

EFFECTIVE STORYTELLING WITH PHOTOGRAPHY

Premium Guide
Written by Kent DuFault



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INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is one of the oldest methods of human communication. It began with verbal grunts and hand gestures, and then later moved on toward cave drawings and simple conversation.

Eventually, storytelling made its way into the written word, theater, music, and moving pictures. In addition, in the last ten years or so, storytelling has become a staple of the advertising industry.

This is important to you because creating stories with your photographs is the difference between someone wanting to stare at your images or simply letting their eyes drift right past them.

This is especially true in today's environment, where we are all bombarded "visually" on a constant basis.

A photograph being simply "pretty" just doesn't cut it anymore. We've all seen it before. It's the unique story within the photograph that makes it worth viewing.

Those of you who have followed my writing know that I'm a huge proponent of storytelling in photography. For those of you that are new to my writing, in my mind a professional-level photograph consists of three components: technically sound (although a quality photo doesn't always have to be technically perfect); an organized composition

(without this your photograph is a lazy mess, and a viewer feels that... even subconsciously); and most importantly, the photograph conveys a message, which is **the "story."**

Of these three components, you should prioritize the creation of your photographs in the following manner: story first, composition second, and technical quality third.

I can hear some of you sucking in your breath.

"Did he just say technical quality third?"

You can have a technically perfect photograph that has no story and it will be boring as hell, and no one will ever really look at it.

I quantify my statement with the word 'really' because there is a difference between someone studying your photograph with true interest and someone who simply gives it a "like" on social media.

If getting "likes" is what you truly seek, then simply see what style of images are getting likes and copy them. When it comes to receiving "likes," there are definite trends. We've all seen the photograph of the lone individual shining a flashlight up into the sky as the Milky Way glows brightly behind them.

If you spend any time perusing Instagram at all, you will see that is what the vast majority of Instagram photographers are actually doing: repeating what's already been done.

However, what if that's not you? If you desire to infuse something of yourself into your photography, then study this Premium Guide and put what you learn into practice.

A photograph with a strong story element will engage a viewer's attention even if the quality of the photo is less than stellar.

At a photography workshop that I once attended I was shown a photograph that had been selected as the cover photograph for the annual report of a major New York City metropolitan hospital. (Excuse me if you've heard this story before, but it's important here.)

Keep in mind that the cover photograph for an annual report is considered the "face" of this once-a-year, and extremely important, corporate publication. Companies spend huge amounts of money on the design and cover photography for their annual reports.

The photograph that I was shown depicted a nurse running through the emergency room of this hospital with an infant cradled in her arms. A mask covered

her face. However, the limp body of the child, and the wild look in the nurse's eyes, told a story that captivated viewers. The image created dramatic impact, and that led to the decision to place this photograph on the cover.

Now, here is the interesting part. The photograph was completely blurry. There wasn't a single sharp detail in the entire shot.

I asked the famous photographer (who was giving the workshop) how this photo came to be selected as the cover shot when it was completely blurry.

He responded with two sentences that completely changed the way I viewed my own photography and photography in general.

He said, "Story always trumps technical. Get the shot, and then worry about the technicalities."

Bear in mind that this photographer was paid thousands of dollars for the cover rights to that image. Now that's a powerful story! Right?

I've always been a storyteller. In fact, I'm a published author of fiction. No, I've never written a full-length novel; however, over the years I've cranked out a nice collection of short stories. Some of them have been published both online and in book form.

My penchant for storytelling goes back as far as I can remember. My first two short stories were published while I was still in high school.

My mother used to call my inherent need for storytelling “white lying,” as I just couldn’t help but embellish anything that ever happened to me, or could happen to me.

True story...

My parents divorced when I was four years old. This was back in the early 1960s when divorce was not very common.

I got to see my dad every other weekend.

Our family home had been sold off as a result of the divorce, and he was now living in a trailer in a trailer park.

It was winter.

My dad had picked me up and then taken me to his trailer. It had rained the previous evening, which later turned into a light snowfall, and everything was coated with ice.

Dad pulled up to the curb, in front of his new home, and got out of the car.

As I was about to get out of the car, drama developed in my young childish mind.

(And in this case, my dramatic nature resulted in extreme stupidity.) **(Drama is the basis for all literary stories by the way.)**

I decided, as I got out of the car, that I was going to “create a story.” I was going to pretend to slip and fall onto the sidewalk as a result of the ice.

Why did I decide this?

I really have no idea.

Maybe I was just trying to get attention.

Maybe I was acting out.

I have always had a wildly active imagination. Like my mother said... little white lies.

I got out of the car and set my plan in motion. **Now, here is the interesting part.**

In my attempt to “fake” slipping and falling, I actually slipped and fell.

This resulted in my face slamming against the sidewalk. I severely chipped one of my front teeth and almost knocked out the other one.

My dad ended up carrying me into his trailer with blood flowing everywhere, and believe me, he was not happy.

With every story there is an outcome (referred to as a resolve in literary terms).

The outcome to this story is that I had to live every day of my life for the next 28 years with an oddly shaped (chipped) front tooth.

My family (including me in early adulthood) were too poor to get it properly fixed!

I told you that story because storytelling in photography seems to come easier to me than I think it does to a lot of other photographers.

“Seeing the story” is often the first thing that compels me to create a photograph (before I’ve even thought about any other aspect of the photographic process).


However, I do believe that becoming a good photographic storyteller can be learned, and that’s the reason for this Premium Guide.

Here is what you’ll learn:

- The history of storytelling
- The definition of storytelling
- Accepted forms of storytelling
- How storytelling affects the human mind
- Storytelling and entertainment
- Storytelling and learning
- The therapeutic nature of storytelling
- What storytelling is not
- How to transform traditional storytelling concepts into photographic terms
- How cropping affects the story
- How the camera point of view plays a critical role in storytelling
- How your choice of lens changes the story
- How shutter speed indicates the action of a story
- What the aperture does to a story
- How ISO selection can make a difference in the story
- How white balance can change the story
- The power of post-production... in the storytelling process

01 WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

There is a literary storytelling term called “The Story Trope.” The word **trope** is used for describing common recurring literary and rhetorical devices, motifs, or clichés in creative works. In other words, **there are no new stories**. All stories are a derivative of some story that has already been previously told. Now whether you actually believe that or not, **becoming a student of the “story trope” is good for your photography**. Viewers recognize story tropes subconsciously because we’ve all been bombarded by these stories since birth. An interesting thing about story tropes, also referred to as story arcs, is that they seem to be universal across all cultures. The story will differ, but the story arc (or theme) stays the same. When story tropes are lurking about in your mind, stories will subconsciously insert themselves into your photography as you go about seeing and creating pictures. A story trope came to my mind when I created Image 001. Can you guess which story trope I was thinking of? It was the biblical story of David and Goliath, which is the story trope of the little guy going up against the big guy. In the case of David, he won. In the case of the Chicken Village, I think the battle is still being fought. When a viewer sees this image, the intended message, story, and probably even the story trope are clearly evident.

 **Key Lesson:** By becoming a student of story arcs (tropes), you can then condition yourself to recognize story value in a scene that you wish to photograph. Once you recognize a good story within a scene, you can then set about photographing it (just like I did with the Chicken Village). You can also have a story in mind and then go about setting up a photograph to tell that story. For example, did you know that the movie *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* is loosely based upon the story trope “The Odyssey” as told by Homer in the late 8th Century BCE? The writers of that movie began with a thought about the story arc of “The Odyssey” and then transformed it into a modern movie storyline.

That, my friends, is how you should be thinking about your photographs!



Image 001 – Photograph by Kent DuFault


THE HISTORY OF STORYTELLING

One of the earliest recorded, and traceable, forms of storytelling began somewhere around 3000 BCE in Mesopotamia. No one knows for sure the exact origins, or location, of when storytelling truly began.

It's suggested that the origins of storytelling were born from the following needs:

- The human need for play and self-entertainment
- The human need for explaining the physical world
- The human desire to believe in a higher power and to placate the supernatural forces that were believed to be present in the world
- The human need to communicate and experience one another
- The need to fulfill an aesthetic need for beauty, regularity, and self-expression
- The need to record history

That six-point bullet list is important to you as a photographer!

 **Key Lesson:** When attempting to create storytelling photos, ask the following questions: Is this image playful or entertaining? Will my viewer gain an explanation or an understanding of some physical aspect of the world around me? Will my photograph compel a viewer to believe in a higher power or not to believe in a higher power? Am I completely communicating an experience that someone else will comprehend, even though they aren't here with me? Does my shot convey beauty, regularity, or self-expression? Am I recording a moment in history that someone out there might find important?

Let's break down this key lesson using the Chicken Village photograph from above as an example.

- 1) I believe the photograph is playful and entertaining as it compares a corporate behemoth, KFC, to an unlikely competitor such as the Chicken Village. It's a visual interpretation of the biblical David and Goliath story.
- 2) By looking at this photograph, a viewer will realize that it is a location in Asia. So, yes, there is an explanation or understanding of the physical world surrounding this shot.
- 3) Will my photograph compel a viewer to believe in a higher power or not believe in a higher power? That's not likely, unless they believe the Colonel is God. **This is important. Your photograph doesn't have to have an answer of "yes" to every one of these questions to be a successful storytelling image.**
- 4) I believe that this shot does communicate a complete message of the David and Goliath story trope.
- 5) The composition – and in particular the patterns of red to yellow and then back to red – do communicate regularity and beauty through composition.
- 6) If the viewer of this photograph were a relative of the Chicken Village owners (long after KFC forced them out of business), or in the reverse (if they outlasted KFC in this Asian location), then this photograph could have significant historical meaning to someone out there.

THE DEFINITION OF STORYTELLING

Storytelling is the process of formulating ideas and thoughts within your own mind and then transforming those thoughts into a form of communication, be it words (written or spoken), song, dance, drawing or painting, or in our case (you and me) a photograph.


That is a pretty simplistic definition.

I say that because among the academics and historians, there is no complete consensus, and it is extraordinarily hard to create a definitive definition for storytelling.

Storytellers themselves resist the idea of defining the art of storytelling, because it feels confining.

Storytelling is also fluid, because we don't all see the world in the same way.

A good story to me might not be a good story to you. This is why one person will love a book or a movie and another person will hate it.

 **Key Lesson:** The **definition of storytelling** does not create a good story. In a minute, we will discuss the components of a great story.

ACCEPTED FORMS OF STORYTELLING

Storytelling is everywhere. It's the only form of communication that has transcended time and culture.

If at this moment in time you were standing in the checkout line at your local store and a customer was arguing with the cashier over a pricing problem, well that's a story.

If your child throws a ball and the family dog chases after it, but the ball rolls into a pond and the dog is unable to retrieve it, that's a story.

If you're on the subway train and a very tall man attempts to get onto the train but he has trouble getting through the door due to his height and he crouches down to slip through the door, but not before the doors attempt to close in on him and squish him, that's a story.

Again, it is hard to clearly define the accepted forms of storytelling. However, in general, a story will have an audience, a key point, a conflict, a hero, an adversary, and a resolve.

Now bear in mind that these are literary definitions of storytelling elements. When you're telling stories with photographs, you're not likely to get all of those elements into a single photograph. (If you can, bravo to you!)

However, by understanding them, it will better prepare you to take awesome storytelling photography!

Let's lay out these points using my example scenarios from above.

Audience

In all three examples, the audience is the photographer who is going to capture the moment and then transfer the audience status over to the viewers of the final photographs.

