

“Light on the Land”

ASP Fellowship Thesis

Rod Brown

Master of Photography
Photographic Craftsman

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To my parents and teachers
who taught me.

To my family and friends
who inspire and challenge me.

And especially to my beautiful wife, Lynda,
who loves, helps, understands, encourages and supports me.

In my photography, I have found that the mere capture of light is an easy accomplishment. The true essence of a great photograph lies in the preparation, visualization and capture of the emotion of the scene. To create an image without feeling and experiencing the scene before me, is no different than simply recording what is there. To me, an image is so much more; it is about my relationship with the beauty that unfolds before my lens. The way the light dances across the landscape, the way the wind feels against my skin, and how the world stands still, if only for a fraction of a second.

Too often in our rush through life, we fail to allow ourselves the opportunity to experience the world around us. This is true in our photography as well. We hurry to accomplish the goal and miss out on the very purpose of the image itself. It is satisfying to me to “re-live” each and every image that I have created. Remembering the way it felt to “be” there, to live in the moment, and to capture what God so graciously placed before me.

Looking back over the years, I have had time to reflect on my journey. I realize that my life is like a puzzle, each piece fitting together to form a whole, creating, if you will, a tapestry of experiences. It is these lessons in life that guide me, affording me the opportunity to see the “light on the land.”

It seems as though photography has been part of my soul for most of my life. My mom always had a camera, taking pictures and saving memories. I remember as a child, taking the camera from her and doing the photography at holidays and family functions, partly because I liked taking pictures and partly because my photographs were the only ones in which the family’s heads weren’t cut off.

During high school and immediately thereafter I worked for my dad in his appliance and television business. At the time, not giving much thought to a career in photography, it was assumed I would follow in my father's footsteps and eventually take over the family business. I was taking college classes in business, thinking that it would be helpful in my job at the store. College life was fun, probably too much fun to be honest; a lack of interest on my part led me to postpone college for the time being.

It wasn't long after that my life took on a new direction; I was drafted into the Army. Being young and fearless I was ready to take on the new challenge. My basic training was at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Though it was not pleasant, the army did teach me many new skills. I learned how to work as part of a team and came to appreciate the true meaning of "respect for authority."

After two months of training we finally received our shipping orders. We weren't going to Viet Nam after all; instead we were bound for Korea, "land of the morning calm." The landscape fits the description very well. What a beautiful country of mountains and valleys. The climate there is the same as my home in Ohio hot humid summers and cold winters with snow and ice.

I was stationed in Korea along the D.M.Z (demilitarized zone) for 14 months. My love of landscape photography began while running patrols along the lush, green rice paddies, hills, and mountains of northern South Korea. On these patrols I was armed with an M-16 rifle and a Kodak Instamatic camera loaded with slide film that fit perfectly into my ammo pouch. I could see, enjoy, and experience the awe and the beauty of the landscape. Witnessing the texture of the land and sensing the serenity that surrounded me, I couldn't wait to have the film processed in "the village." It was a learning experience for me to hold the slides up to a window to view them and

critique my own work. Having seen the possibilities, I soon wanted better quality so my first big purchase at the PX was a Pentax 35mm camera. I was so excited I could hardly wait to expose my first landscape images. The quiet light and the early morning mountain views overwhelmed me. The euphoria soon ended after realizing the new camera was stolen from my locker. It was disappointing not being able to expose my first frames from this new camera. However, I still had the cherished slides from my Kodak Instamatic.

Upon returning home, I went back to work for my dad. Being more mature I decided to go back to college for more classes. I enrolled in some elective courses in photography and art history. I was anxious to see what could be learned in those classes. Art history taught me an appreciation for art, color harmony, and composition. The photography classes gave me a great basic knowledge of the camera and a quest to learn all that I could. It was during those classes, that I had my first experience in the darkroom, witnessing the magic of seeing an image develop before my eyes. Shortly thereafter I purchased my first enlarger, setting it up in my mother's bathroom over the bathtub and waiting for nightfall. I would then cover the window and the bottom of the door with towels. I was excited to be making images at home; but that didn't last long as my mother wasn't thrilled with the inconvenience of not having a bathroom to use. Not to be discouraged, I went to work building a darkroom in the laundry room. I used old kitchen cabinets to build a counter for the enlarger, did some plumbing, and ended up with a very efficient darkroom.

