

Photography is a tool to express ourselves in many unique ways and the mind set responsible for this is as unique as each member of the club. I would like to thank John Pace for sharing some of his time with us as we get a glimpse of how he sees the world.

Malcolm McElvaney – How did you initially get into photography?

John Pace - When I was a child, I used to look at the photographs in my parent's National Geographic magazines. I was fascinated and decided that I wanted to be a Nat Geo photographer. They had to be rich and famous because their pictures were in magazines, right? At the age of 12-13, my parents gave me an official Boy Scout camera to use when I went to Boy Scout summer camp. It used 120 roll film and it took me a while to learn how to load and unload the film. I don't think any of those old pictures have survived, but I still have the camera and it seems to still be functional.

I bought my first SLR when I was 19 years old. I think it was an entry level Pentax. That would have been in 1976. Taught myself how to use it, so there were many bad pics. Occasionally, I would get it right and those "good" pictures were what kept me shooting. A few years later, I got a hand-me-down Olympus OM10. It had a much better light meter and I was able to get more consistent results. All this time I had been shooting mostly family pictures and would sometimes take pictures for my friends.

About 1988, I took Photography 101 at Midland College under Kent Moss. I wanted to take the course mostly to learn how to develop and print images, but this class became the turning point. I learned a lot about composition, as well as how to critique and be critiqued. From then on I started pushing myself out of my comfort zone, doing portraits, weddings, sports and events on a small, part time basis.

This is how I got started in photography. Once I found out that National Geographic photographers weren't necessarily rich and famous and usually had to buy their own equipment, I put that on the back burner. It's still sometimes on my mind, though.

It is good to have a dream to aspire to hopefully you will get your shot at it. What role does a critique of one's work and helping others critique their work play in photography?

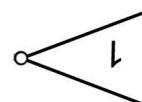
Learning how to give and receive a critique is a big learning experience and one of the major milestones in photography. When I started photography school, I was not prepared for others to "pick apart" my work. Nor did I know how to critique other people's work. We did weekly critiques of each other's work and I found it terrifying. I felt with each image, I was baring my soul and I took it personally at first. Only after several weeks did I look forward to other people commenting and offering constructive criticism. I learned how to learn from this feedback and it helped improve my photography skills a lot. I got to view and critique other people's images and had to learn how to comment on what I liked about them and how they could be improved. This was just as helpful for my own skills as it was for the presenting photographer.

A critique should be done properly or it may not be useful or meaningful for the photographer. Or worse, it may convey the wrong message. I believe a proper critique should first start with positive comments and compliments. What are the good points of the photograph? Then very nicely, comment on what would improve the image and why. Then, reinforce the strong points of the image and finish on a positive note. It doesn't always work out this way, but I think this is a good guide.

Nowadays most photographers don't get much of a real critique. Many times we offer up an image, often on social media, and judge the quality of the photograph by the number of likes. It may even get a lot of comments like great shot or that's beautiful. This may give you a sense of validation, but it does not tell you what is good or what could be improved. This can only be done by an honest constructive critique.

It was the post about your hummingbird workshop that caught my attention, when did you start conducting workshops?

The first actual "workshop" I hosted was specifically for Sibley Nature Center Camera Club in May of 2019. I had been hearing stories about the club members getting skunked on a workshop a couple weeks earlier and figured hey, I have tons of hummers. Why don't y'all come here. Prior to that, I had only had a couple friends over to photograph the many hummingbirds I have during migration. I had previously attended a couple of bird related photography workshops and felt like I had something to offer others that were interested. BTW, the first workshop filled up and we all had a good time. Not to mention thousands of photos.



With so many photographers of varying experience levels and expectations I would assume you have to be prepared for almost anything. What have you learned from conducting your workshops?

I generally start my workshops with a prepared PowerPoint presentation. This gives everybody an idea of what we will be doing and why. I offer as much help as each individual wants. Some don't want any help, and some want me to do everything but press the button for them. I want it to be a learning experience for everybody, even the seasoned photographers. So far, I believe all of my attendees have learned more than they expected.

It helps to have extra gear, especially when working with multiple flashes. Extra flashes, light stands, connectors, transmitters, triggers, gaff tape, memory cards, batteries. The list goes on. Always have a plan B and offer a little more than expected. Try to keep the mood light and cheery. I also encourage everyone in attendance to make friends with each other.

Thank you for sharing a little bit of the behind the scenes of doing a workshop. What advice would you give someone trying to learn photography?

Advice for people wanting to learn photography. Take classes, either in person or online. Paid classes from a competent instructor is usually much better than what you might find on Youtube. With that being said, there's a lot to learn on Youtube. Experiment and take lots of pictures. You will find what genre of photography you are most interested in. You don't have to spend a ton of money right off the bat. Sure, the ads for new gear is very tempting (I know this very well). Learn everything you can about the gear you already have and how to use it. Hang out with other photographers and ask questions. Show your work to them for their opinions and recommendations for improvement. Push yourself out of your comfort zone to try new techniques.

Do you share your work online and if so where could people go to see more of your photography?

I'm a member of many groups on facebook. They include photography groups, bird groups, wildlife groups, and landscape photography groups. I enter contests and challenges on Viewbug as well as some local and bigger contests. I have a website that I have been neglecting for a while, but it's still up and can be seen here:

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