Key Point

Scenario #1: People are waiting to go through the checkout lane.

Scenario #2: The family dog is playing with your child and chasing after the ball.

Scenario #3: A man needs to access and travel on the subway train.

Conflict

Scenario #1: There is an argument over the price of a product, which holds everyone else up in their desire to pay and move on with their day.

Scenario #2: The ball is irretrievable by the dog.

Scenario #3: The man cannot get onto the train, and then becomes threatened by the closing doors.

Hero

Scenario #1: It could be the customer, the cashier, another employee, or someone else in line.

Scenario #2: It could be the dog, the child, or another adult that is present.

Scenario #3: It could be the tall man, a bystander who helps the man, or the train itself (should the doors detect his presence and open back up automatically).

Adversary

Scenario #1: The customer or the cashier.

Scenario #2: The pond.


Scenario #3: The train and its closing doors.

The Resolve

Scenario #1: One of the two, either the customer or the cashier, will be correct and the other will be wrong, and this will establish the hero and adversary roles, ultimately resolving the conflict.

Scenario #2: Any number of potential resolves could happen. The dog might jump into the pond; the child might retrieve the ball with a stick; the child might fall into the pond in an attempt to retrieve the ball and the dog goes in after him or her; or another adult might intervene.

Scenario #3: Any number of potential resolves could happen. The man might force his way through the door; a bystander might intervene and pull the doors apart to the man's relief; or the train may pull out and the man's days are numbered!

 **Key Lesson:** To develop into a good storytelling photographer, the stories, the possibilities, and the motivations should constantly be rolling around in your head like a movie reel. What could happen? What is happening? Where could this go? As these thoughts are going on, you are already physically positioning yourself, even before something happens. This level of anticipation

takes time to develop, but you can do it. Remember: audience, key point, conflict, hero, adversary, and resolve.

From a photographic standpoint...

It's typically the resolve that you want to capture, or just before the resolve. **You should be aiming for "peak action."**

The genre of street photography was born from the concept of storytelling.

Unfortunately, I see so many street photographs that tell no story at all.

A person simply walking down the street is not a story. A person walking down the street along with another element that creates conflict, well that begins to become a story.

Don't take the word "conflict" too literally.

The situation does not need to involve one person shoving another. The conflict could be something as nonthreatening as a grandmother walking past an advertisement of a young woman wearing nothing but her panties and bra; that described scenario raises internal conflict.

I should also mention what is known as the “three-act structure.” The three-act structure is a literary model used to write stories. A three-act structure divides a narrative into three parts (or acts) often called the setup, the confrontation, and the denouement (otherwise known as the resolution).

You may be wondering, “Why is it important for me to learn these literary terms and situations? I just want to take better pictures.”

Here’s why.

The three-act structure permeates almost every aspect of our lives.

Subconsciously, when the three-act structure is presented – even in a photograph – we are drawn to it. We feel better about whatever it is that we are viewing, reading, listening to, etc.

In discussing photographic composition, we often talk about The Rule of Thirds, The Rule of Odds (which includes the number 3), and Triangulation in composition (with 3 points to a triangle). All of these can be related to the number three. (Get it? The three-act structure).

Now, in composing and creating a still photograph, you may not always be able to create a setup, a

confrontation, and a denouement. However, you should be striving to accomplish that. The closer you can get to that ideal, the better the story your photograph will tell, and that will result in widespread audience acceptance.

Some genres of photography are easier to see and execute a story. Street photography, for example, is all about the story.

But how do you tell a story with a landscape photograph? You look for ways to fulfill story structure. Sometimes you might only find one or two of the six suggested origins of storytelling.

The mere fact that you are “making an effort” to see the story will help you to be a better storyteller with your images.



Key Lesson: When something catches your eye and calls out to you to create a photograph, your subconscious has already identified a story element. That’s why you have an interest in capturing whatever it is that you’re looking at. Step one is accomplished. Some story is there. You want to communicate a message from your mind out to viewers of your photograph – that decision puts your photographic process into the loosely defined

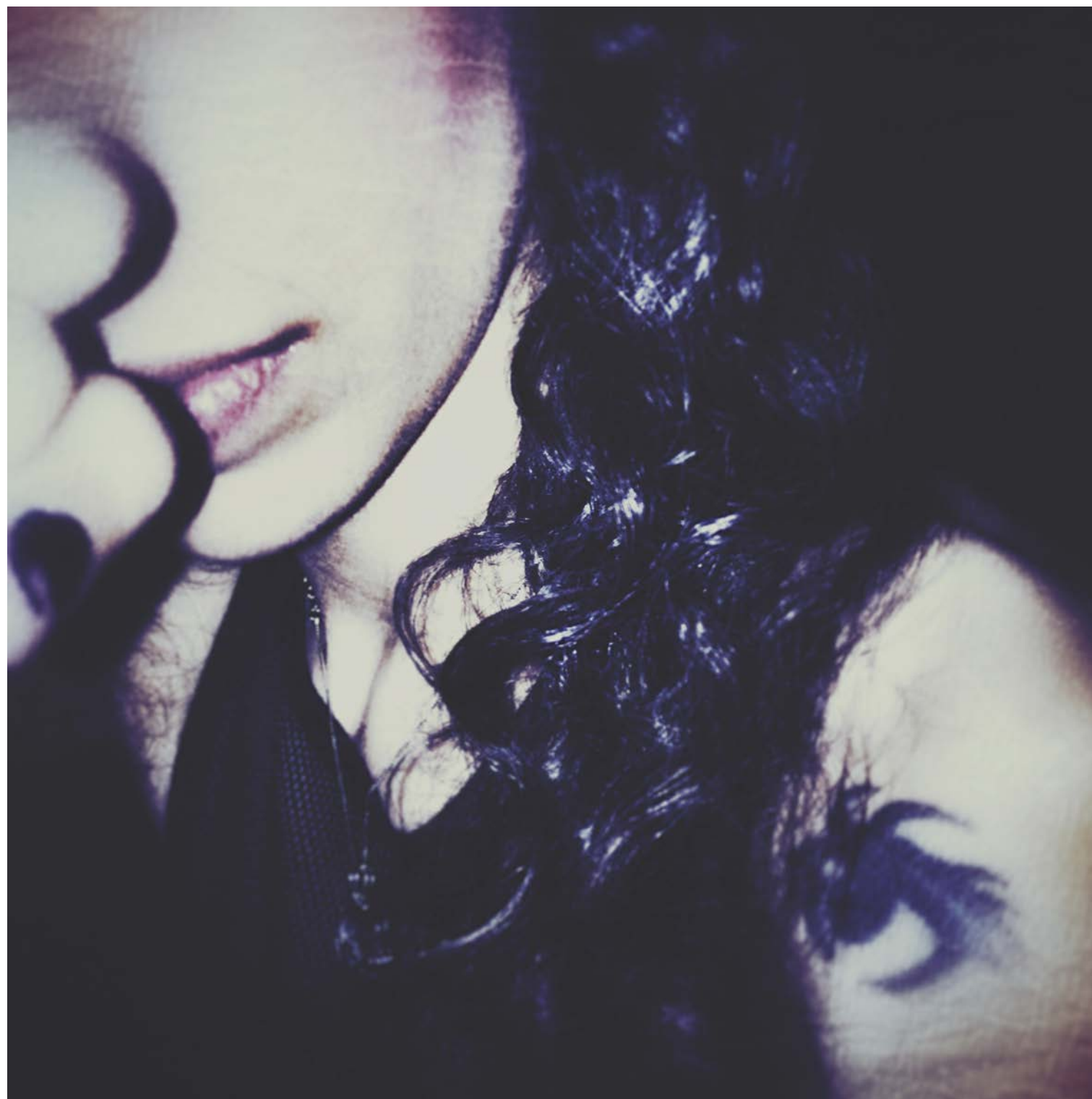


Image 002 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

category of storytelling. Now it becomes a three-part process. Step two, you must figure out what it is you're trying to say with your photograph. That's called **developing the story**. Thirdly, you must make the technical choices to transform the story into the photographic medium. **That's being a photographer** and not simply a snap shooter.

Earlier, we talked about how you can spot a story developing from a scene in front of you, or you can create a scene to tell a story that you already have in your head. Image 002 is an example of the latter. I was creating photographs for a fictional literary story. In the story, one of the characters is a woman who is a total ninja, badass, warrior. She is called "The Woman with the One Eye Tattoo." I wanted to tell the story of the woman's character in a single photograph. Image 002 is the storytelling image that I created. So what did I accomplish in this photograph? What can my viewers learn?

- I chose a stark color scheme to create tension and a sense of mystery.
- I featured an eye tattoo, which is a major element of the character.
- I chose specifically **not** to show her entire face, as she is mysterious.
- I did show her jawline and lips to clarify that it is a woman that the viewer is looking at.
- I had her raise her hand and create a fist in a fighting stance.

We are the audience. The key point is that we are looking at a mysterious woman with an eye tattoo. The conflict is her fighting posture. Is she a hero or an adversary? In this case, that part of the story isn't played out. Does that make it less effective as a storytelling image? I don't think so, and neither did the author.

Remember, you're always striving for complete story structure, but you won't always get there, and that's okay.

02 WHY STORYTELLING WORKS

Storytelling works when it is permeated with emotion, meaning, and truthfulness.

The human brain is hardwired to learn better if the stimuli we are taking in holds emotion, meaning, and truthfulness. This is because the narrative helps our brain focus.

This is scientific fact.

When we are taking in a story that is comprised of those elements (emotion, meaning, and truthfulness), the neurons in our brain that are firing off are the same neurons that would be firing off if we were actually living the event.

This is why we get scared during a scary movie even though we can rationalize that it's just a movie. It's not real.

Okay. You might think, "Well, how can truthfulness be a factor? Star Wars wasn't true! It never happened."

Think about this.

Have you ever watched a movie that you lost interest in long before it ended because there were events that were simply not believable.

So... maybe a better word than truthfulness is "believability."

In a movie, the script must be believable.

In a novel, the plot must be believable.

In your photographs, the image depicted must be believable, even if it's not real.

If you're doing wild photo composites, cool! But don't leave telltale signs where I, or any of your viewers, will know that you faked it. If so, your image will have a low truthfulness factor.

The great author and poet, Reynolds Price, said the following about the concept of 'story':

"A need to tell and hear stories is essential to the species Homo sapiens—second in necessity apparently after nourishment and before love and shelter. Millions survive without love or home, almost none in silence; the opposite of silence leads quickly to narrative, and the sound of story is the dominant sound of our lives, **from the small accounts of our day's events** to the vast incommunicable constructs of psychopaths."



 **Key Lesson:** I placed that eight-word section of the quote by Reynolds Price in bold type because of the importance to you, and I, as storytelling photographers. We don't have to be witnessing some major news event to tell good stories with our images! Even small accounts of our day's events make great stories.



Image 003 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

This photograph, from a small event in my life, tells a strong story. Look at the faces of the man and the woman. Look at their body posture. As the two of them stand there – the only folks in the shot wearing festive holiday costumes – do they look happy? No, they do not. A story is unfolding. Now, did I capture the story at the peak moment? I believe that I did, because a second later the man stormed off and that was the end of it. We don't know what led these two people to the situation that they are in; we only have conjecture. But the conflict is there, and for viewers of a photograph the need for conjecture is entertaining!

