

Tips on Photography from Richard Van Inwegen

Do not be afraid to make mistakes – My favorite quote is by J. Wooden, a basketball coach – “If you are not making mistakes you are not doing. ...a doer makes mistakes.” Try new things, learn from your mistakes and do not get discouraged. When first learning to walk you fall, but you get back up and continue on. I still make lots of mistakes but I realize it is a way to continue learning.

Learn to See - “A camera is a tool for learning how to see without a camera.” (D. Lange). The learning part is never-ending. You need to learn about the camera and most importantly learn about your subject. Every subject you photograph is different - be it a bird or a person or pretty scene. Behaviors, actions, emotions are all different. The light and the environment are always changing. You need to see these differences and understand them to capture the moment. The camera is only a tool to be used to capture that moment.

Practice, practice, practice – Everyone learns by practicing and did I mention – learning from your mistakes?

Learn to tell visual stories – every photograph is a way to communicate a story to the viewer. It is your story to tell and you decide how you want to present it. Do you just want a picture of a pretty bird or do you want to show what the bird is doing?

Think about what you are going to photograph before pushing that button. The most important part of the camera is between your ears – you need to use your knowledge and vision to create the photo. For birds you may need to react quickly so you need to be prepared for the action to happen and anticipate it.

Work at every image – anyone can buy a good camera and just push a button. But you need to search for the best image to tell the story you want to tell. It is not always obvious even to professionals. A really good baseball player only gets on base three out of every ten

times. I give the symphony only one or two of every ten images I shoot. I take lots of images trying different settings, different viewpoints, and different compositions.

Learn from others - “The heart and mind are the true lens of the camera.” (Y. Karsh)
Your learning needs to be not just from other photographers but also from all types of artists including musicians. Try to see what others see and the “stories” they tell. Adapt what you learn to your own images.

Interesting photos are everywhere - although there may be great images to be found in far away places, many are right in your own back yard. Some of the selected images are from my back yard.

Patience and Respect - This is particularly important with birds. All animals that you photograph need to feel safe and non-threatened; you should not chase them or make them nervous. You need to watch and learn their behavior to get a good image. I have stayed for an hour or more with a loon and her chicks, making sure to stay far enough away so that she and the babies did not feel threatened. If you see that the animal you are trying to photograph is bothered by your presence, you need to respect your subjects and back off - you are a guest in their home.

Don't forget to take time to enjoy the experience. Appreciate what you are shooting and learn as much as you can about it.