

It's Magic

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"Why do you do it?" The direct question comes from a leader of a recent photographic workshop I attended as well as indirectly from many who wonder how an impatient old professor, still Type A, finds the patience to spend hours in the darkroom trying to get prints to come out "just right."

The answer is easy. "Because it's magic, that's why!" Knowing the basic chemistry did not change the sense of wonder in me when I watched that very first sheet of blank paper suddenly transform itself into an image after less than a minute's immersion in a clear solution no different in appearance from inert water. That image and others



Figure 1. Glacial ice, Portage Glacier, Alaska.

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like it captivated me, and I have been pursuing them ever since.

Everyone who works hard and focuses intently, especially a physician, needs regular reminders of the beauty of their life outside work. Besides my family, always my first interest, books, art, music, and photography have been my "nondoctoring" addictions. There is something peaceful, protective, and at the same time creative, about entering a cocoon-like darkroom lit only by the yellowish glow of a sodium-vapor lamp, embellished by background music, and leading to something of beauty "made by hand." One points a black box loaded with opaque film toward a lighted subject, presses the shutter release, then manipulates film and paper to manufacture images, and sometimes manages to exploit the magic to make beauty. It is an all-consuming, personally renewing, never boring way to let the right brain run amuck. We all need to pay



Figure 2. Seashell, Sanibel, Florida.



Figure 3. Rain, Falling Spring State Park, Missouri.

attention to beauty and grace around us. Photography is one of my ways.

As with other things, one develops personal tastes and interests in photography. Photographs of nature, family, and scenery all interest me, but the underlying fascination for me has always been how transmitted or reflected light creates different impressions in ordinary objects. Many directly lighted photographs are beautiful, but backlit images can have an ethereal glow and pattern that are infinitely intriguing.

The first photograph presented here is an outdoor, sunlit scene of glacial ice at Portage Glacier, Alaska, demonstrating both transmitted and direct, bright natural light. The second is an image of a back-lighted seashell, printed darkly, so the main emphasis is light, evident at

the edge, in the opposing hemi-shell, and at the circular opening in the base. Prepared in this way, the photograph has a mystical feel that I find pleasing. The third is a different subject, the branch of a tree in the rain, this time with the soft, natural backlight of a rainy day. To me, each of these photos conveys a kind of peacefulness and beauty that I was able to create. To my knowledge, I have no talent for painting or sculpting or composing, but through the camera viewfinder and in the darkroom, I sometimes see and record beauty others may express in different ways. I find that very satisfying, and yes, still magical.

I like these photographs. I hope the reader likes them too. For me, at least, they provide a sense of peace and loveliness in an otherwise often difficult and harsh world.