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Newsletter from Kim Westerskov

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Newsletter #78 – July 2019

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This newsletter goes out to many photographers in New Zealand and overseas - and to anybody who asks to go onto the mailing list. If you know anybody who would like to be on the mailing list, please get them to email me. It's free and they can unsubscribe at any time, of course.



One of the many sea tunnels and caves on the west Auckland coastline

1. Want better photos? Get closer.

Want to take better photos? Here are two tips that can make a big difference.

“If you want to be a better photographer, stand in front of more interesting stuff” - Jim Richardson

“If your pictures aren't good enough, you aren't close enough” - Robert Capa

“Standing in front of more interesting stuff” speaks for itself, though there are nuances that we’ll explore in a future newsletter, nuances such as “there are good photos everywhere – it’s your job to find them”.

But for the time being, let’s just “stand in front of interesting stuff”. Your interesting stuff can be whatever you want it to be: the Eiffel Tower, the pyramids of Giza, Niagara Falls, the wildlife of the Serengeti, Antarctica’s penguins ... the list of “interesting stuff” on Planet Earth is effectively endless.

My examples for this article are all closer to home: Muriwai on Auckland’s west coast, Tauranga’s Wairoa River and Cosy Nook in Southland. Let’s start with Cosy Nook [its proper name is Mullet Bay] on the exposed Southland coastline west of Invercargill.



The marine forecast that got my attention read: “Foveaux: “GALE WARNING IN FORCE. Southwest 25 knots rising to 35 knots, gusting 50 knots. Sea becoming rough. Southwest swell rising to 8 metres. Poor visibility in showers.”

“That’s my kind of forecast”, I thought, so I borrowed Dave’s ute and headed out to Cosy Nook. The first photo is my location photo, a wide angle photo whose main purpose is to remind me what the coastline there looked like that day. The “more interesting stuff” was the big surf, hundreds of metres away. That rock out at the right in the first photo is called Castle Rock by the locals. Every now and then a big swell would break over it. I changed from wide angle to telephoto: my 300mm lens with a 1.4x converter gave me a focal length of 420 mm. The photo I was after was of a big wave crashing against – and over – Castle Rock. 420mm got me close. Close enough. Then I just waited. And waited. A big swell came and crashed against the rock. Gale-force winds shredded the whitewater downwind. I had my photo. A more detailed account of photographing those storm waves featured in Newsletter 63 back in March 2018. You can find my newsletters archived at <http://kimwesterskov.com/newsletter/>

So, why get closer to whatever you want to photograph? It’s a point that many beginners don’t get. They see something interesting, point their camera at it, press the shutter, and hope that they’ve got a good photo. Without having put any real effort into figuring out “How can I best photograph it?” Often the

answer includes getting closer. Getting closer makes the subject shine. It becomes the star. In your closer photo, there is less distracting background and more subject.

There are three ways of getting closer:

1. Walk/move closer to your subject
2. Use a bigger focal length [your telephoto lens]
3. Crop the photo later in Lightroom, Photoshop or whatever image editing program you use.

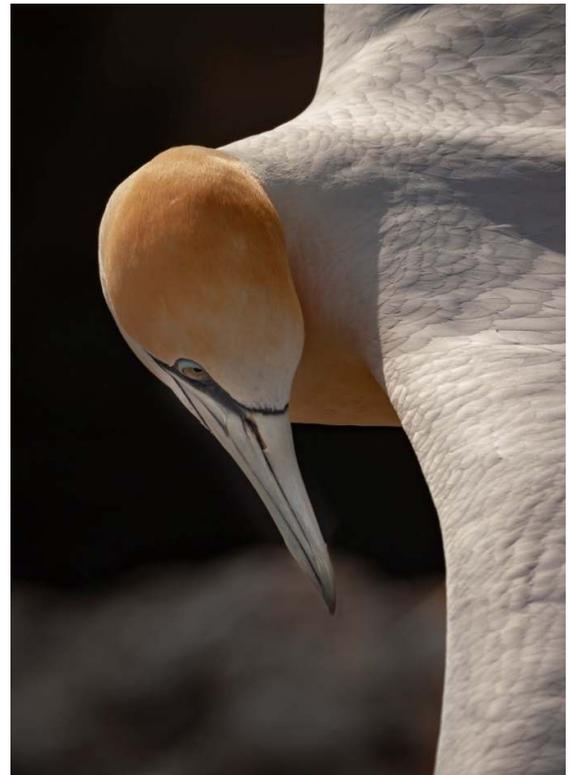
And yes, there's no reason for not using all three ways. I do.



Let's now visit the gannets at Muriwai on Auckland's west coast. Gannets are such photogenic birds that it's hard not to come away with good photos. So, most competent photographers who visit the Muriwai gannets do indeed come away with good photos. And therein lies a problem for me – how can I come away with photos that are in any way different from the tens of thousands of gannet photos already taken by others, many of them fine photos?

