

- Portraiture
- Editing
- Rates

Photography

Photographers I Have Loved and Known

April 21, 2018 | Charles T. Low, Photographer

Photographic Influences Good ... and Superlative!

I think it fair to say that I do not recall any bad photographic influences. Unlike in some other lines of work, little waste occurs and very little harm, even when an influence turns out not to advance the craft; even then, at least one finds out what one does not like!



It all starts at home

My parents got me some sort of humble Kodak camera when I was about ten. They paid for the occasional roll of film - and that back in the days when I actually had to roll the film on.



I have some photos tucked away in an album of a group of fellow cottagers taken at a forty-five degree angle. I think that must have presaged something!

Now, my Dad liked taking pictures. It was part of his work as well as occasionally his leisure, but to the best of my recollection he had no training or aspirations, beyond finding something interesting and then releasing the shutter.

But as I grew into my teens, I picked up his camera and studied the controls. I was not encouraged actually to take photographs with it! But its very presence in the house intrigued me.

Featured Posts



Instructional Photography Walk

December 12, 2017

Recent Posts



Event Photography

May 19, 2018



Photographers I Have Loved and Known

April 21, 2018



A Week in Photography

April 1, 2018



Photographic Light

March 24, 2018



Depth of Field

March 10, 2018



Not Just Any Barn Photography

March 4, 2018



Film-Photography Renaissance

February 24, 2018



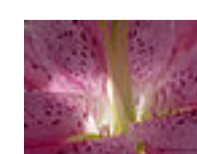
Photography While Downhill Skiing

February 18, 2018



Got Up and Went ... Photographing!

February 8, 2018



Seeing versus Looking

February 2, 2018

Archive

May 2018 (1)

I remember my father playing a bit with photography. For example, he had us all jump into a pool, and used a fast shutter speed to freeze not only the action but also the water drops.

My mother took up painting, and I was so happy for her to have such a creative outlet, and the family of course still has many of her works. But I did not feel that pull.

The camera, on the other hand ...

A bit later, our parents got me and my two brothers each the same camera model - an Olympus Trip 35. This interesting apparatus - which I still have and which worked the last time I tried it - could operate completely automatically without batteries, which must remain a credit to Olympus engineering ingenuity to this day. It had four focal settings, and with a little more manual input could connect to a flash unit.

Many of you will have seen a photo I made with this camera, which continues to please me.



[Olympus Trip 35 - Algonquin Park Dawn Mist, c.1980](#)

Camera store staff enjoyed some of the photos I had developed from that camera, and more than one said not to be deterred by its small size and simplicity, as it was known to have a very good lens.



[Olympus Trip 35](#)

During all of this time, I did *not* take up photography as a hobby with any dedication. I recall an acquaintance from the camera club at high school showing me around the darkroom, and I thought it all very cool, but didn't see how I could fit it into my busy life ... how valid that hesitation was, I will never know. Also, I thought that the yearbook photography was outstanding, but that it would take me some time to achieve that level of inventiveness.

Through the next decade, I took pictures the way many people did - when on vacation, for example.

April 2018 (2)

March 2018 (3)

February 2018 (4)

January 2018 (3)

December 2017 (2)

November 2017 (2)

October 2017 (1)

Search By Tags

Balleycanoe Christmas
aperture architecture art
assignment camera cause
chaos commision composition
depth depth of field digital
downhill dynamic equipment
event field filme gallery gift
healthcare impromptu
influences instruction iris
justice lens life light looking
mentors outdoors people
photo photographers
photography portrait practice
prowl rules salvage seeing
seminar shoot skiing tools
walk week wrinkles

Follow ctLow Photography



From time to time I attempted to construct a photo-diary of people in my life, but after getting one in-focus snap, that would often be it.

Then, one day, my mother showed me the Christmas present she had purchased for my father - a Pentax K-1000. I got to hold it in my hands, the first single-lens-reflex, interchangeable lens camera I had seen, adjusting all of the settings (without any film in it). Something stirred in my imagination.

So, thanks to my parents for providing me with my first two cameras, and for exposing me to photography with more fully-featured cameras!

My First SLR

Someone else noticed that photographic stirring, the interest which my father's new camera had piqued in me, and a year or two afterwards, I found a new camera in my own hands, a gift from someone in my inner circle. I was 29 years old. With that camera, a Minolta X-700, I knew that all of my wants and hopes for the rest of my life had been answered, and I did the thing which many new-camera owners do - raced out and shot a roll of film.



[Minolta X-Series System - still mourned, as digital has supplanted it!](#)

The prints which returned were dreadful, worse, if anything, than with my previous two cameras, and I was terribly disappointed, but at least had the good sense to blame myself, not the hardware. I give myself a least a little credit for not giving up, but resolving to see if I could master this problem - a problem I might describe as living up to the camera's potential.