 **Key Lesson:** Good storytelling photography will often have some unanswered element to the story. It's a still photograph. The full plot generally cannot be revealed, such as in a written story or a movie. The key is to capture enough of the story so that the viewer is enticed to fill in the blanks with their own thoughts. I was only a few feet away from these two people, and I can't tell you for sure what was going on. I can only tell you (for sure) that they were fighting. I think this photograph is an interesting study in body language. Look at his aggressive stance versus her submissive one.

Many stories have a 'surface story.' The surface story holds details that unlock certain information for the recipient, including metaphors to the story. The underlying message to the story can be understood, and interpreted, with clues that hint to a final message.

I titled Image 003 "The Annual Christmas Argument." Given the clues from the surface story as you study the photograph, you can probably guess where I thought the story was headed.


MEMORY RETENTION

Emotion shapes our thoughts.

In fact, emotion not only shapes our thoughts, but we can't properly learn without the use of emotion.

Stories are an ideal delivery mechanism for your photography, because stories are a facilitator for emotion. When your photographs contain the story element of emotion, it becomes the catalyst for a viewer to **remember your photograph** by putting it into an emotional structure.

People remember a good story because our brains are set up that way. People remember a photograph that incorporates the story element for the exact same reason.

 **Key Lesson:** If your goal is to become a good photographic storyteller in street photography, or in a photojournalistic sense such as in Image 003, you need to do the following:

- Be aware of your surroundings and developing stories.
- Anticipate the action so that when it occurs, you are ready.

- Practice capturing the decisive moment (peak action). Most great storytelling photos happen quickly, and you will only have a millisecond where the best story can be conveyed in a single photo. You need to be releasing the shutter at that exact moment. When possible, you can use the "drive mode" to capture multiple frames quickly. However, that can be intrusive, and it can actually alter the story depending on the situation.
- For image 003, I shot about 10 frames to capture the one frame that I felt best conveyed the complete story. However, they had no idea that I was taking a picture at all.

Keep these points in mind to help viewers remember your storytelling photographs.


- 1) Keep the story simple. Don't try to cram so much into the picture. Just put in the elements that are necessary: audience, key point, conflict, hero, adversary, and resolve. Image 003 is successful due to its simplicity: there is a man and a woman, they are in a bar, they are in holiday costume and likely have been drinking,

he looks angry, she looks defeated. Now the viewer (you) can fill in the blanks to the story.

- 2) Make it emotional. Even when your shot depicts an inanimate object, you can make it emotional. (I'll show you examples later in the guide.)
- 3) Make it truthful. A viewer has to believe the story that you're attempting to tell them.
- 4) Make it real. I don't think that I could have staged Image 003 successfully and have told a real story. Yet, I staged Image 002, and it worked out just fine. Just remember... it has to feel real to the viewer!
- 5) Keep your story valid. You **cannot** tell a story that will appeal to everyone. Photograph the story as you see it, tell your story, and then let the appropriate audience find it.

CREATE CAUSE AND EFFECT

Storytelling can create cause and effect in the mind of the recipient. This is why storytelling is so powerful and used for such purposes as government propaganda, journalism, and in the propagation of history.

 **Key Lesson:** To become a great storyteller with photography, you should have cause and effect for your viewer already established in your mind before you snap the shutter. Practice the art of 'thinking about the message.' Most photographers today do not do this, and it's clearly evident in the work that they produce. Incorporating a storytelling meaning into your photograph means that you must have a message to send. If you have no message in your mind, how are you going to communicate a message to someone else?

The upcoming photograph (Image 004) is an excellent example of having a message and then trying to create cause and effect.

Let me tell you a story.

I have become somewhat disillusioned with the Christmas holiday season. This has been on my mind for several years now.

However, it came to a head this year when I saw Christmas decorations and promotions showing up in the retail stores in August.

In my mind, greed has eaten up the meaning of the holiday season (be it Christmas or whatever you celebrate).



Image 004 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

These thoughts placed a message in my mind. Let me show you how that played out in my photography.

I titled this photograph “JOY – Fast Food Style.”

So one day in December, I get ready to walk into my gym.

I am always visually aware and looking for visual stories. I was walking past this trashcan when I became disgusted by the lack of attendance to the mess.

The word “JOY” popped out at me as I walked past, and the irony of the moment clicked in my storytelling brain.

Here we have this disgusting mess, topped off with a perfect example of how the retail industry has bastardized the ideals behind the holiday season.

I had my photographic story along with the cause and effect that I wished to convey to an audience.

When you examine this photograph, my message – my story – comes across pretty loud and clear.

I wanted you to see this for several reasons.

It's not a complicated photograph. However, it has a strong story. The story has resonated with a fairly wide audience. I personally feel very satisfied having created an image that expresses how I feel, and it did create cause and effect among a viewing audience.

This image is not going to get 1,000 likes. However, I feel that doesn't matter. To the folks who related to my message, it meant something to them.

STORYTELLING AND LEARNING

When someone views your photography, they must be able to take something from it into their own mind and their own experience in order to relate to your work.

It doesn't always have to be simply entertainment or information. A powerful storytelling tool, for your photography, is the concept of learning.

If a viewer learns something from your photograph and from your story, they are more likely to remember and engage with your work.

Our brains are built to learn from stories.

This helps us make sense of a complex world. If your photograph helps me to learn something, I've gained a personal advantage, and we all want that.

Humans are focused on understanding (and recognizing) patterns, concepts, and ideas.



Key Lesson: The human mind focuses on patterns. Utilizing patterns is a primary composition tool for photography. Put these two thoughts together. As you go about creating storytelling photography, using a pattern strengthens your efforts.

Stories are built upon cause and effect, which we just discussed. In a story, one event leads to another.

All of us think in narratives all day long. "If I do this... then this will happen." It's an unconscious and uncontrollable aspect of the human mind.

Stories grab and maintain attention. They help us to understand, learn, and remember.

A good photographic story might be retained in a viewer's mind for 5 minutes, an hour; or if the photographic story is good enough, for a lifetime.

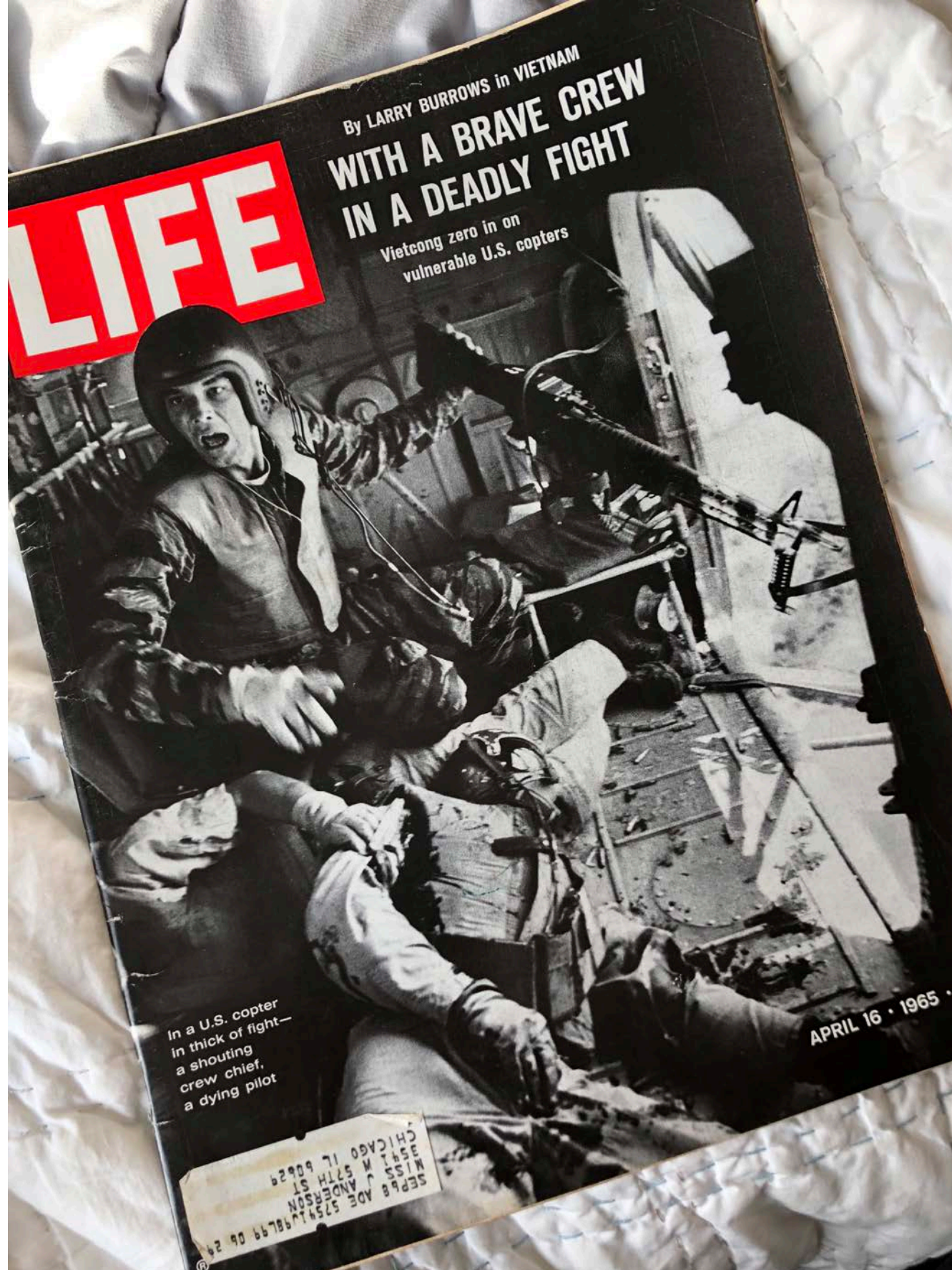


Image 005 – Photograph by Larry Burrows for Life magazine 1965

I was 5 years old the first time I saw the photograph that is depicted in Image 005. The strength of the story that it tells sticks with me, even today. In fact, when I came across a good copy of this magazine back in 2012, I bought it immediately. Can you spot all of the storytelling elements within this photograph? Do we have a sense of the place? Is there emotion and conflict? Do we learn something about the situation? Could the photographer have muffed up this shot and ultimately have captured a less effective storytelling picture? Absolutely! What if he had shot the image while holding his camera horizontally? Use your hands to crop the shot into a horizontal image and you will see that it would have been far less effective.

◆ **Key Lesson:** Something as simple as holding the camera vertically or horizontally can radically alter the story that your photograph will tell. Take in the details of a scene that you want to photograph. Discern what is important and eliminate what isn't. Remember cause and effect. What is needed in the shot to create the cause and effect that you wish to produce?

STORYTELLING AND ENTERTAINMENT

When viewing storytelling through photography, entertaining a viewer is probably one of the easier concepts to grasp.

If you take a gorgeous shot of a sunrise at the beach in Hawaii, and I happen to like beaches, then I'm likely to be entertained.

But think about this. In that scenario, did you really convey a personal message to me?

If there were fifty photographers standing on that beach, on that morning, and they were all photographing the sunrise, would your shot convey something personal from you to me (the viewer)?

Personalization is the essence of storytelling. Without personalization, it's not a story. It is simply an anecdote.

AZ **Definition:** An **anecdote** is a short, amusing account of something that has happened. Some may think of an anecdote as a story; however, some key elements are missing.

An anecdote is an accounting of an event. For example, if I tell you, "I went to the store today, and I saw my Uncle Bob," that's an anecdote.