My approach was to spend real time there, not just an hour or two. And to try as many different angles and ideas as I could. Wide angle photos showed the colony bathed in the lovely warm light as the sun set in a golden haze over a turbulent sea [I'll show you these another time]. Then medium focal lengths narrowed the field of vision, letting me get tighter compositions, such as the first of the three accompanying photos.

Switching to telephoto let me concentrate on single birds. Gannets are beautifully engineered, ornithological works of art. Photos of them in flight emphasize this in a way that photos of them on the ground fail to demonstrate.



One thing that separates many good bird photos from the also-rans is the background. As in other forms of photography, backgrounds often make or break an image. In the case of gannets, a background of out-of-focus tightly-spaced nesting birds might be biologically interesting, but artistically less than ideal. Much

better [artistically] would be a simple natural background that helped emphasize and celebrate the flying gannet, such as the sea, or sky or [in this case] the nearby cliff in shadow.

Once I felt I had a good collection of photos featuring the whole bird, I tried for closer still. I could achieve this in several ways: by waiting until the birds flew close, or putting a 1.4X converter on my 300mm lens [giving me a focal length of 420mm], or cropping the resulting photos later on in Photoshop. I used all three approaches to achieve the more intimate vertical composition on the previous page.

And finally, a few months ago I spent several hours on the banks of Wairoa River, just west of Tauranga. A New Zealand scaup spent some time near me, repeatedly diving under the surface in search of food. What makes these dark squat birds photogenic is their “bath-toy duck” shape and [in males] their bright yellow eye. Golden reflections on the silky surface visually echoed the yellow eye, as well as contrasting nicely with the blues from the reflected sky. I just needed to be close. I waited, kept an eye on the bird, did other stuff and when it came back I was ready. Burst mode, autofocus, reasonably high shutter speed and CLOSE.



ROBERT CAPA is considered by many to be the world’s greatest war photographer. He redefined combat photography by joining soldiers in the trenches and photographing their battles in close-up, often grim, detail. He is perhaps best known for his photos of the D-Day landings at Normandy in 1944. He died in Vietnam in 1954, stepping on a land mine.



JIM RICHARDSON is a National Geographic photographer, having illustrated over fifty stories for the magazine. His photo of a farmer and his dog on the Isle of Muck, Scotland, demonstrates many things: getting close, atmosphere, connection, a good “moment” and getting much visual information into a single story-telling photograph.



2. You're never too old

The oldest person to climb Mt Everest was 80-year old Yuichiro Miura of Japan
The oldest person to bungee jump was 96-year old South African Mohr Keet
The oldest person to complete a skydive was 102-year-old Aussie Irene O'Shea
The oldest person to complete a marathon was 102-year old Indian Fauja Singh.

So what about capturing the hearts of millions and winning Britain's Got Talent? How about 89.

Colin Thackerey was born in 1930, joined the British Army at the age of 15 and served for 25 years, "seeing action" [during which he lost some of his hearing] in the Korean War. Singing seems to have come as naturally to Colin as breathing. A singer since the age of 8, during lulls in the fighting he was part of a concert party entertaining the troops.



He met his wife Joan at an army camp dance in County Durham in 1949 and was married to her for 66 years. By all accounts, it was a genuinely happy marriage, including sharing their love of singing together often. She died in his arms of breast cancer in 2016.

After Joan's death, he moved into the Royal Hospital as a Chelsea Pensioner, and music helped him get through this difficult time. Then came a chance comment from a friend *'It's about time you did something because you won't have your voice forever. What about Britain's Got Talent?'*

Colin initially laughed at the idea. Then entered. And won. I love Colin's story and have watched the videos of his performances many times. Colin dedicates his performances to Joan, and when he sings there are few if any dry eyes in the house.

So why am I telling you this, other than that it's an inspiring and heart-warming story? What's this got to do with photography? In some ways, nothing at all. In other ways, it has a lot to do with our photography. Here's some of what I take from Colin's story that is highly relevant to my photography and to your photography:

- It's never too late. Not just to really get into your photography, but also to go to those faraway places you've dreamed about.
- Keep enjoying your passions. Keep learning. Keep trying.
- Don't be afraid of challenges.
- Your passion, your art [your photography] can indeed touch others. And probably should. Is that not what art is for? To communicate important ideas. To touch others. And is our photography not art? [I'm talking here about our serious photography, not our selfies or snaps on our cellphones].

Give yourself 13 minutes of heart warmth and inspiration and look at this video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqaCJR1WmM4>

or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRzidnxRICc> [9:06 minutes]

or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFYkhlp9qcE> [8:37 minutes, a different take]

3. "The Power of Photography" - Tauranga presentations - 24th & 27th July

Illustrated Talk: "The Power of Photography – the light and the darkness"

Speaker: Kim Westerskov

Dates & venues: Wednesday 24th July 6pm-8pm at Papamoa Library

Saturday 27th July 11am-1pm at Greerton Library

Cost: Free



Bookings: Please register through the links below. If you're interested, best be in quick, as the organizer is capping registrations at 40 at each venue.

