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# LENSWORK

Photography and the Creative Process • Articles • Interviews • Portfolios • Fine Art Special Editions

No. 59 Jul - Aug 2005



Interview  
**Stu Levy**

Article  
**Hugh MacLeod**  
EndNotes  
**Bill Jay**

Portfolios  
**Carol Golemboski**  
**Vladimir Kabelik**  
**Stu Levy**



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# LENSWORK

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*Photography and the Creative Process*  
*Articles • Interviews • Portfolios*

*Editors*  
Brooks Jensen  
Maureen Gallagher

In this issue

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**Hugh MacLeod**

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**Stu Levy**

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ISSN #1075-5624

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Printed in Canada

LENSWORK Publishing

909 Third Street  
Anacortes, WA 98221-1502

USA Voice Toll Free  
**1-800-659-2130**

USA FAX Toll Free  
**1-800-866-7459**

Voice (360) 588-1343  
FAX (503) 905-6111

E-mail [editor@lenswork.com](mailto:editor@lenswork.com)  
Web site at [www.lenswork.com](http://www.lenswork.com)

JULY - AUGUST 2005

LENSWORK #59

*LensWork* (ISSN 1075-5624) is published six times annually (in odd numbered months) by LensWork Publishing, 909 Third St, Anacortes, WA 98221-1502. Subscriptions are available within the United States for \$29 for 4-issues, \$39 for 6-issues, or \$75 for 12-issues. Canada and Mexico subscription rates are \$39 for 4-issues, \$53 for 6-issues, or \$105 for 12-issues. Overseas subscription rates are \$49 for 4-issues, \$69 for 6-issues, or \$135 for 12-issues. Periodicals Postage Paid at Anacortes, Washington and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to LensWork Publishing, 909 Third St, Anacortes, WA 98221-1502.

Cover Image by Stu Levy  
*Havasus Stream*  
from *Side Canyons of the Colorado*



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# EDITOR'S COMMENTS



## *Lessons from a Photographic Friendship*

I met my friend Joe Lipka in 1983 when we attended a workshop together. Ever since then we've been photographic compatriots. In 1988, Joe moved to North Carolina, the kind of cross-country move that would normally take a toll on a friendship. Fortunately, our photographic bonds gave us a reason to get together whenever we could to share time photographing and "shooting the photographic breeze." Every year for 17 years Joe and I have spent a week's vacation wandering the country, cameras in hand, swapping stories, prints, techniques, frustrations, and most of all encouragement. We did so again a few weeks ago, and as we have for so many years during our annual photo safari talked to the wee hours of each morning about all things photographic – including our 17 years of efforts. In our parents' generation, men used to go hunting together as a form of male bonding and a manly pursuit: now we go make art. Fortunately, our wives have been as accommodating and understanding as the previous generations.

It dawned on me that in 17 years of photographing together we've probably learned *something* that would be worth

sharing. So, here's a list of a few odds and ends that might be useful.

#1.) First and most importantly, before you leave the house and drive 800 miles on dirt roads, be sure you pack the groundglass back of the 8x10 camera. Do not assume the other guy has done so. It is not the best plan to discover your mistake when setting up the camera for the week's first exposure.

#2.) There are great landscape *locations*, and there is great landscape *light*. The best photographs are made when the two come together. That rarely happens when you spend your entire week driving around looking for it. As a strategy, it's much better to find the right landscape and wait for the light rather than find yourself in the right light scrambling for some subject matter of interest.

#3.) There are two activities that look deceptively similar but are substantially different; searching for a *photograph*, and searching for a *location*. You can spend all kinds of time searching for a location and not end up with any good photographs. It's better to have done a little research,

found the location, and then go there looking for photographs. “Destination location” photography will always produce more of interest than random searching – although random searching is a wonderful excuse for wandering the countryside to see what’s there. Discovery is fun; it’s just not very efficient.

#4.) If you’ve ever worried about photographing with someone else in tow, fearing that you might make photographs that are too similar, rest assured this does not happen. In fact, two photographers can place their tripods in each other’s tripod holes, use the same cameras, film, lenses, and meters and will, under no circumstances, make photographs that are identical. It cannot be done. It cannot be done even if you’re *trying* to do it.