During this time I entered my first photography contest sponsored by the local newspaper. I won first place with an image taken on an early morning drive to college, a photo of a sunrise with our local General Motors Foundry plant in the foreground. It was recorded on Kodak Tri-x film, processed and hand printed in my own

darkroom. Needless to say, it felt good to be recognized for my talents, and encouraged my decision to pursue landscape photography.

Now the pursuit of photography became even more important to me. Needing more paper, chemistry, and equipment, I began earning small amounts of money doing copy and restoration of old photographs, all the while still working for my dad and going to college.

Feeling the need to learn more, I joined the Professional Photographers of Northwest Ohio, about an hour's drive from my house. This organization had just been founded and was faithfully attended by a small and dedicated group of photographers, all eager to learn. Long lasting friendships were formed at this time.

In 1974, I joined the Professional Photographers of Ohio, an association to which I've remained a loyal member for over 36 years. As everyone knows, associations are a good place to learn, meet like-minded people, and serve for the benefit of all. One of the charter members of the PPO was Paul H. March; he was a master of photography and a photographic craftsman, and owned a studio in my hometown. We were at the annual Ohio convention in 1975, where he introduced himself to me and invited me to lunch. Of course, I knew Mr. March; he photographed my high school senior portraits. While having lunch at this meeting, he offered me a position as an associate photographer. He had been in business for thirty years and was looking for a successor to take over when he retired. After that meeting I had to decide whether to stay in the appliance business, start my own business, or go to work for Mr. March. I have never regretted accepting his offer, working for him for three years before purchasing the business in 1979. It was a great opportunity and an enriching experience for me to learn lighting and posing from a Master Photographer, honing my business skills, and experiencing the value of patience.

The next stop in my quest for knowledge was Winona Lake School of Photography. I attended several classes learning from some of the most famous photographers in the world. From the legendary Gerhard Bakker, then “Dean Emeritus” of Winona Lake, I learned composition, color balance, and lighting, and his critiques were worth their weight in gold. Frank Kristian taught about the rule of thirds, and fifths and how to place our subject matter in the right balance. I will never forget his little green book; *The Power of Composition*. His rules have guided me well over the years, either when setting up the shot in the camera or composing the image for printing. Leon Kennamer taught outdoor lighting; Tony Celento, family posing; and Al Gilbert, another legend, showing the art of posing and lighting. On the business side, so much was learned from Marty Ricard and Patsy Hodge. Winona was the best place on earth to learn photography and a great experience for everyone who was fortunate enough to attend. I can attribute most of my current success to the lessons I learned at this school. The intimate classroom experiences and the powerful instructors changed my photography forever.

I have been in professional photography for 38 years now, and have found it to be a constant learning experience, an ongoing quest for more knowledge. As I remember, my first years were probably the most important, learning the basic skills that would mold my future. I will always be grateful to my teachers, who gave selflessly so that I could become the photographer I am today.

The next few years were busy building the business, photographing weddings, seniors, families and children in a full service portrait studio. My life was busy, and it was not an easy road. Different interests led my marriage to slowly deteriorate, which lead to divorce and some depressing times. I was now single again and trying to fit in. I then met a woman, a photographer who helped me become grounded. It was a long

distance relationship but one that renewed my spirits. She brought hope, a big smile, and encouragement along with a love for travel. We took trips together seeing different parts of the world. It was a great experience and a wonderful photographic adventure. I fell in love with the beauty that the countryside provided and realized that I still had the desire and need to photograph the landscape.

During this time a good friend of mine, Scott Hall, introduced me to large format landscape photography. Scott is an accomplished portrait photographer with a passion for creating fine art back and whites. Scott sold me a Linhoff 6 x 17 Panorama camera, which I love to use even in this digital age. On his recommendation, I also purchased a Linhoff 4 x 5 field camera to which I've added several lenses over the years. I became amazed at the quality of the images these cameras could produce. I love the deliberate pace of using large format, pre-visualizing a scene before even setting up the camera. Taking time to consider the composition, leading lines, and lens selection. Finally, setting the camera and waiting for the light to be just right before releasing the shutter to capture the scene.