If I tell you, "I went to the store today, and I saw my Uncle Bob. I was approaching him when he tripped and went headfirst into a rotating rack of wallets. It was like an explosion and wallets went everywhere. The poor guy was rolling around on the floor when a manager came over to help him, and the manager slipped on a wallet and fell down himself. I helped my Uncle up to his feet, and we both went over to the manager and helped him up as well. Luckily, no one was really hurt." That's a story.

You show me a pretty photograph of the sunrise on a generic-looking beach, that's an anecdote.

You show me a pretty photograph of the sunrise on a beach along with a sign that says Waikiki, and a bikini-clad girl carrying a surfboard into the water, that's a story.

Here are some ways to entertain while also telling a story with your photographs:

- Provide a humorous element
- Shock the viewer
- Include a mysterious element
- Capture human drama
- Show a specific point of view
- Present a personal opinion

STORYTELLING AND COMMUNICATION

Do you consider yourself a good communicator?


I have always considered myself a good communicator; however, my wife says that I'm not. Let me clarify that statement. She says that I'm excellent at written communication, but my oral communication skills could use some work. She thinks I don't talk enough.

So I guess I'm good at written communication.

In this section, I have one main point that I really want to hit home with you.

No matter how good you are at communicating, there will always be a huge percentage of the population that will not understand what you are saying.

It's just the way it is. We all think differently.

 **Key Lesson:** By being true to yourself, and to your message that you want to convey, you will reach more people than if you try to be generic and as widespread as possible. A message for the millions is a message for no one. The greatest storytellers are great because they stay true to their particular way of telling a story. It's what makes them different and memorable. You should do the same with your storytelling photographs. Don't be trendy. Develop your photographic style around the way you think and see the world. Then go about capturing the world with your camera in your own way and telling your own stories.

STORYTELLING AND VALUES

I think my written story that I told you, and the visual interpretation of that story shown in Image 004, is an excellent example of using photographic storytelling to impart some values from one person to another.

You should sit down and write out a list of the values that you hold dear. By writing them out, you will become more aware of them and consequently they will be fresh in your mind when you're out trying to create storytelling photographs.

Let me give you an example.

Some values that are on my mind lately have to do with the idea of aging. I happen to be within a few years of turning sixty years old.

Previously, in my life, I never thought much about the aging process.

However, at this stage in my life, I have come to value health, family, the less fortunate, the concept of a life after death on earth, and many others things as well. These are values that previously didn't occupy much of my thoughts.

Now, let me share a photograph with you that I recently created. It tells a story, and it is a direct result of some of the personal values that I just shared with you and are on my mind.



Image 006 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

I have titled this photograph “Timeline.”

I was touring the Museum of Modern Art in Seoul, South Korea when I came around a corner and saw this scene.

The woman sitting there was a docent for the museum. I was immediately struck by her body language and facial expression. It was in such opposition to the artwork that hung on the wall next to her.

You see, I’ve spent a good deal of time recently contemplating aging and the aging process.


That value was in my mind, and here was the perfect situation to tell my story. I stopped, raised my camera, and took 3 or 4 pictures of the woman and the artwork.

She never moved, not even a flinch.

I think this is a storytelling photograph that folks my age can relate to. It compares the jubilation of youth to the unsettled passiveness of age.

A younger person may not “get” my storytelling message.

However, I do feel that this shot has longevity, and when a person of my age group sees it, it's likely to stick in their mind.

 **Key Lesson:** Many experts agree that the process of writing something down on paper has a tendency to bring those written objectives to reality. If you write down your values, the things that matter to you, and if you carry that around with you and review it on a regular basis, you are more likely to create meaningful storytelling photographs that convey those values than if you don't write them down.

THE THERAPEUTIC NATURE OF STORYTELLING

Storytelling is innate in all humans. It feeds the mind of both the storyteller as well as the listener (or in our case the viewer).

You want to tell a good story with your photos, and people want to receive a good story with your photos.

This isn't a fight. It's simply a matter of altering your thinking as a creator of photography.

Look, we've all been there. I was there. When I started in photography (a long time ago), my mentor taught me to take pictures of barns and fences.

That was what he loved to take pictures of, and he felt that I should be the same way.

However, it didn't take me long to become tired of barns and fences.

I wasn't finding my own creative therapy in that type of photography or storytelling.

When you make the effort to discover your passions and values, the process of creating storytelling photographs will actually provide a therapeutic benefit to your being.

It's true.

I have many of my photographs hanging on the walls of our home. All of them are storytelling images. None of them are simply a beauty shot of some vacation spot.

When I look at them – all of them – they bring me peace and happiness. I remember the story.

When you begin to shoot your images in this manner, they will bring you inner peace as well.

03 WHAT STORYTELLING IS NOT

Storytelling is not simply about a beginning, middle, and an end. A photograph of a fence leading into a seemingly generic woodland area is not a story (even though the fence has a beginning, middle, and end within the photo).

Stories have a beginning, middle, and an end, but this is only three pieces of a more complex puzzle.

Remember, **humans remember the emotional**. We forget the boring, the general, and the anodyne.

So what happens when you want to photograph a fence leading into a woodland area?

Should you kick the dirt under your boot and tell yourself, "Well there's no story here, I guess I won't take the picture."

Remember what I said earlier. The mere fact that you are motivated to create a picture means that the groundwork for a storytelling picture is there. **Step one is completed.**

So how do you turn **what you see** into a storytelling photo? How do you capture your passion, your vision, and your message into a great storytelling photograph that viewers will want to look at and remember?

Sometimes you simply won't be able to, and then you will have to decide whether it's still worth it to you to create the photograph.

Other times, you will be able to create a story. You might create it using shooting techniques or maybe in post-production.

Later in this guide I'm going to give you a number of examples to get you thinking on how to **visually** tell a story, especially using post-production techniques.

Let's look at an example right now.



Image 007 – Photographs by Kent DuFault

The image on the left was taken of the Swiss Alps from an airplane window. The image on the right was taken while standing on the shoreline of a lake just outside Valdez, Alaska.

I picked the two photographs as a comparison, in Image 007, for these reasons:

- They depict a similar subject – a mountain range.
- They exhibit a similar color scheme.
- On their own I think they are each “pretty” photographs that aren’t bad.
- One of them tells a story, and the other one doesn’t.

In my mind, the photograph on the right – of the Chugach Mountains – tells a story, and the one on the left – the Swiss Alps – does not.

The popularity ratings of the two photographs would support that statement.

Now, the photo on the left isn’t bad. In fact, it was submitted and accepted to a stock photo agency, and it has sold several times.


However, the photograph on the right has been a winner for me all the way down the line. It’s made a lot of money, and it’s won a few contests. It is one of my more popular photographs online.

Put the fence and woodland scenario back into your mind for a second. We had a beautiful scene, but no storyline.

The scene of the Chugach Mountains (the image on the right) was a beautiful scene...

However, it had no storyline.

So I thought through how to create one, and I did so by throwing a rock into the water to create the ripples.

 **Key Lesson:** Here is where we will begin to explore how to apply storytelling techniques toward still photography. By throwing the rock into the water, what photography technique did I accomplish? I strengthened the composition by adding a focal point into the foreground, which also created depth to the photo. By throwing the rock into the water, what storytelling technique did I accomplish? I added drama through mystery. A viewer sees the ripple and can’t help but wonder, “What created the ripple in this tranquil scene? Did someone throw a rock? Did a fish jump?” It’s important for you to grasp this idea, because I could have taken the shot without throwing the rock and it would have been okay, just like the Swiss Alps shot. But it’s the sense of mystery that turns this rather benign situation into a storytelling photograph. The ripple leads to conjecture on the part of the viewer, and that creates a story in their mind. Now the next time you’re about to take a photograph of a fence leading into a beautiful woodland area, what can you do to your photographic effort that will add a storytelling element similar to my “ripple at the Chugach Mountains”? I don’t know. You’re the photographer, and that’s what you will have to figure out!

Just remember, it takes more than a beginning, middle, and an end to successfully create a story – written or in a photo.

04 IMPORTANT STORYTELLING ELEMENTS



Image 008 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

We have somewhat touched on this, but let's dig a little deeper.

IT MUST BE TRUE

You're probably wondering... "I'm taking a photograph! How can it not be true?"

The photograph has to be true **in the mind of the viewer**.

Your photograph could be quite literal (as I'm about to show you) and it can still fall flat on its face, because the viewer doesn't believe the story that you are trying to tell.

Image 008 is one of my earliest attempts at creating storytelling photography. This image has never done well for me, commercially or artistically. That is despite the fact that it has two super cute women in it, which typically (these days) is a recipe for success. (I guess I didn't show enough skin.) Plus, this shot was heavily produced. The women are professional models. A makeup artist did the cosmetics and hair. A wardrobe dresser and prop stylist picked the clothes and




Image 009 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Image 009 is also an early attempt at a storytelling photograph. Unlike the women ice fishing, this shot has been highly successful in the commercial market, and has even received some notice in the artistic market.

the props. I pulled everything together to create a great shot, and yet this image has flopped time and again.

The reason that Image 008 has not been successful is because it isn't believable to the viewer. It doesn't ring truthful. Viewers cannot look at this image and then see themselves in the scene.

 **Key Lesson:** A good book occurs when a reader can visualize the story and then participate in their mind. If viewers can visualize themselves within the scene that you have photographed, you are one step closer to a good storytelling shot!

This is a very interesting note for you...

The shot of the women ice fishing was highly produced. But guess what. The shot of the mechanic standing in front of his shop was also highly produced.

There isn't a single element in Image 009 that wasn't there on purpose, including the green fluorescent fixture in the background.

This shot first appeared in a company annual report, which I billed well into the 4-figures. It has also sold dozens of times, as a stock photo, for various uses.

Why?


It tells a story. A young man – an entrepreneur, one who takes great pride in his shop – stands at the ready waiting for customers to start rolling in the door.

- 1) Audience – the viewer of the photograph
- 2) Key point – a young man waits for customers
- 3) Conflict – his bay is empty and he currently has no customers
- 4) The hero – the man, the business owner
- 5) The adversary – fill in the blank: lack of advertising, needs a website, low on cash
- 6) Resolve – he needs “fill in the blank”: an advertising agency, a website company, a banker, etc.

Can you imagine all of the potential story arcs that this image can complete for a business?

This is why this photograph has been a commercially successful, “storytelling” photo that has made me a lot of money over the years.

You may be wondering, “Where’s the drama? I thought all stories needed drama.”

 **Key Lesson:** Sometimes the drama can be “implied.” The implied drama in Image 009 is that the man’s business is in trouble. He doesn’t have any customers. He’s standing outside looking for someone to come give him some business. As you develop your storytelling skills in photography, always bear in mind that it doesn’t have to be a “slap” in the viewer’s face. In fact, storytelling in photography is often MORE successful when you leave something to the viewer’s imagination. By doing that, you’re letting them fill in some of the blanks, and that inserts them into the story.

Let's look at some of the other indications of good storytelling to see how well this image fits. (We discussed these indications earlier.)

- Does Image 009 resolve the human need for play or self-entertainment? In this case, it kind of does. It really depends on the viewer. Viewers that grew up in a small town environment, or that like good-looking young men, could be highly entertained by this shot. I say this based upon some of the feedback that I've received from the image over the years.
- Does it explain the physical world? It explains enough of it to make sense, while still giving it a slightly mysterious component that allows a viewer to insert him or herself into the scene (story).
- Does it address the belief in a higher power? No. Remember, these are guidelines – not every shot has to answer every question or dramatic element.
- Does it fulfill the human need to communicate and experience one another? I believe it does fulfill this due to the man's posture, expression, and placement within the frame.