#5.) The old photographic cliché “f/8 and be there” may not be as cliché and hokey as it sounds. In fact, it may be photographic words to live by.

#6.) Photography rarely happens on a timetable. Don’t be surprised if the person you’re photographing with is taking a nap while you’re making the best photographs of your life. And vice versa.

#7.) At the end of a long day of intense photographing there is nothing that beats the reward of a cold Henry Weinhard’s

Private Reserve. (Joe would insist that I include this one.)

#8.) The ratio of time that it takes to organize, pack, travel, secure lodgings, grab a meal, get to the photographic location, and start looking for photographs when compared to the amount of time one actually spends being creative is about  $10^{23}$  to 1. If the “logistics time” is not also fun, then the creative time will be severely compromised.

#9.) When traveling with a photo partner there will come many moments when your partner wants to stop and photograph and you have no idea what they see or why they could possibly want to stop *here*. Trust their judgment and stop, get out of the car, and start looking for photographs. There is an undeniable freshness that accompanies the challenge of looking for photographs in a place of someone else’s choosing. It’s amazing how many good photographs you can find when you start looking in places that are outside your habits.

#10.) At some point after the photographic trip is over, your photo compatriot will show you their prints. If you pay attention, you’ll learn more about your prejudices and habits of seeing than in almost any other exercise you could conceive. It is amazing how this individual could be at exactly the same location that

you were and create such wonderfully different art. In fact, other than the obvious enjoyment of simply sharing friendship, this may be one of the most interesting and useful aspects of going photographing with someone else.

#11.) Three of the most often overlooked and incredibly useful photographic tools are the stepladder, the detailed map with county roads, and the Costco bucket of Red Vines.

#12.) Photography requires patience as much as it does luck. Some outings will be incredibly productive, some frustratingly fallow. However, *discussing* photography is never a waste of time because there is always something to learn, some new way of thinking, some unexpected insight, or some new knowledge that will become useful – eventually.

#13.) The kinds of discussions that you have during a week-long photographic trip are entirely different than the discussions you have over the phone in the midst of everyday life. You certainly will not solve the world’s problems, you may not even improve your photography, but you will find that you will learn something about yourself – and that is always a useful thing for an artist to do.

#14.) It is instructive to watch another photographer work. Watch how they

approach the subject matter, pay attention to what they look at, note the sequence of their creative process. Later, when you won’t interrupt their process, ask them about what you observed. It’s a fascinating and useful exercise to see how others have solved the same creative puzzles that you, too, are exploring.

#15.) Whenever two photographers work together there is a seductive temptation to do a joint photographic project. It can be done, but it is more difficult than it looks. Issues of photographic style, subject differences, even printing logistics (e.g., Joe prints platinum and palladium, I print silver or digitally) can make it difficult to create a harmonious result. Nonetheless, it’s a great deal of fun to attempt to do so. Try using Polaroids. You may not, however, use the term “parallelaroids” because it’s already been taken.

#16.) One of the more interesting things we’ve done in our years photographing together was introduced a few years ago when we started experimenting with digital cameras. Each night Joe and I would upload our day’s work to his laptop computer. We could then review the raw images of the day and offer to each other a sort of “instant critique” – obviously not a critique of a final print, but rather comments on the process of photographing in the field. It’s been fascinating to observe how we see each other’s raw compositions.

This is the kind of unguarded exchange that can only be successful between individuals who care for and respect each other's creative process. It's difficult enough to show your finished photographs to the world, but to show your unvarnished "contact sheets" requires a trust that is best developed through years of friendship.

#17.) I am undoubtedly the world's largest collector of original Joe Lipka photographs. Joe is undoubtedly the world's largest collector of mine. There is a special joy and preciousness in owning a piece of work you know about, possibly because you were standing right there when the image was made, but mostly because you know the experience and toil a photographer endured to make the image. I suppose if I could know the stories from anyone's art I could feel the same way, but I can't – except with friends like Joe. For me, that makes his prints even more special.

#18.) Anyone involved in the creative process is likely to have hundreds of ideas, maybe even a few *good* ones. It is handy, even necessary, to have a friend upon whose judgment you can rely. There is nothing more valuable in the life of the creative artist than a friend who will be honest about the crap you've made. Conversely, there are few things more valuable than a friend's honest praise.

