourself," he said, "will I ever use this photograph for anything?"

Although I always edit when I first file images, I'm rarely brutal, because I'm too close to the experience of making them. Six months later I dare to trust my rational judgement considerably more. It's a lot easier to be objective then.

The editing process is also a process of self-examination. I made every image. Every one is autobiographical. Why did I make that photograph? What moved me? Why am I willing to let go of it now? Or, why am I keeping it?

Personally, I rarely edit on the basis of technical worth. If I've made a boo-boo of a digital file, I can probably fix it or improve it considerably. Rather, I edit on the basis of how well the image describes the subject matter or situation (documentary photographs) and/or how well it conveys my response to it.

Neither do I make a practice of "ranking" the images I save, other than to choose a small number from each particular trip or season and put them in a "Favourites" folder. However, every now and then I feel the need to create an image that has little physical counterpart or none whatsoever. So, I may pull images from anywhere and poke them into folders that exist solely to have visual material at hand for when I go into a dreaming mode.

Everybody edits differently and should. The main thing, it seems to me, is to edit according to your own feelings, unless you're working on a project for somebody else. If you make pictures for yourself, then edit them for yourself, and tell your own story in the process.



In 2003 Michael Khoury invited me to spend six weeks with him in Lebanon – late February through March. One day we drove from Broummana, above Beirut, over Mt. Lebanon and up the Beqaa Valley to the ancient Roman ruins at Baalbek. These are a couple of the scenes I saw going and coming back and I saved both pictures in editing my many images of Lebanon. At the top of the pass the snowbanks were at least 10 feet high. Of course, once we arrived in Baalbek we photographed the enormous ruins for hours.





Phoenician ruins, Tyre, southern Lebanon (not Baalbek)

Part of me celebrated its 24th birthday last week. Yes, it's been that long since the two liver transplants (one five days after the other) that I wasn't expected to survive. My surgeon for the second transplant and I have stayed in touch and we usually exchange messages around the anniversary date. This year he included a very interesting and encouraging statistic. "As a physician," he wrote, "I learned that the odds of a 60-year-old living until the age of 70 are less than the odds of an 80-year-old making the century." Want to go dancing, anybody?

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"The meaning of our life, of this life, is not found in surviving. We don't survive. It's found in the way we live this life." *James Hollis*

"Either that wallpaper has to go or I do." *Oscar Wilde on his deathbed*

Are You POLARIZED?

Other than a multi-stop neutral density filter, which I almost never use, the only filter I have is a polarizing filter or polarizer. I have one for each lens and I never remove it, but simply adjust it according to the direction of the light and what I want to show. In other words, it's always with me.

Although a polarizer tends to be most useful on sunny days when myriad brilliant highlights can defeat colour rendition, it can also be extremely helpful on overcast days, because certain subject matter, such as rhododendron, rose, and many other leaves, or many rusting objects, tend to "wash out" due to the light they reflect from the grey sky.

However, I'm not an "absolutist." Every now and then I prefer the unpolarized image. Here are a couple of comparisons that I hope will prove useful. (Right images polarized.)

By the way, any number of times on a workshop field trip when I've asked a participant if she/he has a polarizer, the reply is "Yes, but I left it in my room." My reply, of course, is "Please tell me, just what are you expecting it to accomplish for you there?"



You can see in the illustrations how tiny highlights (extremely light tones) degrade the rendition of colours (two images above left) and how I've overcome the problem by simply rotating the polarizer on my lens (above right.)

BOOKS

I've spent considerable time in my comfortable kitchen chair this winter perusing this book or that, but settling down to catch every word, fact, and inference in others. Here are a few titles that I'd like to recommend.

When I concluded my slow reading of Yuval Noah Harari's three books, SAPIENS: A Brief History of Humankind, HOMO DEUS: A Brief History of Tomorrow, and Twenty-One Lessons for the Twenty-First Century, I knew that sooner, rather than later, I would read all three books again in the same order.

And, as I was reviewing the last few pages of the third book, I commenced reading (and intermingling with Harari) the opening pages of James Hollis' latest offering, A LIFE OF MEANING: Relocating Your Centre of Spiritual Gravity. Hollis never disappoints, although I thought he'd never surpass LIVING AN EXAMINED LIFE: Wisdom for the Second Half of the Journey. However, I believe he's done it. Or, maybe his most recent book especially resonates with me at this time in my life. However, the following quotation is relevant for everybody.

"When we think about it, we realize that death is actually easy, Nature takes care of that for us. We don't have to worry about that. Life is what's hard. The meaning of our life is found precisely in how luminously we live this brief pause between two great mysteries. Before finding out where we may or may not be going, it might be more productive to be sure first that we manage to be here in the first place." (Underscoring is mine.)

I usually buy paperbacks, so I don't mind sticking "post its" on the pages or marking lines or passages with a pencil, if I want. Before I was halfway through this book I was digging in a desk drawer for my pencil sharpener.