"Afghan Girl" photo by Steve McCurry

"The power of photography – the light and the darkness" shows us the many and varied roles photography plays in our lives, from powerful world-changing photography to the personal and intimate.

With just 90 carefully selected photos - a mix of my own and other people's photos - I covers a remarkable variety of subjects, places, emotions and photo styles: photos that started wars, photos that stopped wars, photos of both world events and private moments, photos of places we could never get to [and often wouldn't want to get to], both here on Earth and beyond. We also swim with whales in the tropics, meet penguins in Antarctica, watch the sun rising over Tauranga, fly over the Rena oil spill and follow the progress of Rena's oiled penguins. There's wildlife, astronomy, art, music, & the human condition. Powerful photos and gentle photos, ideas, and subjects relevant to us all, from our place in the universe to life here on Planet Earth, to our homes and families and friends.

<https://library.tauranga.govt.nz/whats-on/news-and-events>

<https://www.mytauranga.co.nz/whats-on/event-details/eid/2376/tctl/7663>

<https://www.mytauranga.co.nz/whats-on/event-details/eid/2378/tctl/7663>



4. "PHOTO IMPRESSIONISM" WORKSHOP – Saturday 13 July

Photo Impressionism is an exciting area of photography. It releases your inner artist. It creates images filled with colour and movement and texture and feelings and emotion. It allows you to get really good photos when other photographers are complaining that "there's nothing to photograph" or "the light is lousy". I've learned and developed many techniques, tips and tricks over the years, and I'll pass these on to you. Many are remarkably easy,



once you know what to do and “get your eye in”. You will very likely impress yourself!

Saturday 13 July 9.00am – 5.00pm plus assignment and follow-up evening 2-3 weeks later for assignment evaluation [at a time that suits everyone]. The follow-up can be by email. **Cost:** Full course fee [which includes tuition, hand-outs, Vivienne’s yummy catering, assignment and follow-up] is only **\$245** - the EarlyBird price because I’m late getting this newsletter out ☺. Fulltime students with ID **\$150**

- “I was thrilled with my photos thank you. It opens a whole new world!! The photo impressionism workshop was wonderful. We went to a bleak, midwinter park and created beautiful, colourful photos. Photos full of fun, imagination and mystery.” **Vicki Ostler**



- “Hi Kim, I LOVED the Impressionist Photo workshop and would recommend it to anyone wanting to have some fun and get creative with their camera. My family and friends were very impressed with my impressionist photos taken at Yatton Park and one friend even offered to buy one to put on a canvas to hang in her home!!” **Jan Gill**
- “I found the photo impressionism workshop very exciting as it allows me to pursue my more artist/creative side, the techniques we learned have opened up a whole new world for me.” **Lynda Farnworth**



5. KIM'S "PHOTOS & COFFEE" EVENINGS

We meet on the first Tuesday of each month [except January], chat about photography, and view some of the recent photos we've taken. It's **free [no charge], supper is served**, and there's no obligation of any kind. **Please email me if you'd like to come** [it's not a big room so I need to keep an eye on numbers]. We've been full or pretty much full recently. These evenings are always fun and friendly - there's usually many smiles and laughs. It's a great way of meeting up with like-minded people, **being inspired by the creativity of our group of photographers, and coming away with new ideas and tips**. There's a wide range of interests and abilities – so you're very unlikely to feel out of your depth. Bring photos if you wish, but there's no obligation to. Some people do, some don't. **The next one is on Tuesday 6th August** starting 7.00pm. 18 Greerton Road, Gate Pa, Tauranga.

6. PROGRAMME FOR REST OF 2019

JULY

- **Saturday 13th July. "Photo Impressionism" workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.

AUGUST

- Tuesday 6th August. "Photos & Coffee" informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Sunday 11th August. "Black & White" photo workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.

SEPTEMBER

- Tuesday 3rd September. "Photos & Coffee" informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Saturday 7th September. "People" workshop.** Portraits, kids, families, candid, travel, events, weddings. Full day plus follow-up.

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OCTOBER

- Tuesday 1st October. "Photos & Coffee" informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Sunday 6th October. "Good photos, great photos – anytime, anywhere" workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.

NOVEMBER

- Tuesday 5th November. "Photos & Coffee" informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.

DECEMBER

- Tuesday 3rd December. "Photos & Coffee" informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.