Too much of our busy life is captured by motor drive cameras, with hundreds of images. Being able to slow down and enjoy the moment is very rewarding. Landscape photography is my escape from the portrait world and all its hours of computer editing and adjusting image files.

Always trying to improve my work, I've studied many books on how to photograph the landscape. From these I learned the many technical skills needed to improve my photography. For inspiration, I have collected a vast amount of coffee table books on large format landscape photography. Relaxing in an easy chair while looking at these books, I can be transported to the many places I dream of being able to photograph some day. There are an overwhelming number of great landscape

photographers to learn from. A few of my favorites are Ansel Adams, David Muench, John Sexton, John Shaw and Robert Stewart.

Photography has given me the opportunity to meet many of my peers with whom I have shared so much. I am thankful to my friend, Scott Hall who started me down this road of adventure in landscape photography, and Dave Huntsman who has given his friendship, talent and creative eye. I will especially be forever indebted to my good friend, Michael Timmons, who pushes me to succeed; is there to lend a helping hand; inspires me with his creative talent; and always makes me laugh.

The Lord blessed me several years ago with a person who has become the most important presence in my life. My wife, Lynda, and I have shared many sunsets and sunrises together and we have experienced things that would have not been nearly as inspirational alone. She is the love of my life, and my soul mate. Lynda brings out the best in me, both photographically and creatively. Her soft and loving demeanor and easy way of encouragement, lift me to new heights. She is my closest friend, my lover, partner and supporter. I receive so much from her and admire her qualities of generosity, compassion, and tenderness. She is a skilled artist with camera, brush, and stylus. Together, we have reached places that I could have never achieved alone. Her unconditional love completes my life.

My Vision

For me photographing the landscape is much more than taking a pretty picture of what lies before my lens. It is more about the experience and how it affords me the opportunity to express myself in a creative visual way. Equally important though, it puts me in touch with my feelings, emotions, and senses and heightens my awareness of the beauty in nature that surrounds me. When looking back at any image I have taken, I am transported to the moment it was captured. If I see an image of a

beautiful sunset taken from a mountain top, I can still feel the coolness of the air, the wind on my face and the warmth of the setting sun on my body. Or, upon seeing an image from a babbling stream, I can hear the water as it rushes over and through the rocks covered with emerald green moss, and remember the silence of the protective forest that surrounded me. I can remember standing in a meadow of soft grasses, watching a herd of horses grazing. Above the scene is a mountain range, majestic and proud. Looking beyond the mountains, I see a beautiful blue sky with puffy white clouds and notice the sunlight skimming across the landscape before me. Imagine, if you will, a colorful image, shot in one of the slot canyons in the desert southwest. Think about the soft light sculpting the graceful curves of the sandstone. Picture the leading lines of the sculpture, the beautiful hues, where exposures can last several minutes to record a single image. Imagine being so quiet that you can almost hear your heart beat, where people whisper like they were in a church, the reverence, and the respect of such a beautiful place. Think about experiencing a place so serene that it calms your soul.

Some of my favorite images from the desert southwest are from my panoramic camera. I love the view it creates. The desert landscape is perfect for this format. It is hard to explain the vastness of the view in this part of the world. Imagine, again, if you will, awaking at 4:00 in the morning in complete darkness to photograph the hoodoos at sunrise in Bryce Canyon. With no city lights for hundreds of miles, your first view of the heavens reveals billions and billions of stars along with a spectacular view of the Milky Way. Picture yourself standing at the edge of Bryce Canyon. The penumbra of light moves quickly across the valley, illuminating the land, eagerly awaiting the first rays of sunlight and watching as the light skims across the landscape

giving it shape, color and life. Waiting patiently, camera composed, focused, and ready to capture the magic of the “light on the land.”

