

TO CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF A PLACE (TO TELL PART OF ITS STORY):

Presentation by Gary Ellis at June 2009 Meeting of the Photography Forum

Use a Variety of Shots (& Lenses)

- Establishing shot (e.g. wide-angle overview of scene)
- Medium shot (e.g. a stretch of street)
- Close-up (storytelling details—e.g. signs, face, art)
- Point-of-view (from the angle of the participant, perhaps showing part of you in the shot, but you take the shot)

Do Your Research:

- Check postcard racks for “classic views”
- Check photo books for best places to go
- Check local paper for community events

Make a Shot List (including different lenses!):

- Skyscrapers
- Street scenes People, including local celebs and characters
- Recreational activities in parks
- Cultural activities (e.g. performing arts, museums, galleries)
- Historic building/monuments
- Architectural details (close-ups)
- Shopping
- Restaurants

- Nightlife
- Neighborhoods (e.g. ethnic or distinctive scenes)
- Festivals, street fairs, parades

Think about How to Shoot Each Subject:

- Views from on high (e.g. from 2nd story window, roof top)
- Views from down low (kid-level or lower)
- Views from eye level
- Use different lenses or different focal length if you have just one zoom lens (e.g. wide-angle to get an overview "feel" of a street, telephoto to zoom in on someone or to compress the distance between people in a crowd; wide-angle to get a foreground rock/bush in same shot as a distant mountain or prominent local structure, but telephoto to get moon rising/sun setting over city bridge/buildings)

Challenges:

The "Blue Problem"

·When I edited my landscape photos using the white and black sliders, I found that a bluish cast appeared in the photos. A local photographer told me that it had to do with how far north Alaska was, but he didn't say how to fix it.

After I returned from the trip, I realized that I had set white balance to "average" instead of setting it for each day's weather. Perhaps if I had used the sunny or cloudy settings (the two types of day I experienced), the cast would have been less.

If I were to go again, I would do a test shoot with all the white balance settings and then edit them on my laptop on location to see if the blue cast appeared or not.

I would also see if I could get some help ahead of time by asking a couple of northern-based photographers what they experience and how they fix it.

Exposing for animals

When I saw the animals I was hoping to see in the wild (black bear, bald eagle), it was suddenly, and they were already moving. The big question was how to expose for them?

The eagle was a problem because of the great contrast between its white head and dark brown body. It's a tough call whether to expose for the head, the body, or somewhere in between. But, since it was in flight, I just kept the settings I already had, resulting in an overexposed head. If I did it again, I would quickly turn the exposure compensation dial down 2/3 of a stop and hope I could bring up the detail lost in the brown body when I edited later. The reason my camera was "fooled" was because the eagle was flying in front of some evergreens, so 95% of the frame was darkish; as a result, the head was blown out. Oh well. Next time.

As for the black bear, it wasn't moving that fast and it was among rocks and grasses that were all shades of medium to dark colors. Thus, the exposure wasn't a huge issue. If I were doing a close-up of the bear, though, I might want to underexpose by at least one stop to prevent the bear appearing grey instead of dark brown/black. If I were to go again, I would do a test shoot with all the white balance settings and then edit them on my laptop to see if the blue cast appeared or not.

Finally:

- Look out for the unexpected, things that catch your eye (colors, patterns, contrasts in objects next to each other, things that seem out of place, things that seem funny to you).
- Try the unusual (walk and take photos while holding camera at waist height, move the camera on purpose during a day or night shot, shoot while zooming in or out, shoot for one solid hour in a downtown city from the perspective of a child...and a child's height!).
- Relax and have fun!