

Dedicated To Excellence In Photography

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Long Handheld Exposures or Getting Past The Fear of Failure

by Jim McGee, Vivid Light Photography

Jim McGee writes for Vivid Light Photography (<http://www.vividlight.com>), a free on-line photo publication. Many thanks to Charlie Bowman for obtaining the author's permission to reprint his article in this month's TTL.

There is a rule of thumb in photography that says you shouldn't try shooting without a tripod if the shutter speed is less than one over the focal length. That means that for a 300mm lens you shouldn't try hand holding anything less than 1/300th of a second. Some photographers advocate shooting just about every shot from a tripod and some won't even attempt a shot if they think it might not come out sharp. Phooey!

There are some simple techniques you can learn to improve the quality of your hand held shots and some good reasons for doing so. The most obvious is that a shot may never present itself to you again. Another reason is that by practicing those "extreme" handheld shots you're more likely to be able to pull one off when you really need to.

How to Do It

I have steady hands. But steady hands alone aren't the answer. There are some simple techniques that can help anyone get better handheld exposures.

Relax. If your body is tense your muscles will shake. If you don't believe me make a fist and squeeze it hard and hold your arm out. In short order you'll see a slight tremor in your hand and arm and it doesn't take much vibration to make a photo soft. The body mechanics I talk about in the next few paragraphs are all about relaxing your body as you shoot. Take all the tension out of your body and your hands will be much steadier and your images sharper.

Get a good stance and hold your camera correctly. Stand with your feet about shoulder width apart. Your front foot should be pointing in the general direction of your subject and your back foot should be around 90 degrees to your subject. Don't go nuts and worry about the exact angles and placement of your feet. Just get them generally in this alignment so that you're in a relaxed stance. Don't lock your knees.

Get your shoulders in line with your hips. I'm always surprised when I see photographers crank their bodies around to shoot. Their shoulders are at a 30 degree angle to their hips. That means your muscles are exerting force to keep you at that angle. Rotate your shoulders so that they're roughly in line with your hips and the muscles of your torso will be relaxed rather than working to keep you in position. A little body rotation is fine. A lot is bad.

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What's New

IPG Workshop Meeting (1 st Night of Passover)	April	5
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PFLI Competition Night	April	30

Quick Tips for April



Regardless of what you have invested in your camera and accessories, the fact is that you need to keep your gear in tip-top shape if you're going to be able to rely on it when you need it.

Cameras: Whether it's a full-featured 35 mm SLR or a digital point & shoot, you should keep your camera in a case or camera bag until use. Be sure the bag has plenty of foam padding to reduce the chance of camera damage from bumps and to protect it from dust and dirt. Specially made foam inserts are available at many photo stores and may be custom cut to fit a wide variety of bags.

Lenses: If your camera accepts interchangeable lenses, keep them in your camera bag, too. Place caps on both front and rear lenses to protect delicate elements from dust, dirt, and scratches (replacement caps are available for a nominal price from your local photo dealer). If a lens surface should happen to get dirty, use a specially made photo lens cloth to clean it. Just remember to be gentle, and never use eyeglass tissues or cleaners. They may contain solvents damaging to lens coatings.

Film: Buy only fresh film. Out-of-date film may still "work," but its colors have likely shifted and overall results will be poor. Store all unused film in the refrigerator and warm it up for 15 minutes before using. For longer storage periods, keep it in the freezer and warm it up for 30 minutes before use.

When transporting film, keep it away from direct sunlight and high heat. And never allow it to be X-rayed, which can be cumulatively damaging, especially with today's faster film. Instead, place all unexposed film in a clear plastic bag and request a hand check. It takes a little work to keep photo gear safe and secure, but the results will be equipment you can rely on for years to come.



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IPG Information

Meetings

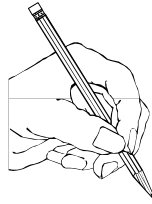
IPG meetings will be held from 7:30 - 10:00 PM on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Mondays of each month, except for holidays, at our meeting room located at:

Ellsworth Allen Park
101 Motor Avenue
Farmingdale, NY 11735

Critique Nights will be held the 3rd Monday of every month

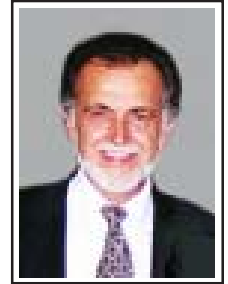
All IPG members can submit 2 photos in each of the following categories:

Color Prints, B&W Prints and Slides



President's Message

Those of you who did not attend our last Critique Night on March 15th missed seeing some outstanding photographs. It seems that we keep improving each month, as is evidenced by the March PFLI scores. I am especially impressed by the submissions of the "B" workers. It appears that our format of instructional critiques instead of competitions is paying off. I ask those of you who have not yet submitted any work, to do so. The more images we see, the more we can learn from each other, and learning is the name of the game.