- Does it fulfill an aesthetic need for beauty, regularity, and self-expression? Again, I think it does, at least for a certain segment of the population that can relate to the moment.
- Does it record history? It could. However, this shot was never meant to do this. In fact, to keep the shot saleable after the initial use I purposefully orchestrated it so that the "story" could be changed. The Pepsi machine has been digitally changed to a different brand, and it has been completely removed on occasion. All the signage on the building can be easily changed to read something else.

You've looked at a shot that wasn't true, and its history proves that fact. You've also looked at a shot that does appear true, and its history confirms that. One thing occurs to me: both of these shots were highly orchestrated, and perhaps that is outside of what you would normally do.

Let's look at a shot that wasn't produced at all.

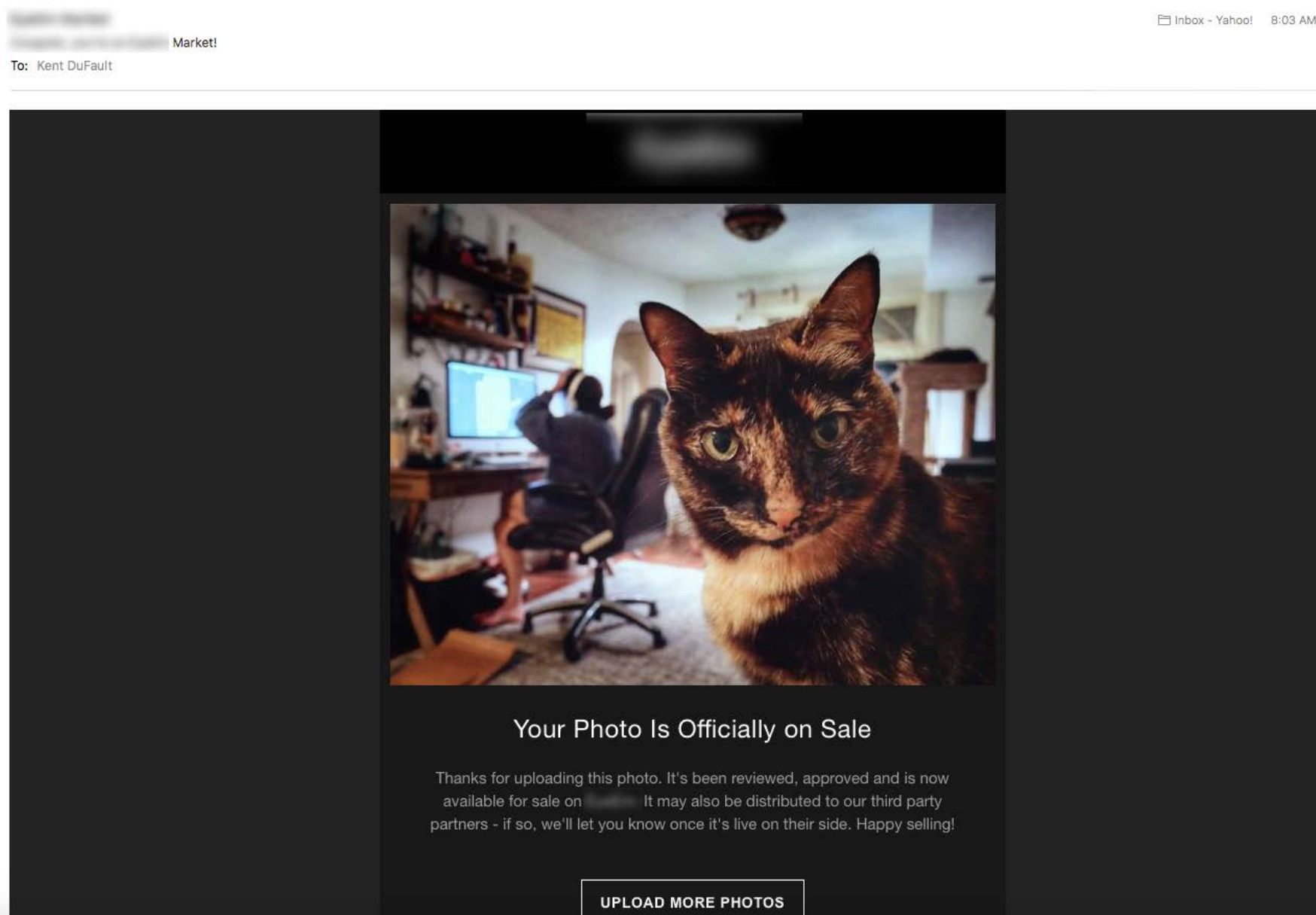


Image 010 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

I recently snapped this shot while I was sitting on the couch at home. It has been accepted, and put on sale, at one of the most widely known, and most respected, stock photo agencies in the world.

Why would they select this simple picture? Most photo forums would pick this image apart for having a cluttered background (and whatever else they could come up with to belittle it)!

I can tell you why.

It's because it tells a good story. It has drama and conflict. The woman has a hand to her head as if she has a headache or troubles. The cat's stare is somewhat menacing and completely judgmental! There is definite mystery as to what is happening and why.

Now, think about this:

If I had adjusted my framing so that it included only the cat, because I thought, "The background is too busy," would the shot be a good storytelling shot? No, it would definitely lose the storytelling factor.

Take your hand and cover the woman up so that you're just viewing the cat. It's not an awful shot, but the story is gone! The story of this woman – busy and harried and who has a headache, sitting in her cluttered home trying to get something done, and her cat is ticked off because she hasn't been fed or her litter box hasn't been cleaned – is relatable and gives the shot **value**. When the cat is all alone it says nothing. If the woman is all alone it lacks significant drama.

IT MUST BE VALID

Validity comes from you placing your thoughts, dreams, and aspirations into your storytelling photograph.

If you see a scene and it inspires you, then you want to take a photograph.

But let's say that before you do any thought on what your storytelling idea might be - you remember some photographer, who has a certain style, and you decide to mimic that because it looks cool.

No. Do not do that. That lacks validity, and viewers of your photographs will sense that.

Am I saying that you can never mimic some type of technique or style that you saw somewhere?

No, I'm not saying that at all.

What I'm saying is, your purposeful work – your thoughts, dreams, aspirations, and story arc – should happen first and then, if the style or technique fits, go ahead and use it.


I don't mean to burden you. I really don't. But storytelling in photography takes work and it's a process. This is especially true if it doesn't come naturally to you.

It's worth it, though. Not only will your ability improve, but also the viewers of your photographs will have a better experience, and you'll feel so much pride in what you've accomplished.



Image 011- Photograph by Kent DuFault

Image 011 was my “valid” interpretation of the movie *The Shining*. Clearly, I have taken part of the story, as well as some of the “effect” from the original movie. However, as you can see, it is my storytelling image. It is my valid interpretation of the original movie scenes.

 **Key Lesson:** It’s okay to mimic a storyline or a technique, but to keep it valid it must have your thoughts, dreams, and aspirations. It must come from you!

IT MUST CONTAIN YOUR VOICE

I'm not going to dig too deep into this, because it runs along the same learning points as validity.

However, I thought it might be helpful to show you two examples of how to "place your voice" into a photograph by studying two locations that are mega-photographed.

My goal? To show you how I placed my storytelling voice into these situations.

Photographers who travel to the Portland, Oregon area will likely schedule time to go photograph Multnomah Falls (myself included).

This is a very famous landmark for photography.

If you Google Multnomah Falls, 90% of what you will find will look like the photograph to the left of Image 012.

In fact, when I was taking these pictures, there were at least 30 other photographers standing around me taking the same shot (the image on the left).

But as storytelling photographers, we aren't happy with what everyone else is doing. Why? It's because we want our images to contain our voice and send a specific message that came from us (and travels to the viewer), because we know that storytelling photography is memorable **and** more valuable (salable).

The image on the right is my "bestselling" storytelling photograph from my morning at Multnomah Falls.

So what's the story? The sun was coming up. It was early in the day. It was a beautiful morning at Multnomah Falls!

Where's the drama? As the sunshine peaks through the trees, a star effect was created that builds up a tension between it and the waterfall to the right.

The image on the right is a great example of "subtle" storytelling. I can guarantee you that not a single other photographer that was there that morning captured this same storytelling shot of Multnomah Falls.

How do I know this? I was watching them. Plus, when you did your Google search, did you see any listed photograph that looked like the shot on the right (Image 012)? You didn't, did you?

You know why that is?

None of the other photographers were thinking about telling their personal story.

They were simply snapping a shot. Quite frankly, many of those shots are beautiful and technically perfect, but they did not share their voice with the viewer, and that makes them, well, forgettable, because we've ALL seen that shot before.



Image 012 – Photographs by Kent DuFault
Multnomah Falls, Columbia River Gorge just outside of Portland, Oregon.