Half-day workshops 9.00am – 1.00pm

Full day workshops 9.00am – 5.00pm

COST: Course fees **include tuition, detailed hand-outs, yummy catering, plus [for most full-day workshops] an assignment and follow-up evening.**

- **One day workshops:** \$295 – or \$245 for Early Birds if you register by 10 days before the workshop. Fulltime students with ID \$150.

7. PRIVATE TUITION

Yes, like you I'm usually busy doing "other stuff" too, but I can nearly always fit private tuition in, and am very happy to do so. First 2 hours: \$80 per hour, after that \$70 per hour. If you come again, it's \$70 per hour right from the first hour. Think not just about cost, but "value" – it's one-on-one with an experienced photographer and teacher and we cover a lot each hour. Bring a friend if you wish - no extra charge.

Or – for just the cost of a full-day workshop [with Early Bird discount] - \$245 – you get my full attention - one-on-one - for 4 hours. This can be out in the field or at my studio, looking at your photos on my computer, going over your camera functions, looking into specific techniques, or all of the above and more – whatever you want to do. I'm here for you. For only \$475 I'm yours for the whole day.

8. "MENTORING BY KIM"

Mentoring individual photographers to the best of my ability is time-intensive, so I'm only able to mentor a few photographers at any one time.

"Mentoring by Kim" is for serious photographers who want to get better, much better, to make more compelling images, and who realize that great photography is not something that you can spend a few hours on and "have it sorted" by 7 pm tonight.

How good do you have to be to be mentored? It absolutely doesn't matter, truly. I'm just as happy mentoring keen beginners who know nothing much more than where the "Auto" button is as I am mentoring successful professionals. The kind of camera and lenses you have don't matter either. All that matters is that you are keen and willing to put in some effort learning and trying. It's a journey, and for that reason "Mentoring by Kim" is for a minimum of 6 months. After that, you can choose to finish or to carry on.

So what happens during that time? Whatever is needed to make you a better - and happier - photographer. "Mentoring" is the ongoing process of inspiring, advising, guiding, teaching, critiquing ... whatever is needed for your ongoing development as a photographer. It's one-on-one, so it's different for each person. One day it may be about equipment or Photoshop, next week it may be "I just want my photos to have more 'Wow' in them", the following month it may be about exhibitions or "Should I go pro?"



Do you need to live in Tauranga or travel to Tauranga for mentoring? No. Face-to-face time every now and then is great, but most mentoring can be done by email or over the phone [or Skype]. One photographer I've mentored for some years lives in Dunedin and although we're in contact often, I see him only once every few years. Another photographer lives an hour's drive from Tauranga and comes over for a full day with me once every month or so. Between visits, we're regularly in contact, often daily. For a very reasonable \$450 per month you get access to me pretty much whenever you want, daily if need be. But most importantly, it's whatever works best for you. I take the mentoring seriously and I'm there for you. I want you to succeed.

If you don't need the full mentoring program, a second option is "Mentoring Lite". For \$225 per month, you get a "light" version of the mentoring program.

Here's what two of the photographers I've been mentoring have said:

Pam Thomson [Te Awamutu]: "I have been mentored by Kim for about 5 months now, and have wanted to do it for a couple of years. I wish I had done it sooner. Kim is a wonderful Mentor, gives great encouragement, and has so much knowledge to share... He gives very honest, thoughtful, critique. The Mentoring is led by you".

Derek Morrison [Dunedin], 2018 New Zealand Geographic Photographer of the Year: "Kim is, without doubt, one of the best – he is proactive, really knows his stuff and genuinely drills into the creative process, pain and dreams... I wanted a raw and unfiltered appraisal of where I was at and where I wanted to go. I got that with Kim". Was there any connection between the mentoring and your NZ Geographic Photographer of the Year win? "Of course".

Photos of Kim by Tony Whitehead, James Frankham, Malcolm Macfarlane. & I'm afraid I don't remember who took the photo at McLaren Falls.



9. FAMILY PORTRAITS BY KIM

Yes, I'm happy to photograph you [by yourself or with a partner or friend] or your family. I make the session as relaxed and fun as possible, and I'm confident you'll be happy with the results. Ring or email me if you're interested.

10. PHOTOGRAPHING ARTWORKS PHOTOSHOPPING & PHOTO RESTORATION

As well as teaching photography and mentoring a number of photographers, I also offer photo restoration, Photoshopping, and "Photographing your Artworks" services. \$50 per hour [we get a lot done each hour].

11. INVITATION TO CAMERA CLUBS & GROUPS

If your club or group might be interested in hosting one of my presentations - or workshops - or "Field Trip • Photo Critique" days, please get in touch.

ABOUT KIM

- **Passionate about photography and passionate about inspiring, guiding, and supporting photographers.**
- Over 30 years as a professional photographer and teaching photography for 12 years now
- Five First Prizes in the BBC "Wildlife Photographer of the Year" competition, the Olympics of nature photography worldwide.
- 18 books published [international distributions] – written and photographed by Kim.