Charlie Bowman, IPG President

By now, most, if not all members, should be aware that a committee has been formed to nominate a slate of candidates for the office of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer for 2004 - 2005. The Nominating Committee consists of Bob Makely (Chairperson), Pat Hutcherson and Tony Corrado. Bob will present the nominations at our **April 12, 2004** meeting. After the Committee's nominations are presented, additional nominations (if any) will be accepted from the floor. Bob will email the final slate of nominations to the membership. Voting for the election of officers will take place during our meeting on **June 14, 2004**. Proxy votes will be accepted from members unable to attend that meeting. Such votes must be emailed to Bob Makely (robertmakely@optonline.net) and received by him no later than Saturday **June 12, 2004**.

We are looking for a volunteer to be a "roving reporter" for the TTL. Experience working for the New York Times is not necessary, just the ability to interview new members, post information about upcoming photo exhibits, and any other tidbits which would be interesting to the TTL readers. Anyone who is willing to tackle this assignment should contact Jeff or myself.

Charlie



PFLI Spring Festival

C.W.Post University

April 25th

Tickets are available at the next Island Photo Group meeting for \$20 ~ \$25 at door ~

See Jo Edmundson for Tickets

Elbows in. An awful lot of photographers shoot with their elbows hanging out in the wind like a pair of wings. That causes your shoulder muscles to work. If you don't believe me put your hands in front of your face as if holding a camera. Start with your elbows at your side and raise your elbows up and down a few times. You'll feel the muscles in your shoulders working. Get in the habit of relaxing your arms and letting your elbows rest at your side. It's especially easy to cock that elbow out when you're shooting a vertical composition.

When you're shooting, your left elbow should be resting against your body and your left arm should be supporting all of the camera's weight. Use your right arm only to steady the camera and press the shutter. When you take all the weight on your left arm you'll relax your right arm and the right elbow will drop on it's own.

Control your breathing and relax. Do you hold your breath when you shoot? Do you even know for sure?

Holding your breath is the same as clenching your fist. You're bringing air in and tensing the muscles in your chest to keep it there. While you're reading this exhale deeply. Your chest and shoulders will drop. If you do this while standing as described above there will be a feeling of your upper body settling down onto your hips. I exhale just before shooting and often don't breathe for a couple of frames if I'm shooting some kind of action handheld. It allows my body to stay relaxed. Don't worry. I've never known a photographer to pass out from lack of oxygen!

Find a brace. If you can find a solid vertical object such as a wall or tree let your upper body sag against it. Let it take your weight. That extra support can buy you up to two stops (sometimes more). If you can find a horizontal surface throw a jacket or camera bag on it and rest your camera on top of that soft support in place of a tripod.

Under expose. If you're shooting print film you've got a lot more exposure latitude than you do with slides. Bracket your shots so that some are at the recommended exposure and some are a stop underexposed. You can almost always get a usable print from a negative that was shot one stop under.

Take multiple shots. Take multiple shots if you can. You'll probably have three or four throw-aways to every shot that's acceptable and a much higher ratio of so-so shots to tack sharp shots. But you'll improve with practice and the number of keepers will go up.

Push the Envelope. Go ahead and push the envelope a bit. This isn't brain surgery after all. If you screw up a frame or two there's no harm. When the light is fading fast I've had exposures over one second come out tack sharp. Now no sane photographer would try and hand hold an exposure over one second. But if you never try, you'll never "get lucky".



Items For Sale

1. Nikon Coolscan III film scanner \$250
2. Nikon N90S 35mm film camera body \$250
3. Nikon N90S 35mm film camera with Nikon MB 10 Power pack and hand grip \$300
4. Nikon SB 24 electronic flash \$100

All of above in excellent condition.
Please see Sherman Paur if interested.



Heard on the LI Photogs Grapevine

Anonymous Contributor

John Brokos of the Freeport Camera Club will be giving a course in judging photos in competition to selected "A" group workers in PFLI. This is a welcome event as many members have expressed concern that consistent judging has been hard to come by of late. Many thanks to John for taking the lead on this issue and I'm sure we all wish him success in this important undertaking.