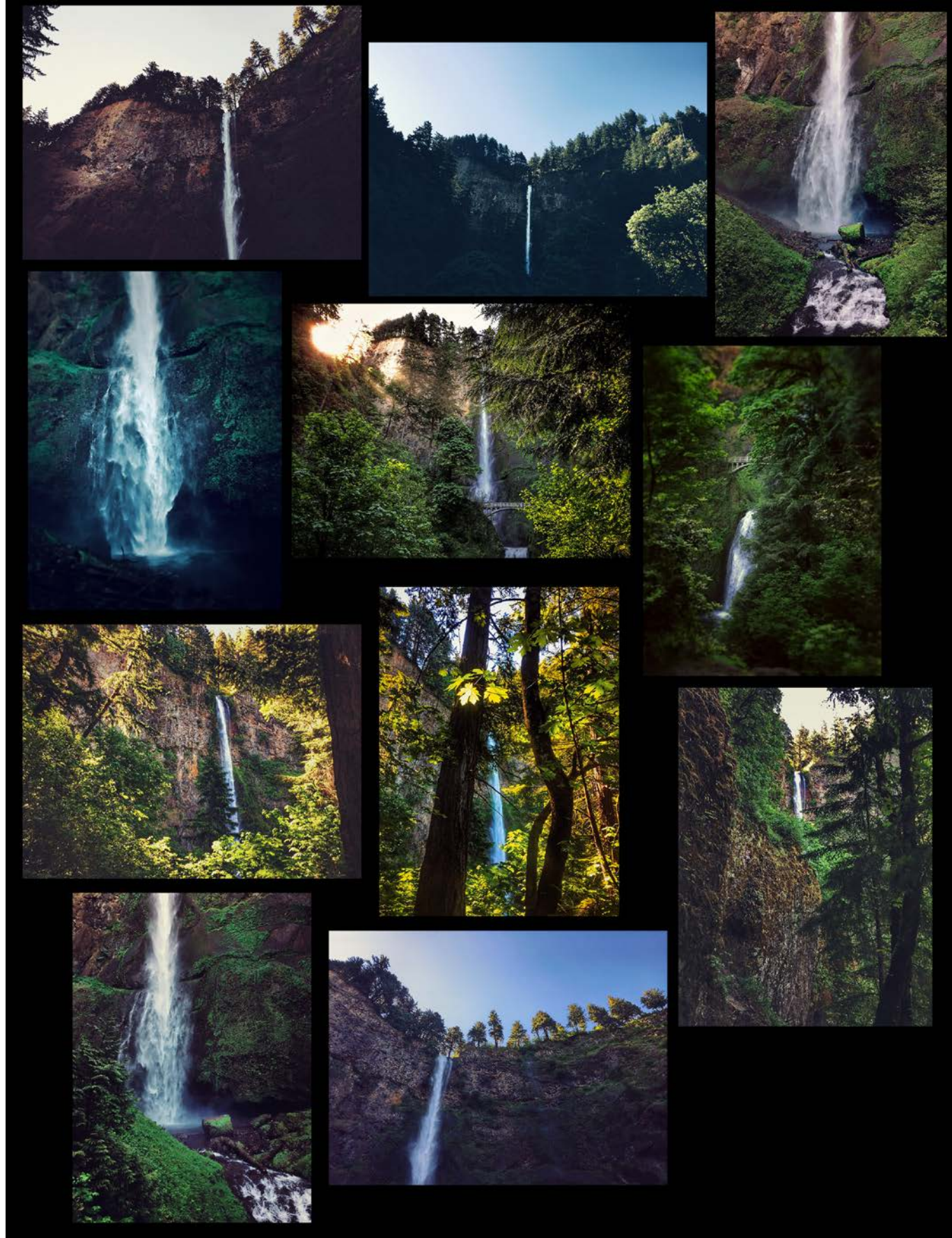


Image 013 – Photographs by Kent DuFault

◆ Key Lesson: By concentrating, and practicing, the art of storytelling photography, I guarantee you that you will create amazing images that no one else gets. Image 013 depicts 11 additional photographs that I took in my 2-hour window at the falls. No one else got these shots. How do I know that? I know that because each one represents my voice. Putting your voice into your storytelling photography is key to making your work different! Sure! Take the photograph that everybody else does. I did! But, then put your voice into your work. In journalism, they call this “flushing out the story.” It’s the same thing. Journalists flush out the story because rarely (really never) is the best story immediately obvious. It’s the same with photographic storytelling. You must flush out the story. Shoot different angles. Give your shots different moods in post-production. Just always remember that in each shot you must be valid, true, and insert your voice.



Image 014 – Photograph on the right by Kent DuFault
The Louvre Museum in Paris, France

For my second example, I am using the entrance to the Louvre Museum in Paris. This is also an iconic and much photographed location.

If you Google “The Louvre,” 90% of the images that you see will be some variation of the photograph on the left.

I created the photograph on the right in a storytelling fashion.

You can still see the iconic pyramid. You can still see the tourists. So what gives my version the storytelling factor? It’s the busker (panhandler) on the right with his postcards that he was trying to sell.

The busker creates a story element. He adds drama as he stands there, with his postcards displayed, and everyone has walked past him, ignoring him.

The cards create a strong photographic composition element through pattern, repetition, light, and shadow. They take your eyes right to the man.

Now, the fact that he was selling these postcards may not come through to every viewer.

But that’s okay.

Remember, it’s a positive in storytelling photography to include some mystery. Let the viewer fill in the blanks.

The photograph on the right has my voice. I’m very proud of the fact that you won’t see another shot exactly like it. That fact makes it unique and **valuable** to me as the photographer!



Key Lesson: Repeat this in your mind several times: “A story for everyone is a story for no one.” Storytelling (especially in your photographic efforts) is about making you unique. My busker shot at the Louvre is unique. Everywhere you go – everywhere you shoot – you can find a unique angle and situation that will set you apart from other photographers. Be open to it. Be looking. Be aware.

A STORY SHOULD TOUCH ONE OF THE HUMAN EMOTIONS

If your photo makes someone laugh, cry, or get angry, you can rest assured that your story is good.

Great storytelling is about cause and effect.

I have two creative passions in my life. One of them is obviously photography. The other is short story writing.

A number of years ago, I entered a national writing contest that received tens of thousands of entries.

My story was titled, "The Power of Fine Furniture." In that contest, I was one of 14 finalists, and I eventually ended up in 8th place.

I was pretty proud of that. But something even more important came out of it, and that's why I'm telling you this story.

I received a fair amount of "hate mail" because of my story. Yes, hate mail!

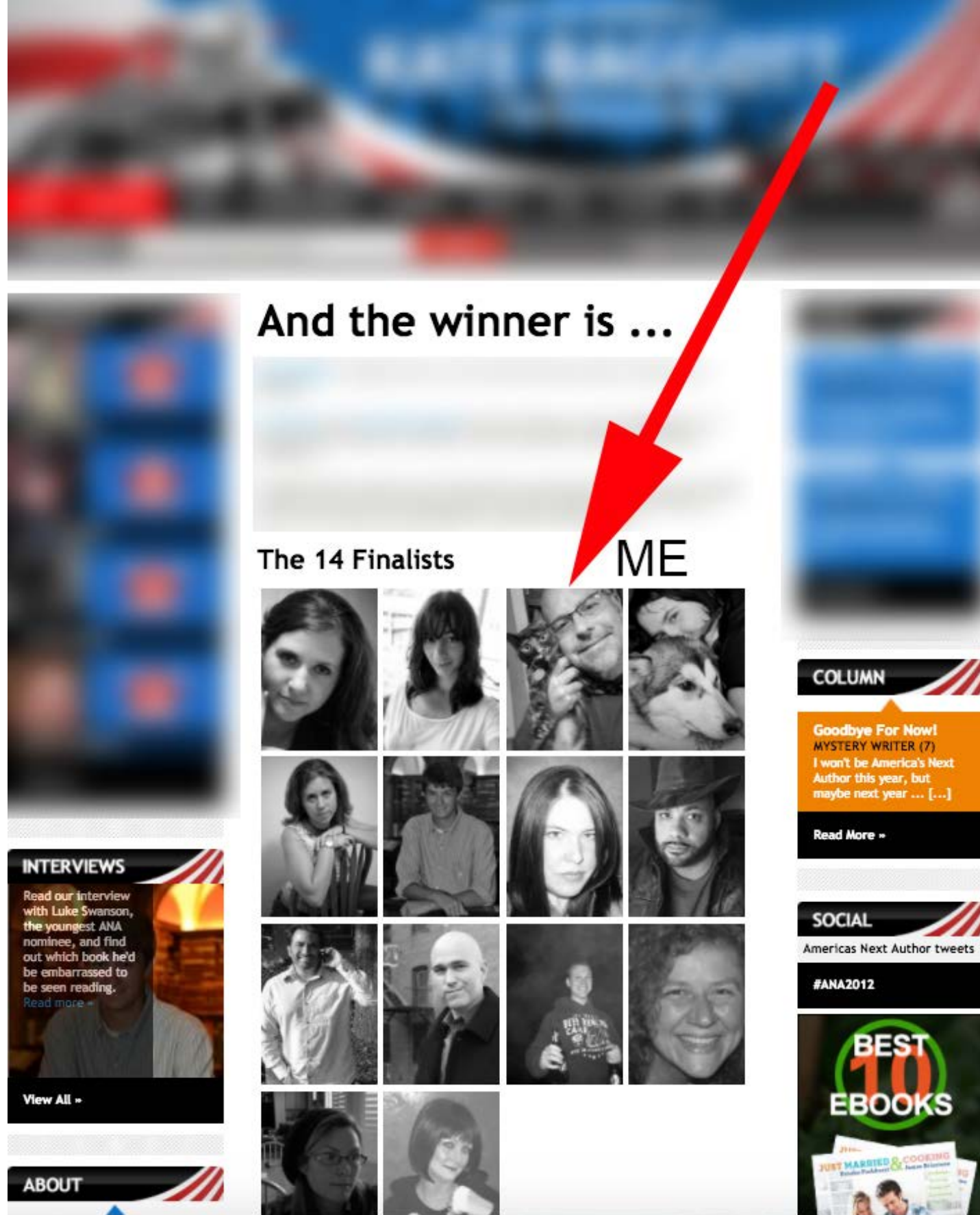



Image 015 – Screen capture by Kent DuFault

When that happened, I realized that I had truly made it as a writer.

Something that I had written actually caused people to take time out of their life to write to me about my story.

Sure! They were angry, mad, or disgusted. But I didn't care. I had created cause and effect.

(Just so you know... the story was about a man who commits a pretty heinous and brutal crime.)

 **Key Lesson:** You want your storytelling photography to touch a human emotion. The stronger the touch, the more reaction your work will receive. Even a reaction that might be considered negative is still a positive for you. It's a response, and the stronger the response, the more it will be remembered.

Have you ever heard of the art photographer, Cindy Sherman? If not, look her up on Google.

Cindy's photographs are all about telling stories, and many of those stories are not pleasant.

The first time I saw her photographs, her portfolio had been published in a magazine called *Photo District News*. This was back in the mid-1990s, and

to be published in PDN was quite a feather in a photographer's cap.

Her images disgusted me. (This was just about the time that I was discovering the importance of storytelling in photography.)

One particular Cindy Sherman photograph that was published in PDN over 20 years ago is still permanently emblazoned in my mind.

She had made herself vomit onto a street in New York City. She then placed a pair of mirrored sunglasses into the vomit. After which, she lay down so that her reflection was visible in the glasses, and she took a self-portrait.

After looking at that photograph, I remember saying this out loud to a photographer friend of mine who was with me...

"What kind of crap is this? Why would PDN publish this? This is terrible!"

Since that time, Cindy Sherman has gone on to become one of the most heralded art photographers in the world.

Seven of her photographs have sold for more than a million dollars each.

Her photography continues to be difficult to look at. She uses her inner voice to tell stories about what it is like to be a woman, and many of those stories are horrid and painful.

No one had ever done that before, and she was (and continues to be) well rewarded for her courage and her voice.

IT SHOULD BE SIMPLE

Look. People are not as smart as we would like to believe they are.

If you complicate your story, inevitably some viewers are going to begin falling off the boat of "comprehension."

Include just the elements that you need to complete your story. Start with simple photographic stories. This fits pretty well into photography, because photographic composition is also generally improved with simplification.



Key Lesson: Extraneous stuff – GONE!

05 HOW TO TRANSFORM TRADITIONAL STORYTELLING CONCEPTS INTO PHOTOGRAPHIC CONCEPTS

You essentially have four ways to instill storytelling elements into your photography:

- 1) Choice of subject
- 2) Choice of camera angle and perspective (lens)
- 3) Choice of composition
- 4) Choice of post-production

At this point, you should have a good understanding of traditional storytelling techniques and elements. Now you just have to take that knowledge and put it into photographic terms.

What I would like to do is walk you through photographs of mine, and we will have a discussion as to what went right, or wrong, based on steps 1-4 (above).



1

SIMPLIFY THE SCENE TO THE MESSAGE

While traveling in Seoul, South Korea, I came upon a citizen protest against the government. There were actually quite a few people and a lot was going on. I found these two protestors standing off to the side of the main action.

My first storytelling step was good. I was simplifying my scene by moving to the side and eliminating a lot of the crowd.

However, it was after choosing these two as my subject (Step 1) that my actions began to fall apart.

Key Lesson: I have been involved with photography, both professionally and as an enthusiast, for more years than I care to quote out loud. I've been around a long time, and I still make mistakes. I think that's an important point. You won't become a great storytelling photographer overnight. You'll have to read the guide – and then read it again – and practice and try. Even after all of these years, I still practice and try to learn.

Image 016 – Photograph by Kent DuFault



Image 017 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Image 016 is the picture that I shot based upon my selection of these two protesters as my subject.

At the time that I created it, I considered this my final shot.