#19.) A good friend always brings an extra tripod. Just in case you forget yours. In the Toronto airport. Trust me on this one.

#20.) It is possible, both in theory and practice, to find yourself at the end of the week having discussed every possible thing there is to discuss in the world of photography – *everything*. It is amazing, however, that next year you will have enough to discuss for another week and never repeat a topic. As you look back on it, you will find that after years of making photographs together it is still possible to look forward to next year's new location, next year's new adventures.

Thirty-five years ago I became interested in photography because of the magic I saw in images. I underestimated, however, the power of photography to connect me to *people*. Through photography I've met people who have become friends (and one very special one who became my wife), met people I've photographed, people whose work I admire and enjoy, people whose work I collect, people who collect my work – a world of people who I am sure I would never have met were it not for our mutual love of images, of photography. No one told me this was a reason to be a photographer, but it's a darned good one.





# REMEMBERING PRAGUE



*by*

Vladimir Kabelik



# HOW TO BE CREATIVE

*Excerpts from an Ongoing Blog Commentary*

*by*

Hugh MacLeod

***1. Everyone is born creative; everyone is given a box of crayons in kindergarten.***

Then when you hit puberty they take the crayons away and replace them with books on algebra, etc. Being suddenly hit years later with the creative bug is just a wee voice telling you, “I’d like my crayons back, please.”

So you’ve got the itch to do something. Write a screenplay, start a painting, write a book, turn your recipe for fudge brownies into a proper business, whatever. You don’t know where the itch came from, it’s almost like it just arrived on your doorstep, uninvited. Until now you were quite happy holding down a real job, being a regular person...

Until now.

You don’t know if you’re any good or not, but you’d think you could be. And the idea terrifies you. The problem is, even if you are good, you know nothing about this kind of business. You don’t know any publishers or agents or all these fancy-shmancy kind of folk. You have a friend who’s got a cousin in California who’s into this kind of stuff, but you haven’t talked to your friend for over two years...

Besides, if you write a book, what if you can’t find a publisher? If you write a screenplay, what if you can’t find a producer? And what if the producer turns out to be a crook? You’ve always worked hard your whole life, you’ll be damned if you’ll put all that effort into something if there ain’t no pot of gold at the end of this dumb-ass rainbow...



# PSYCHOMETRY



*by*

*Carol Golemboski*

Carol Golemboski



Unedited original  
audio recording

# INTERVIEW WITH STU LEVY

Brooks: It's hard to believe that you and I have known each other for almost 25 years. I first took a workshop from you in 1983. You'd been involved in the Ansel Adams workshops as an assistant, then returned to Portland, Oregon, and started your own workshop program. I was in one of the very first workshops. That seems like such a long time ago, yet just like yesterday in some ways.

Stu: I know, long ago and far away! (Chuckling.) But it's intriguing. In 1979, my wife, Cris, and I took a year off and spent a lot of time in the west backpacking and photographing. During that year I went to Carmel, California, a lot – where I was introduced to Brett Weston. Several of us went to his house. I think we all wanted to know what was the best camera to have. I'd always been attracted to the Rollei SL66 cameras, but could never afford one. Brett Weston was using one and I got it in my mind, "Maybe that's the sort of camera I should use! It's not quite a view camera, but it's more than a fixed lens camera." Back in Portland I saw an ad in the newspaper for one and went to the guy's house to buy it. That fellow was Stewart Harvey, with whom I eventually became great friends. He was a student at the Ansel Adams workshop in 1981 in Yosemite where I was an assistant for the first time. When we returned to Portland we were so charged up. We decided we shouldn't stop doing this just because we were home! We started monthly meetings that we called the Portland Photographic Workshops and basically found like-minded people who were interested in talking about fine art photography. You were one of them who showed up.

*This interview was conducted in May, 2005.*



# SIDE CANYONS OF THE COLORADO



*by*

*Stu Levy*  
Stu Levy

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LensWork Publishing  
909 Third Street  
Anacortes, WA 98221-1502 U.S.A.

**USA TOLL FREE 1-800-659-2130**

Voice 360-588-1343 FAX 503-905-6111

Email [editor@lenswork.com](mailto:editor@lenswork.com)

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