

Some Thoughts About Competitions

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I joined Images Alberta Camera Club (IACC) in 2012, with the expectation of spending time with other photographers and like-minded people, and (probably) eventually learning a few things from other Club members.

My initial reaction when I attended my first competition was: “WOW! These images are fantastic! It will be a long time before my skills develop enough to compete at this level!”

My second and stronger reaction was to be inspired! I was inspired to explore and expand what I considered was possible with a camera, and it was a whole lot more than I had considered in the past. I realized before I had a lot to learn, but now it was even more how little I knew about photography. I figured now is a good time to start.

I worked to create an image and submit it in the next competition, in my second month of membership. Being my first attempt at competing, I figured I would start small and only enter in one category, and I entered the Digital Themed category “Noise” in October 2012.

My submission, “Harley Tailpipes,” resulted in a First Place, which was unexpected. Again, I was inspired to continue to enter future competitions. Winning competitions is nice (but certainly not expected or frequent), but I’ve learned it’s not my primary motivation. To me, what is much more significant than winning, is the skill development that has occurred. The competition critiques (mostly complimentary and always positive) have provided valuable feedback and learning opportunities. I’ve also tried many different techniques, methods, genres and subject materials to create some good, and many not so good, images. Entering competitions motivated me to push my personal limits and develop my skills in a way that would not have occurred otherwise.

I’d like to close by sharing some of my key learnings regarding competitions.

- Try to enter as often as possible; at the very least it will be an opportunity to learn something. You cannot learn anything (or win) if you don’t enter.
- When creating images, don’t be afraid to try something different; get out of your comfort zone.
- The (voting) crowd is fickle; create the images you want, even if you do not win a competition you will like your images.
- Never stop learning.
- Have fun!