Then, a new friend came to call and left me with a copy of In the Shelter by the Irish poet and theologian Pádraig Ó Tuama. To quote from the back cover, this is "a work of prose that reads like poetry; exploring safety, sexuality, history, violence, and religion." Superb!

Another friend strongly recommends and gave to his wife for Christmas TO BLESS THE SPACE BETWEEN US: A Book of Blessings by another Irish writer, the much-read John O'Donohue. O'Donohue's classic Anam Cara (soul friend) and BEAUTY: The Invisible Embrace will never leave my bookshelves, except to be read again.

Finally, a couple of books on creativity and art, the first of which goes to great lengths to make the point that creativity operates in every area of life, not just in art. The two are THE CREATIVE ACT: A Way of Being by Rick Rubin and YOUR BRAIN ON ART: How the Arts Transform Us, by Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross. Here's an excerpt from the second:

"Many of us tend to think that ... the arts are a luxury of some kind. [But,] the arts are so much more. They can be used to fundamentally change your day-to-day life. They can help address serious physical and mental health issues, with remarkable results. And they can help you learn and flourish."



Besides reading, I've been cooking up a storm – fish chowders, fricots (thick chicken stews with lots of onions, potatoes, and carrots,) cabbage-and-tomato soups, and baked beans. All of these are regional favourites and easy to freeze and reheat for either guests or myself. The seasonings are critical to all of them, but that doesn't mean that I don't vary them. There's no reason why every good fish chowder or fricot has to taste the same. I'm fluent in "microwave," having thrown out my stove 40 years ago because of the electricity it consumed, and have a slow cooker as well. It's all I need, although I added an air fryer a year ago, which I use occasionally.

Also, I've also been making my own labaneh since returning from Israel and Jordan last year, having decided that I'm not going to live without it any longer. It's very easy to make from inexpensive natural Balkan-style yogurt, which has no gelatin in it, unlike Greek yogurt. I love a small bowl of plain labaneh, though sometimes I stir in some olive oil and zaatar (mixed herbs and spices.) Other times I serve it as dessert – topped with either maple syrup or honey and crushed walnuts. The sweet-sour combination is a delightful surprise for most guests.

I am mightily impressed by mid-eastern breakfasts with their typical range of soft white local cheeses, labaneh, hummus, salads (oil dressings only,) small sweet peppers, quiches, healthy breads, fruits, and juices. I'm sure there are boxed cereals lurking in the supermarkets of the Middle East, but nobody has ever presented me with one during my several trips to the region – for which I give effusive thanks. I also add lots of whole grains, nuts, and seeds to my morning culinary spread or other meals.

"It is not the tool that is crucial to the art, but the ability of the craftsman."

Gregory Bateson

"All art is craft, but not all craft is art." *FP*

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River ice near my home (cracks caused by rise and fall of the tide)

WORKSHOPS

Registrations for workshops are coming in again after the usual holiday lull, although some spaces remain as of February 1. I've also received requests for one-day workshops at Shamber's Bluff for one to three persons, which I can tailor to the interests and needs of the individual(s.) My cottage (small, fully-furnished house) across the field from my own house is available for rent at a reduced price for anybody who requires accommodation.

Although I give numerous ZOOM, Webex, etc. presentations, I do not teach on-line workshops, as it's simply impossible to match the quality of instruction, evaluation, discussion, and sharing that an on-site workshop with a limited number of participants enables. Meal times are a huge part of workshops too and not only because of the cuisine!

Except for INSCAPE in the last week of June, I'm reserving that month to spend full time in my garden, and I expect to be returning to Namaqualand for August.

Recommendations OLD and NEW

Is it time to share this first link again? It's a great, quick exercise if you find yourself sitting long periods in front of a computer or confined indoors because of winter cold. If you can't complete the three rotations when you first try, do not despair. Success should not take long. (I vary the first step slightly, by keeping my arms straight down at my sides for the knee bends, rather than extending them in front of me.)

[ZACH BUSH MD | 4 Minute Workout - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwJCJToQmps)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwJCJToQmps>



This is an efficient anaerobic workout.

Here's a 2008 musical piece with several musicians around the world that I've shared before, but just in case you've never heard it, I'm mentioning it again. You'll be sharing it with others.

[Stand By Me | Playing For Change | Song Around The World ...](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Us-TVg40ExM)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Us-TVg40ExM>



And then there's **HUMAN: The Movie** by Yann Arthus-Bertrand

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fC5qucSk18w>

One of the most engrossing films I've ever viewed! The cinematography is spellbinding; the music by Armand Amar is haunting. It's three hours, eleven minutes long, and worth every second of your time.



My best to all! Mes meilleurs vœux à tous! Beste wense, almal!
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www.freemanpatterson.com [SUBSCRIBE \(for free\)](#) freemanpatterson23@gmail.com