Let me define what my thinking was.

- 1) I created a triangulated composition between the two protesters and the news photographer.
- 2) I saw the statue as both an indication of the environment and a leading line down to the female protestor.
- 3) I saw the various buildings and lines in the concrete blocks as leading lines to my subjects and their accompanying props (which I thought were my story).

In retrospect, my voice was telling me that the storytelling subject was the young woman, not the entire scene. The big red arrow is pointing at her.

She had a particularly defiant look on her face, which actually gave me the title to my image even before I shot it. My title is "Defiance."



Key Lesson: If you wish to be a great storytelling photographer, you should also work at your titling and captioning skills. I personally LOVE titling my images. A good title can increase your appreciative audience. Like I said earlier, there are many people out there that will not comprehend your storytelling intent. It's just the way it is. However, sometimes you can rein them in with a clever title or caption. Clever is the key word though. Simply stating the obvious doesn't help. For example, if I had titled my image, "Protestors in Seoul"... boring! It doesn't say anything interesting or storytelling. But when I give it the title "Defiance," and you look at Image 019, the story (voice/intent/drama) is quite clear.

The two smaller red arrows (Image 017) point to two secondary subjects, which I thought were important at the time that I was creating the image.

In my mind, I had a storytelling composition that included the 3-point triangle (the blue arrows) and some background elements (in the blue circle), both of which provided the storytelling element of "environment."

However, this was my mistake; almost all of that was irrelevant to the story my inner voice was telling me to create, and that was the defiant expression on the young woman's face.

All of the storytelling drama was located there!

What does this mean?

My effort fell apart in steps 1-3 (choice of subject, choice of camera angle and perspective, and choice of composition). I didn't simplify enough. I didn't follow my inner voice far enough.

Well, that brings us to step 4, and that is post-production. When, I studied my image after the fact, I realized that I had missed the mark.

It was now time to use post-production to attempt to revive my voice – my story.

Image 018 was my first round of post-production. It definitely got me back into the ballpark.

However, my key story element was still missing: the woman's expression. Her expression was where all of the storytelling drama was located. Without it, the picture had no oomph at all!

I was still struggling to create a triangular composition with those two secondary subjects on the left.



Image 018 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

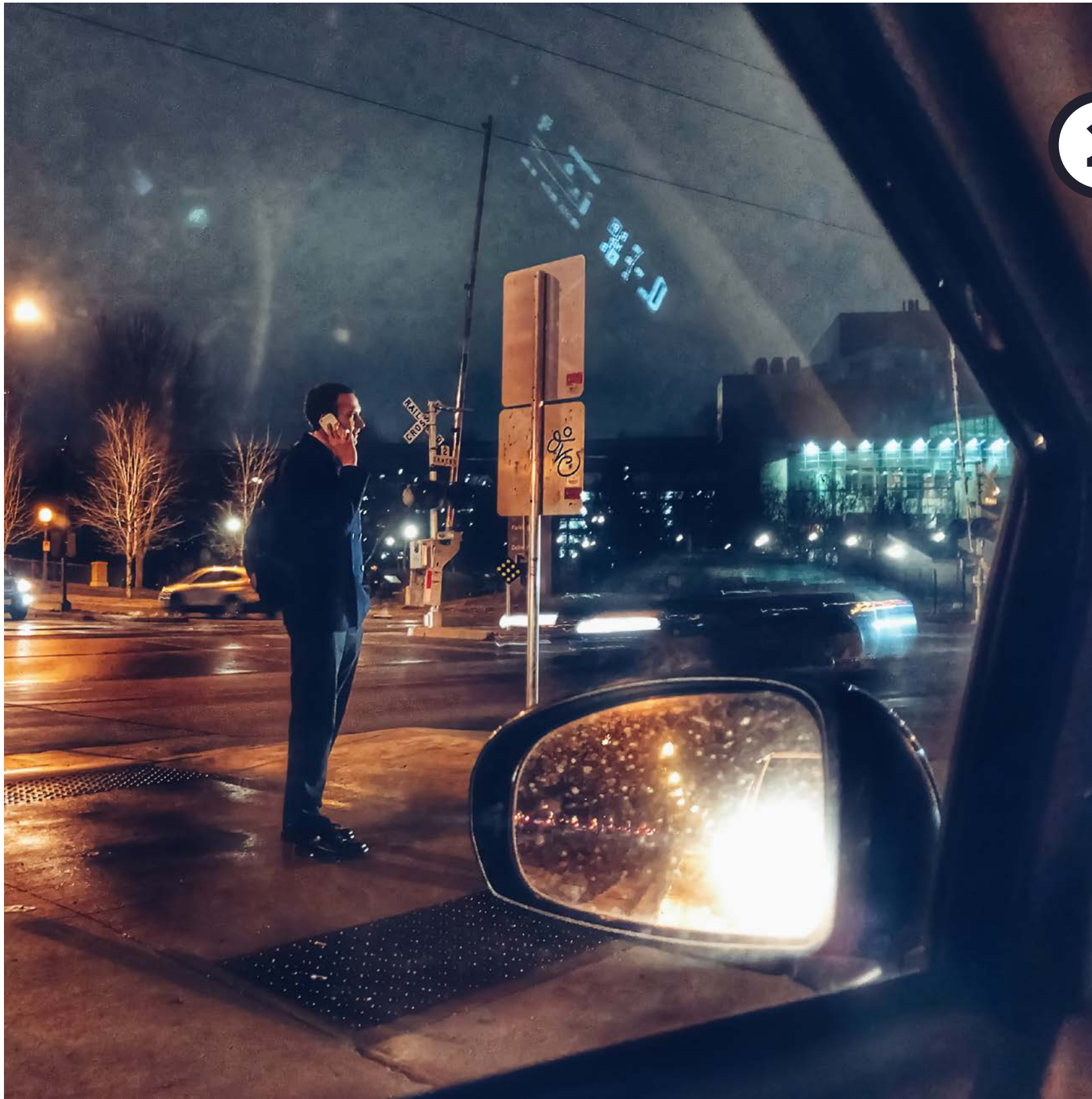
Finally, my voice got loud enough that I listened...



Image 019 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Go back through Images 16-19. You can easily see how the story was strengthened with each change. I am now satisfied with my final storytelling image (Image 019).

Key Lesson: I could have created Image 019 in-camera, which would have been the best possible outcome. I didn't take the time to evaluate what my voice was telling me was the story. So, where am I? I have an image that I can use online. By the time I cropped down to what should have been my full frame shot, the remaining file only has enough resolution for potential online use. If you have aspirations of selling your storytelling photos – and who doesn't – that's a big problem. I eliminated a bunch of potential sales due to my in-camera decisions. There are two big important lessons here. Take a moment to sort out your real story. Plus, if you miss the mark, post-production is an amazing tool to get you back into the game (although there might be limitations)!



2

USE COMPOSITION TO HELP ENSURE THAT A VIEWER UNDERSTANDS THE INTENDED STORY

One rainy evening, after picking up my wife from work, we were sitting in our car waiting at a red traffic light.

I looked over, and there was this nicely dressed man standing in the center median. He looked a bit miserable, as the light rain and wind whipped around him.

He was on the phone and sporting a serious expression.

My storytelling mind kicked into high gear. Why was this man standing out there? What was happening on the phone? What was so important that he would stand in the rain, while having this conversation, when there were plenty of nearby places that he could have gone to get out of the weather?

You can see my imagination was flying high! Right?

Image 020 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

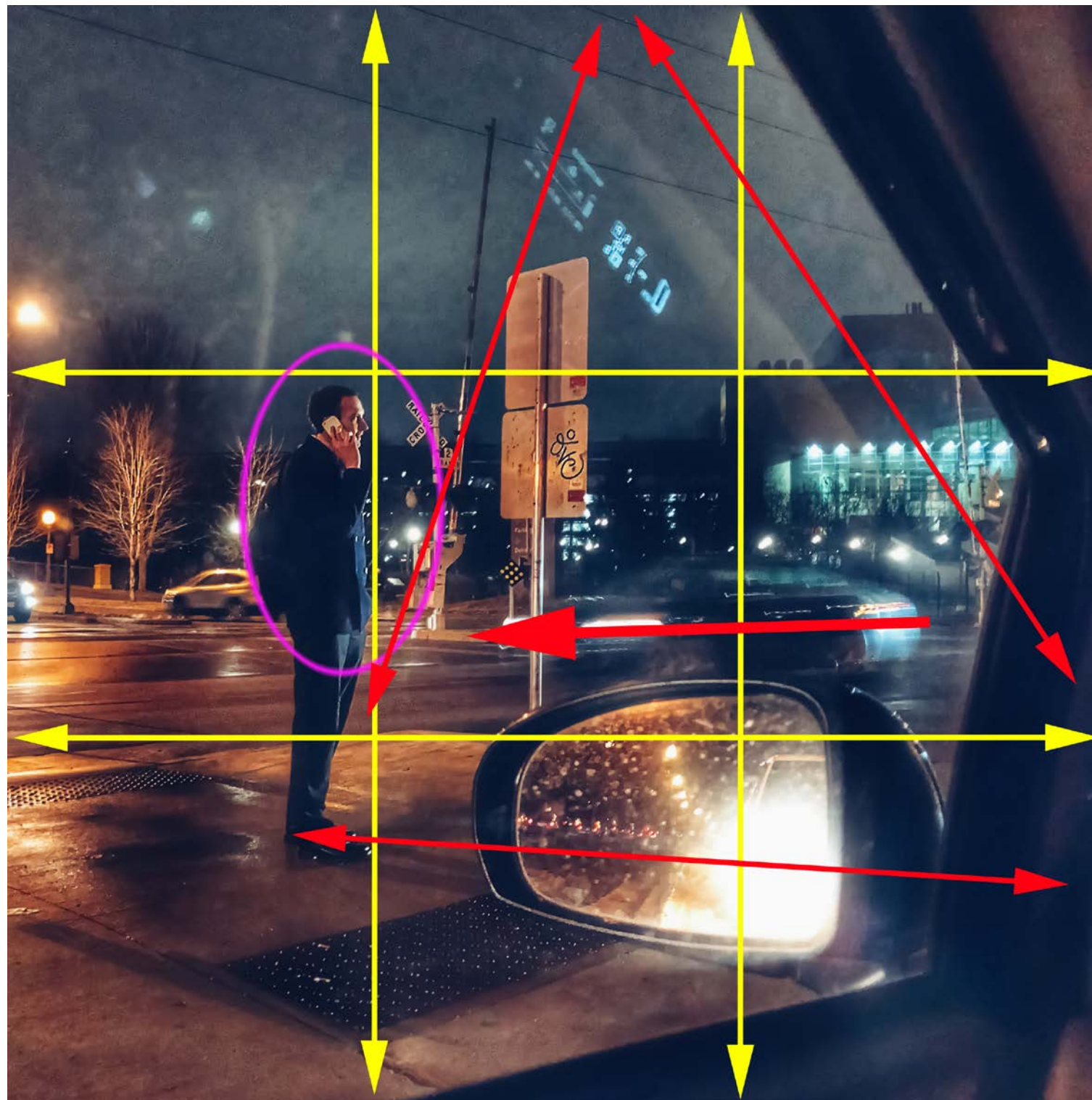


Image 021 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Anyway, I wanted to share this photograph because I literally had less than 30 seconds to take it before the light changed and traffic was moving.

All of that thought process was going on, even as I was whipping my iPhone out of my jacket pocket.

