

Judges' Newsletter December 2020

I offered to write the newsletter for the Judges' Executive a couple of months ago. So far I haven't done very well, as this is the first newsletter I have written. In 2021, there will be a newsletter every two months.

When I was at university a long time ago, I remember one of our textbooks that had the title, 'The Educated Man'. On the front page were the wise words, 'the educated man is the man who knows that he knows nothing'. That book really impressed me and has influenced me deeply.

A Penny for Your Thoughts...

I read a most interesting article the other day. The article was very thoughtful and it was about what we have called the 'Exposure Triangle'. The writer maintained that we should be talking about the 'Exposure Square'.

He talked about the typical three and these were of course Aperture, Shutter Speed and ISO. He contended that the fourth one (and thus the square) was the Focal Length of the Lens being used. He talked about how the Focal Length of the Lens determined what Shutter Speed one would use.

Where Focal Length is factored in, would you use the same Shutter Speed for a 400mm Lens as you would for a 50mm Lens?

This why the Focal Length is considered as an exposure consideration.

PSQ Judges' Forum.

What a fantastic forum we had. Forough presented some inspiring knowledge on the topic of shooting portraits. It is hoped that everyone in attendance have learned a lot more about shooting portraits. I hope so.

Public Speaking: David Palmer did one of the best talks on Public Speaking. We have one very learned gentleman at our club who feels he is at a funeral when he listens to some judges.

David talked about putting life into your commentary and enthusiasm into your voice. It is so important to project your voice. For those who say we don't get enough chances to practise, when you are going to give a judging, stand in front of a mirror with a microphone (use a pretend microphone if you wish – such as a hair brush) and record your judging commentary. Listen to your recording and self-critique your delivery, keeping in mind your audience. Better still, follow up on the PSQ Webpage and listen once again to David's presentation.

And for something a bit different, I'm including in this newsletter a segment titled 'What She Thought':

After recently speaking with a fellow Aspley Camera Club member and listening to her thoughts on judging, I decided I'd take this opportunity to share what she said, as she reflected on her early experiences when entering monthly club competitions, as a B Grader and newbie to the club.

This lady comes from a Visual Arts Education background and said she really struggled at first with the inability of quite a few judges 'to be receptive to those who thought outside the square'. Her background had taught her to push the boundaries and think abstractly, to challenge the viewer and create thought provoking images which challenged accepted ways of seeing. It was natural for her to think abstractly and try to interpret the monthly set subjects with imagination and ingenuity. This was during a time when

explanations for set subjects weren't offered and members were left to interpret subjects how they thought best. Subjects such as 'Spires' saw her shot down quite harshly, with examples on non-acceptances being awarded if said 'Spire' was not part of an architectural building or church. Her way of seeing saw spires in other forms, in both natural and man-made shapes. She indicated she could have easily entered Church Spires or similar, but thought they would be rejected as being too unimaginative, as they had been done so many times before.

After several similar incidences, feeling she had stepped into the dark ages of informed vision, she seriously questioned if she should stay. Wanting to persevere, she stepped back from her usual approach and when the subject of 'Letterboxes' came up, although she immediately thought of letters in a box, or boxes of individual 'letters' in a box as a suitable way to go, she decided to play it safe and made a trip to a rural location where she knew there were lots of funky letterboxes, and commenced taking shots of interesting and imaginative 'letter boxes' at the front of private properties. The next judge was obviously a bit more enlightened and open to abstract thinking, awarding the image of the night for, you guessed it, an image of a box of letters sitting on a bench... so, back to the drawing board...

Thanks to a timely presentation by a highly respected judge on the topic of the vagaries of judging at international level, she was able to step back and rethink her approach to taking on board the often contradictory and conflicting judges' comments. She was able to have more confidence in her work and persevered to go onto becoming one of our highly respected A Grade Gold club members.

What she learnt from these often frustrating experiences as a B Grader trying to navigate the idiosyncrasies of club judging, was to remind herself her photography was for herself, not the judges, and only take on board useful feedback from judges (of which there was plenty) and ignore the rest. She proceeded over the following years to filter through the opinions, rejections and accolades and apply what worked for her and gave her joy, never focusing on the awards and points. Throughout observing many judges and merging their opinions with her formal artistic training, she became more comfortable with herself as a practitioner and continued to improve her photographic skills.

She said that fortunately things have evolved over the years where judges are more receptive to conceptual photographic art and the importance of storytelling, and are moving away from being ultra hung up about focusing only on the technicalities of an image. Whilst these still play an important role in the production of a successful photographic image, they should not be the only consideration when it comes to judging. Some of the most powerful and influential photographs throughout history have been technically poor. Judges and photographic practitioners should be open to improving their understanding and appreciation of artistic vision.

The message she wanted to share with me was that we need to always be very mindful of how we support and encourage our less experienced members and how we as judges must be sensitive to their needs, offering constructive and encouraging feedback at all times, and never be guilty of causing someone to question whether they should continue with a club or photography itself because of negative or confusing feedback. She continues to get frustrated when she hears a new member say, 'my photos aren't good enough to enter'.

I have chosen this lady as an example as I have listened to many Psychologists who talk about the differences in the way females think compared with the way males think.

Closing note:

A special thought to all of you and your families. For those who celebrate Christmas, I hope you have a wonderful Christmas. For those who don't, I hope you have a wonderful vacation period with lots of wonderful photographic opportunities.

Stan Bowles