

Lessons Learned on the Road to Creativity

By Chuck Palmer



Although I had taken photos all my life, making interesting images was not one of my strong points just a few years ago. Operating the camera was not a problem, but seeing creatively through the viewfinder was a skill I needed to develop. I wanted to learn how to make pictures that at least most of my viewers found appealing.

Coming from the left-brain world of High Tech, I knew learning how to make remarkable photos was going to take some considerable effort on my part. So, I set out on a quest to be more creative. I am still learning and developing my artistic eye, but I think sharing a few important lessons I learned so far may help others on the same road to creativity.

Lesson 1 – It is not about the camera. – Like many amateurs, I used to think to make better pictures, I needed a better camera. I soon realized new cameras didn't take any better pictures than the last one I purchased. Of course, digital camera technology evolves at blinding speed allowing us to now take photos in the dark of night with resolutions and low noise not thought possible just a couple of years ago. Despite the advances of digital image technology, I haven't found technology to improve a photographer's vision behind the camera yet. Wouldn't it be nice if there were an App for that? In my creativity quest, I quickly found that what I see is what I get. Only by developing my ability to see, has my photography continued to improve. By studying the masters and design principles of art, then spending time in the field practicing my new creative knowledge, I began to make a few remarkable photos I was happy with.



Lesson 2. – Be thankful you are an amateur – I admire new up and coming photographers who want to turn professional, who have a genre of photography they want to pursue, and have a well thought out business plan. However, I feel fortunate that my amateur status frees me up to explore different genres of photography, spend time diving deep into visual art books, and just play creatively with my camera. I certainly have the utmost respect for professional photographers, but I am very thankful that my amateur status allows me to spend time on developing my art rather than marketing my art or chasing my next job.



Lesson 3. – Find a mentor. – On my road to creativity, I soon realized that I am not the best judge of the impact my photographic art has on others. I reached out and found mentors who would give me feedback, point out what they liked, while providing a new perspective on how I could improve my creativity. Joining a camera club or an on-line photography group, taking workshops that provide critiques, photo contests, and presenting your work for gallery display are all meaningful ways to get feedback.

Lesson 4 – Set Long Term Goals – Deciding where you are in relation to where you would like to be helps set a vision to pull you in the direction you want to go. Early on my road to creativity, I set a goal to be published in a local life-style magazine. It was a quality measure for me. I figured if a photo editor liked my work well enough to include my images in her magazine, then my images must have at least achieved a standard suitable for publication. I learned so much, and achieved my goal. I now have new goals to keep me moving on down the road.

Lesson 5 – It takes passion, time, and practice. – A fellow amateur photographer shared with me recently that he was disappointed he was not achieving creative results he desired. I asked him what books he had read recently, and how much time he spent last week taking pictures. His answer was no surprise. Just like many years ago when I was learning to play a musical instrument, it takes passion, time, and practice to achieve new levels of creativity. As the adage goes, Practice makes Perfect. Anyone can be a remarkable photographer if they have the passion for their art and prioritize their time to practice their creativity. I keep learning and practicing.

Lesson 6 – Create your own projects – Being an amateur allows me the freedom to create projects I want to work on to develop my skills. Always having a project ahead of me motivates me to go out and shoot often. My projects come from a variety of sources. I create projects from photo contest themes, volunteering to be a photographer for local charities, or following a prepared shot list while traveling to create an inspiring slideshow I can share with others.



Lesson 7 – Share the Ride – I think the most important lesson learned on my road to creativity is to share your ride with others. If you truly enjoy the art of photography, then reach out to others and share what you learned. You learn so much by teaching others. Wherever you are on your journey, share your experience and insight with others who are not quite as far along as you.

I learned many lessons on my road to creativity. However, I realize I still have much more to learn and opportunities to explore. The fun part is that there is no destination on this road, just an exciting journey. May your journey also be exciting, and may only the most remarkable photos always be yours.

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