For me, landscape photography is a personal journey of exploration into the world in which we live, providing a creative outlet for self expression and awareness. I thank God for all He has provided us, with spiritual leadership, family, friends, and customers. I thank Him for this beautiful planet that we live on with its majestic mountains, peaceful valleys, and a palette of colorful landscapes. We, as photographers, don't stop often enough to enjoy this wonderful world of ours. We should use our God-given skills and understanding of light and composition to bring these magnificent views home, to enjoy them again and share them with others.

Life has taken me down many roads. Some of these roads have been short, some longer, but all have led me to unexpected and wonderful experiences. Roads that switch back and forth to take me to wonderful views from magnificent overlooks where a sunrise can be so inspiring that you can feel it on your skin. The early morning sun rises slowly to meet a veil of soft fog on the landscape below. Or a sunset of soft clouds, pastel colors, and rolling fog isolating islands of green trees. There have been many times while on my travels I have surrendered to Robert Frost's suggestion and taken the “road less travelled.” I wonder, what lies beyond the next curve? What might be a dead end may instead lead me to a scene that I might have otherwise missed. Perhaps a beautiful vista, or an expanse of meadow, softly lit with the final glow of evening light. Other times, I may purposely drive to an area and explore every back road that I can find, noting places and times that I should return, when the light is right to experience the scene to its fullest potential.

Sometimes these “roads” have taken me to other countries, where I might be driving on the other side of the road, still exploring, my wandering heart and

passion leading me into new worlds, new places and new experiences. Perhaps these roads are not roads at all, but waterways, leading me to a place of history and romance. A place of legend and lore, a place of beauty, filled with gondolas and outdoor cafés. Where people walk arm in arm at a leisurely pace. How fortunate I am, to have seen and lived these grand experiences.

Enjoy all that life gives, the experiences it offers and the memories it provides. Be aware of all that your senses experience during the time of image capture. It is the light on the land that excites me, reliving my feelings, the sun on my face, the earth beneath my feet, the warmth or coolness of the day, and the sounds of nature.

I have a passion for the art of photography. I feel very blessed for how it has enriched my life. I hope to be able to share my life's lessons with others, that they too will be rewarded as I have been offering them the opportunity to experience and see the "light on the land."

Respectfully submitted

Rod Brown

Service

1973 Joined Professional Photographers of Northwest Ohio

1974 Joined Professional Photographers of America

1975 Joined Professional Photographers of Ohio

1979 President of PPNO

1986 President of PP of Ohio

1987-Present Different Committee Assignments with PPO

1996-Present PPA Affiliated Juror

2008-Mid-East States Board Member

Merits

196 Service Merits

143 Exhibition Merits

88 Speaking Merits

Awards

PPA National Award

PPA Masters

PPA Craftsman

PPA Photographer of the Year

- 2 Diamond Awards
- 1 Platinum Awards
- 2 Gold Awards
- 2 Silver Awards

Imaging Excellence Award

Imaging Excellence Bar

ASP Regional Medallion Award

41 Loan Collection Images

Ohio Photographer of the Year (4 times)

Ohio Award

PPO Distinguished Service Award (2 times)

Walter Troup Service Award

Culver Environmental Portrait Award

Buckeye Pictorial Award (3 times)

Shooting Gallery Portrait Award

William Dumbald Award

Fuji Masterpiece Award (3 times)

Kodak Gallery Award (9 times)

J. Anthony Bill Portrait Award (3 times)

ASP Elite Award

Local Clubs

Rotary Club

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks

Defiance Chamber of Commerce

Education

Graduated Defiance High School 1966

2 years attending Bowling Green State University

School of modern photography, correspondences school

Winona Lake School of Photography

Work Experience

Defiance Crescent News paperboy 1957-1963

Jack Brown TV and Appliance 1964-1968 1970-1975

Paul H. March Photography 1976-1979

Self employed, Rod Brown Photography 1979 – present

Professional Associations

Professional Photographers of America

American Society of Photographers

Professional Photographers of Ohio

Professional Photographers Society of Ohio

Ohio Certified Professional Photographers

Senior Portrait Artists