I began to learn about *making*, not taking, photographs. Early lesson: the camera can only take, not make, a photograph. Getting it good requires active input and understanding, and as I nurtured those skills, the odd photo turned out well - better than I could have achieved with lesser equipment.

None of that might have happened if someone hadn't given me that camera!



Stump - c. 1984, with my first fully-adjustable, interchangeable-lens camera. I'm still pleased that I recognized the powerful shape and textures ... and the [light!](#)

I subscribed to magazines, and found some very useful information there, although learned quite quickly that I had to wade through innumerable reviews of the latest cameras and lenses, none of which I would ever own - I already had a camera and lens, and began adding to my collection - interspersed with quite infrequent articles about the actual craft.

Currently I am reading the monthly *Professional Photographer*, which is good, not so obsessed with equipment, although a bit focussed, and rightly so, on the *business* of photography, along with the art.

So of course, I bought a few books. Two early influences were Freeman Patterson - more on him in a moment - and *The 35 mm Photographer's Handbook* by Julian Calder and John Garret. There are a gazillion books on introductory photography, and I find most of them unsuitable, as too simplistic and/or dogmatic. I came across one a few years back which essentially gave menus, such as "always use a wide-angle lens for urban photography," which of course is utter nonsense - you will eventually use every lens in your arsenal, is the correct answer (which doesn't necessarily help a beginner either).

Calder and Garret hit just the right tone for me, reviewing the basics of adjustable settings, what they do and how you might want to use them, and then illustrating a variety of photographic scenarios and how they might approach them.

It really had very little to do with 35 mm cameras specifically, as introductions to photography still have little to do with *digital*, although that word has to be in the title, apparently, for a book to sell. (And there are things about digital which are different, but the basics of light and composition, aperture and shutter speed, all of which is where we win or lose, haven't changed much.)

I believe that the last edition of the Calder/Garret book came out in 1999, so it may be hard to come by, and ... won't cover digital photography! Don't say I recommend it for modern times; all I can say is that it helped me significantly, early on. If you want a book on photography for beginners, then you're on your own, I'm afraid, but just know that not all of them are stellar.

Freeman Patterson is an interesting guy from New Brunswick, who did formal art studies and wrote a Master's thesis on the relation of photography to spirituality, which would be enough to lose my interest immediately under normal circumstances. But he produced a series of easily-digestible books, and in combination with attending day-long seminars of his twice, everything about his instruction came, again, at just the right time for me.

Whether you like his photography is a different matter. People, naturally, vary on this. I personally have found it very impressive, but that doesn't matter as much as that he introduced me to new ways of thinking about making - not taking - photographs.

If I have to choose just one, I recommend *Photography and the Art of Seeing*. But by all means, get several.

Other books include several of the portraiture works of Yousuf Karsh (of Ottawa). Karsh doesn't discuss the technicalities of his photography, technicalities with which he was most certainly intimately familiar, as much as the interpersonal aspects of his work, but I would say that I learned a great deal just by thinking about the posing and the lighting.

If you can find the portrait he did of Sophia Loren, it's worth the price of a book just for that.



Sophia Loren by Yousuf Karsh

There of course have been others. I read Ansel Adam's autobiography, and learned quite a bit from it, but not about the technical minutiae of photography. (He has written about that in other books.) I learned about passion, persistence, and about cultivating and nurturing artistic relationships.

I cannot currently recall the title of a Canadian landscape photography book which I devoured, and from which I learned that landscape photography is very dynamic, chasing the light, sometimes actively running.

Seeing With Other People

The first photographer I met, after having taken up the craft more seriously, with my new, more substantial camera, was a professional photographer, Terry P., who we hired for a few sittings on various occasions, and who eventually became a friend. He is now retired, or I would refer you to him. It amazed me that someone would have the nerve to hang out a shingle as a professional photographer, and hope to make a living at it! But he did. As I picked up my developed prints and slides at his shop, I could quiz him on my own puzzling failures (or successes), and he knew his craft and always had a ready, intelligent, useful answer.



Terry P., early photographic mentor

We have and still proudly display, more than thirty years later, a print we bought of his, and to hear the story of how seemingly casually he made what would be, to most photographers, a significant technical challenge, is simply amazing.

I absorbed a lot just by knowing him. We moved away, but keep in touch.

At about the same stage of my life, another photographer entered, Pete Milnes, this one through a family connection. This fellow had completed formal photographic studies, and then gone into an unrelated line of work, with which to make his living, but had - and has - and amazing eye. Just looking at his work, and watching him working, revealed quite a bit about how to construct an image which pleases, or intrigues.



