

## Remarkable Photography, it's all about telling a story

By Chuck Palmer

Many experts suggest the most remarkable photographs tell a story and evoke feelings for the viewer. Of course, the subject of a photograph has a lot to do with viewer interest, but I have never met anyone who doesn't like a good story. So how do we best capture a story in our photographs? Let's look at a few ideas.

### **A good story conveys a message with feeling...**

A former mentor of mine, Robin Griggs Wood, defined a photographic story as "a grouping of elements which together convey a more cohesive concept than the elements themselves" (<https://www.robingriggswood.com/>) Let's unpack this definition a little.

A Grouping of Elements suggests we should include things that sets the scene or supports our storyline. However, a good story must convey a cohesive message that does not confuse or distract. In the case of a photographic story we want to include only those things that helps tell our story and eliminate those things that just distract our viewers from the story we want to tell.

We seem to always remember what we feel the most. The movies we like, the art we treasure, or the people we love. It's all about how we feel about them. So, it stands to reason a photographic story that evokes feelings will be the most appreciated and remembered. Ansel Adams once said, "A great photograph is one that fully expresses what one feels, in the deepest sense, about what is being photographed."



*At the Water Park*

So, let's see what we have so far. A good photographic story:

- Conveys a cohesive message that includes only elements that support the storyline.
- Evokes feelings in the hearts and minds of viewers.

### **Key Components of a photographic story...**

We can learn a lot from literary experts on how to best tell our photographic story. Just google “key components to a good story” and you will find millions of results. However, there are some common elements we can make sure we include when we tell our photographic story. A compelling photographic story often has:

- A Main Character – our successful photographic stories have a main focal point or character that our viewers will likely relate to.
- Supporting Characters – Unlike a painting, a photograph is a subtractive process where the photographer is responsible for not including things that do not help tell the story. A compelling photograph only includes supporting characters or elements that assist in telling our story.
- Setting – One of the most important components for a remarkable photographic story. Just like a literary story, our setting establishes the time, place, and environment in which the main character resides. Taking our viewer to a place or environment they have never seen or never seen in the same way makes for a most interesting photograph.
- Point of View – One of the most difficult things a photographer must do yet may have the most interest-adding impact is to provide viewers with a distinctive point of view. Capturing our story from a unique point of view helps draw our viewers into our story.



*Into Nature*

## Focal Point Enhancers

Often one of the biggest challenges for a photographic story teller is to lead viewers through an image. Fortunately, we can get their attention with design elements, focusing them on the main characters. Let's call these design elements Focal Point Enhancers. Painters have used these elements for centuries but unlike painters, photographers must find or create these focal point enhancers at the time we capture the photo. When we incorporate focal point enhancers, we can easily lead viewers through our photographic story. Let's look at these powerful tools to draw attention to our main character.

- Light Value – light is more attractive to the eye than dark. So, a main character that is well-lit will be readily seen by viewers.
- Contrast – we are attracted where the lightest light meets the darkest dark in a photograph. A well-lit main character against a darker background is well seen.
- Color – colors, especially red based colors attract the eye of our viewers.
- Color Saturation – gets our attention.
- Pointers – leading lines, lines of perspective or convergence, the direction supporting character's eyes are looking, fingers are pointing, light rays or shadows are pointing lead the viewer to the main focal point of the image.
- Frames – or sometimes called frames within the frame are elements that surround your main character. Windows and doors make great frames.
- Sharpness – detail creates more energy, focuses our eye. Viewers will look first at what is in focus. Mastering depth of field is so important for creating remarkable images.
- Size – A large Main Actor catches the viewer's eye.

Sometimes it is impossible to eliminate a distracting element from your photograph. However, you can still create a remarkable photo by using the opposite of the Focal Point Enhancers to reduce viewer attraction to the distractions. For instance, light value reduced on distractions will tend to make them less noticeable in your photo. You can continue down the list of enhancers to see how using the opposites of any of the enhancers will help hide unavoidable distractions in your photographic story.



*Afternoon Commute*

Stories are so much a part of our lives. We all love a good story and we all have our favorites. Telling a concise, and compelling photographic story with a single image or even multiple images is certainly a challenge. But by telling a story in a way that evokes feeling, including all the key components of a good photographic story, and practicing good photographic story-telling techniques everyone can be successful story tellers.

Keep shooting and may only the most remarkable photographic stories be yours.

Chuck