

Hands ... And the Stories They Tell
Written by Sheila Holzer, Honorary Lifetime Member, September 2017

In January of 1990, I took a *Black and White Photography* evening course at NAIT. One of the suggestions the instructor made was that a good way to organize one's thoughts about photography is to discover where personal interests lie and then take photographs based on themes. I've kept the latter concept in the back of my mind all these years and always have several themes on the go. My "hands" theme began very early; in fact I photographed several on my third roll of B&W film. To date, I have created over 200 hand images.

I've been asked if I look at hands all the time. The short answer is no. I do, however, tend to notice what people are doing with their hands. Of course, there are times when just the hands are enough; for example, hands that are heavily tattooed. Some of my images are the result of being in the right place at the right time; i.e., being at an open-air museum, an arts or music festival. I create many of my images from an idea I have. In other words, I have an idea and then look for a pair of hands to illustrate this idea.

All my images are taken in natural light. My preference is to use a small aperture, typically f16, to get the maximum depth of field with front to back sharpness of the hands. My go-to ISO is 200. On occasion, in low light, I go to a higher ISO and a larger f-stop, perhaps 400 and f8.

Until 2007 when I switched to digital capture, all my images were on black and white film. Now, of course, I have the option of a colour or monochrome image. Colour is often a distraction, as it can take away from the main statement a photograph is intended to portray. Having said that, sometimes colour in a photograph greatly enhances its appeal. Also, wherever possible I prefer a plain background without words or overly bright areas (again because of the distraction).

I have never been refused when I've asked someone to photograph his or her hands. I find a sincere, genuine and friendly approach opens the door. At times, I take a small portfolio of my work. I make sure to tell anyone over the age of 30 that the photograph will make their hands look old. My 83-year old father wasn't hesitant to tell me that.

Whenever feasible, I give a print to my subjects. The response is very positive; with the exception of those people whose perception of their hands doesn't match the reality of the printed version.

Good Luck with your February "Hands" Competition submissions.



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