Peter Milnes

We went out with cameras one day into the woods. I snapped off a roll of 36, which to a pro would be nothing but to me felt quite extravagant. Over the course of an hour to two, Peter took about six.

When our films came back from development, I had about two good ones, and he had about four.

It was one of those watershed moments. Although it is true that you're more likely to get a good shot if you take lots of pictures, it is *true* that you will get good shots with patience and care.



A recent photo by Peter Milnes

This friend then moved away. :-)

Peter Milnes 1969



Peter Milnes. I didn't know much about visual art in the 1970s, but I knew I had chanced upon an extraordinary talent. Note that no one is even going to think about the technology in use at the time ("but I still love technology" - Kip, *Napoleon Dynamite*); it's all about light (very skilful - have a second look) and composition. (I was, frankly, a bit intimidated, and didn't mention anything to him about it until years later.)

From there, I did my photography for a few decades in relative isolation. That's just the way life went, and I had - as during high school - many distractions which effectively prevented me, for example, from joining a photography club. I also could not have imagined ever locking myself away in a dark-room for an hour, without having a serious risk of having to interrupt the session. So thank goodness when digital editing came along.

I continued to practise photography, to read, and also I would say never undervalue the importance of just looking at the work of other photographers. An easy and useful source is magazine articles, be they in, for example, geography magazines - not necessarily *photography* magazines - or advertisements. The photographers who do advertisements are highly accomplished, and much can be gleaned just by thinking about how they might have set up a shot.

One of my work colleagues was an accomplished photographer, and I would admire his work, and find in it inspiration to advance my own skills (i.e. I felt a little competition creep in ...).

A few other people close to me have very good eyes for photography, but their lives have gone in different directions. Distractions! They happen! But that might eventually change.

I became known in my personal circles as the photographer. Early annoyance at my perpetual pointing of the camera at people eventually gave way, in most cases, to appreciation for the memories preserved. (It's also true that I won't aim a camera at anybody for hours without stopping.)

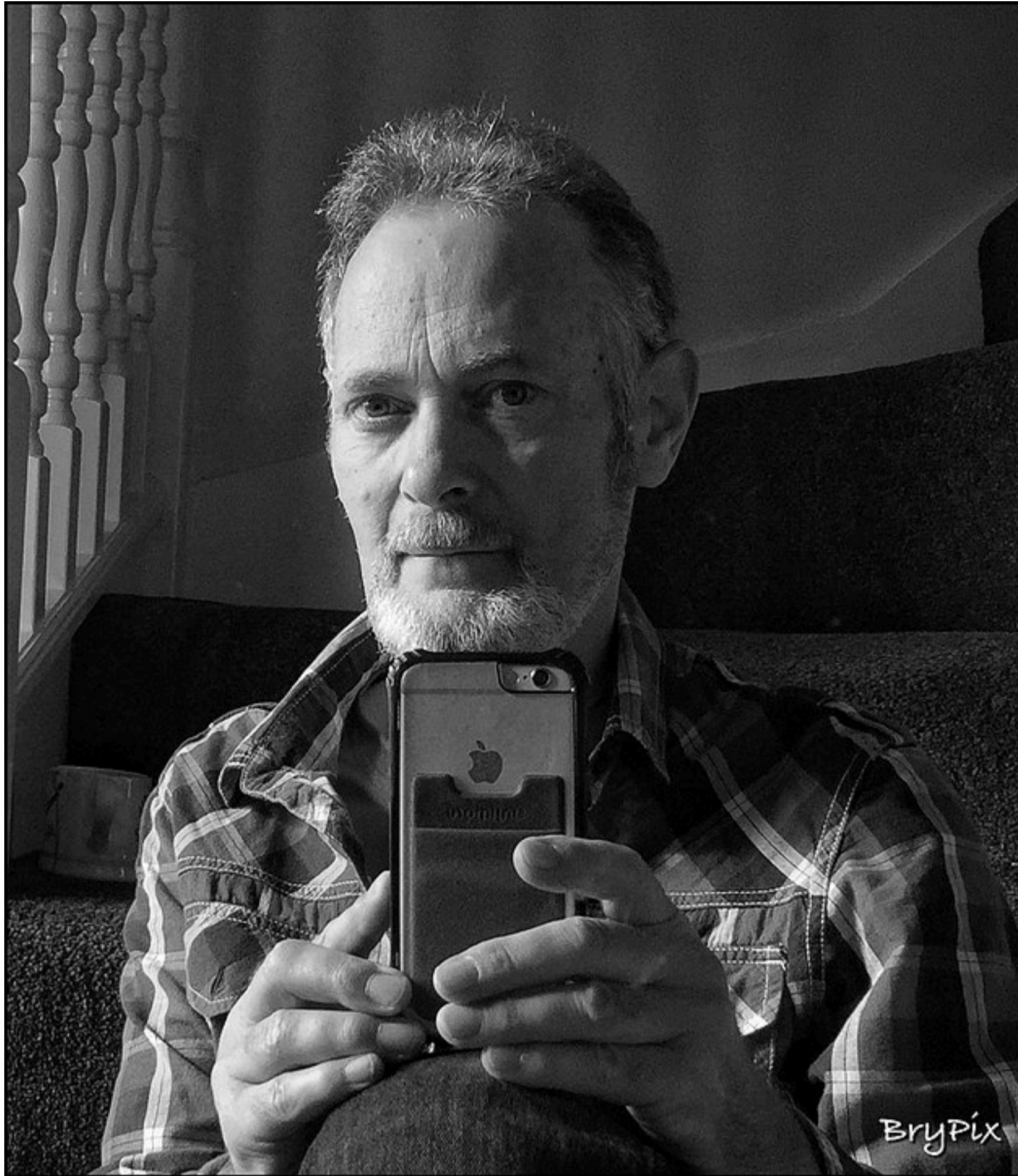
A few in this inner circle have also become my most honest critics, and they have improved my work immeasurably by both their sincerity and by their continued encouragement. Too all of them, I owe a most heartfelt thank you.

I rolled into a cousin's wedding one day, decades ago, to find that the bride's mother had just learned that the couple had hired a wedding photographer ... but only to show up for the reception, not the ceremony (for reasons of frugality). Would I step in?

I was never so scared in my life, but of course I said yes, and given my complete lack of experience or appropriate equipment, pulled something together which I thought was respectable. The experience helped convince me that I was on to something, and to continue to apply myself. (It also helped convince me not to do weddings!)

A secondary network of photographers, too numerous to mention, has arisen, partly because they recognize my interest and partly because I have sought them out. They have all offered something useful and progressive.

More lately, I bumped into someone quite by chance on the Internet, Peter Bryenton, who understands about photography, and particularly about light, in a way which I think I never will. He somehow came across an essay I wrote about [Photography Basics](#), complimented me on it ... and we were off. Having to date never met in person, we seem to nurture something important in each other, and every so often he emails me, saying, "Charles, I have an exercise for you to do", and most of the time, I actually do it. He knows that he no longer has to ask if he may be frank. I learn through his honesty.



[Peter Bryenton](#)

It has been a phenomenally positive influence on my photography, and I will forever be in his debt.

He suggested that I read *Light, Science and Magic* (by Hunter, Biver and Fuqua), and again, while many books exist on similar topics, this one simply hit me at the right level and at the right time.



[Peter Bryenton has a remarkable eye for shadow patterns](#)

It is very unusual and serendipitous to come across someone like Peter Bryenton who has worked professionally at a high level in light and photography for decades, and now is willing simply to help me, recognizing an eager student, a student who doesn't want compliments but wants to be better, however brutal the process might sometimes be.



Peter Bryenton and his feel for light

And yet, it isn't brutal at all. It will often go like this: "Charles, that's great, you're seeing things which few could see, and now ... just two little things ..."

The two little things have added up, these past years!

Thank you so much.

We Accomplish Nothing Alone

Ultimately, my training and life experience combine to foster this sentiment: we accomplish nothing significant alone, and this despite that many individuals are brilliant, hard-working, insightful geniuses, achieving what few of us could ever hope to approach. We all need a support structure, and whatever humble achievements I have made in my own photography are due, in large part, to the encouragement and example and unflinching, but compassionate, frankness of many other people.

Both in my art and in my coaching, there are many people who have, along the way, helped bring me to this point.

It has felt such an honour as I more and more fulfill the role of mentor, rather than student, although as any teacher knows, the lines do blur. Whatever help I can offer to aspiring photographers, I always remain aware of the many people behind me who have brought me here ... and I still often call them up, after doing some coaching, and review with them how it went!

While you're here:

Remember that I make photographs and that I sell photographs.

Almost everything which you see on this web site is for sale. Prices at the time of writing, for example, for an 11x14" fine-art print with a generous white border would start at about \$40, and you can go up or down from there. Check the [rates](#) page. More importantly, check out my [gallery](#).

Book a portrait-sitting - the right frequency with which to commission formal [portraits](#) is a bit more often.

Remember also to leave a comment, or to [contact](#) me. Note that on the main [blog](#) page you can sign up for new-blog notifications. I am very careful and respectful with your privacy.

Thank you so much for reading.

Charles T. Low
Photographer



Tags: photography people mentors influences art photographers