Sitting in the car, I didn't have a lot of options for framing or changing camera position.

I really had to tell my story through composition. Let's look at how I re-enforced the story voice that was playing in my head.

What was I trying to say with my storytelling photograph?

- Man outside in nasty rainy weather
- It's nighttime and the roads are busy
- This man is on the telephone looking so serious... Why?

As you look at Image 021, you'll probably realize that my original framing included more than what you see here.

I cropped my original file to maximize my story through composition.


The purple oval indicates my subject, and in this particular case the subject is key to the storytelling aspects of this shot. Remember, the story is a man on the phone looking serious (drama), while standing in nasty inclement weather (more drama).


I used my crop to focus the attention onto him with the Rule of Thirds.

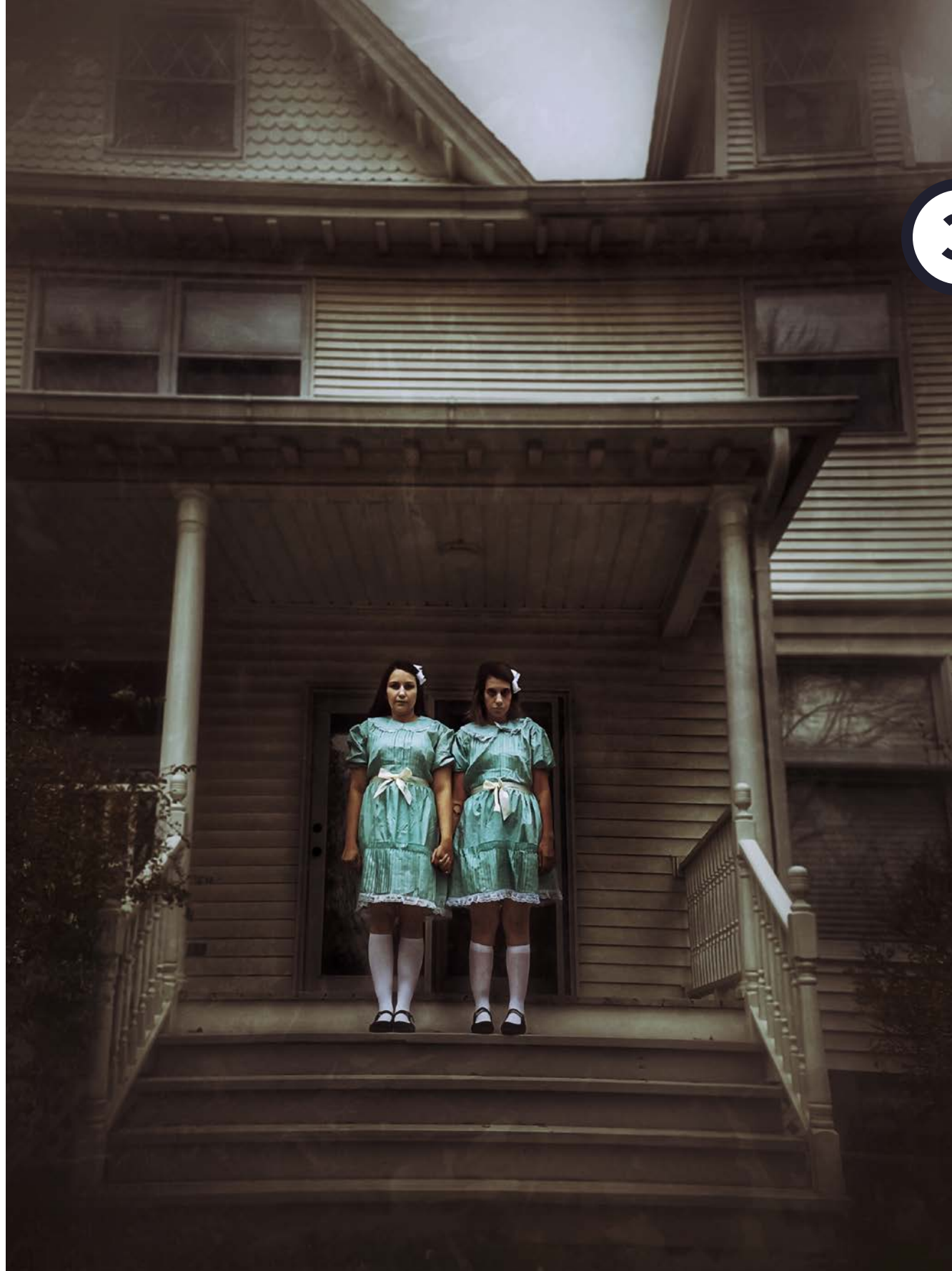
Secondly, since I couldn't really eliminate the fact that I was sitting in the car, I used that fact to reinforce my story.

- 1) The window frame on the right, and the car's mirror, push a viewer's eyes to the left toward the man, while also indicating that he is standing on a median in the middle of a busy road.
- 2) The water drops on the window and mirror help reinforce the part of the story that says, "This was nasty weather."

- 3) The smaller red arrows indicate a triangulation in the composition (the 3-act story).
- 4) The larger red arrow is a car in movement that pushes the eyes toward the man, but also adds a feeling of potential danger and conflict!

 **Key Lesson:** Composition is a super important tool for storytelling in your photography. If your images lack an organized and well-thought-out composition, the chances are good that your viewer will not get your intended message (story). To become a great storyteller with photography, you must strive to become a master at composition!

 Check out the [resource section](#) found at the end of this guide for recommended readings and videos to help you understand composition better.



3

USE POST-PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES TO ENFORCE YOUR STORYTELLING MESSAGE.

For this lesson, I'm going to return to the image on the left and tell you the story behind it which began with an idea but required post-production techniques to effectively bring the story to the viewer.

Let's begin by going back to the image on the left.

As I told you earlier in the premium guide, this shot was meant to mimic (in my own way) the two ghostly girls from the movie *The Shining*.

If you are unfamiliar with the movie, [click here](#) to see a still image of what they appeared like in the movie.

Image 022 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

The first part of this story involves my wife and her friend at work.

It was the week of Halloween, and everyone in my wife's office was going to dress in costume on Halloween day.

She and her friend decided to dress up as the Grady daughters from the movie.

In the movie, the two girls are ghosts who always appear at the end of a long hallway camera shot. This is typical of Stanley Kubrick's filming style.

My wife and her friend acquired the costumes online.

When I saw the costumes, I totally wanted to take their photograph and recreate the scary feeling that the characters truly generated in the movie and in the book.

Here were my problems:

- I had very limited time with them as they were at work.
- They would only be together, and dressed like this, at their office.
- The office is located in an old farmhouse, which could offer opportunity. However, the interior is cluttered and filled with modern décor and equipment.
- The weather that day was gray, windy, and a bit cold.

- I had to figure out some way to mimic the tension that Kubrick's long hallway shots created when I had no long hallway to work with.

By the time I arrived that day, I had already decided that I was going to use the front porch of the former home – now turned into an office – for my "scene."

The two women were ready for me, and I quickly took them outside.



Image 023 – Photograph by Kent DuFault



Image 024 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

I had my models stand in a garden area for a test shot. This location did not lend itself to the Stanley Kubrick “look” that I was hoping to achieve. After I took a few shots, I moved the models around to the front of the building where the porch was.

Image 024 is the original file as it came out of the camera, but before I started any post-production. At this point, I already knew that I had the “bones” of the storytelling photograph that I wanted to create. Now, I simply had to make it happen in post-production. Let me walk you through my steps.

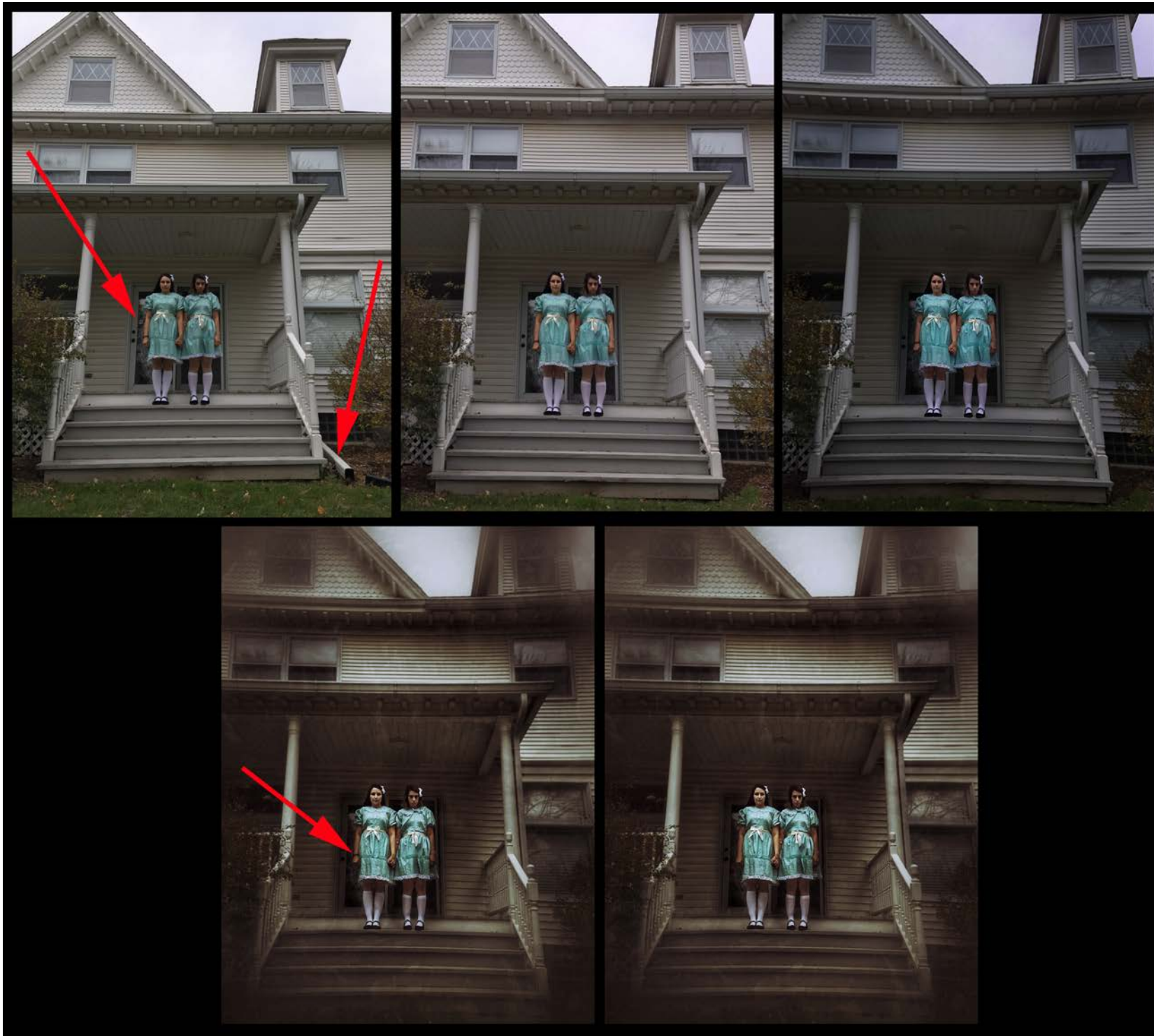


Image 025 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

In the upper left photograph, I identified several items in the scene that didn't really lend themselves to my story, which was two ghosts standing in a scary location.

Here is what I did. I removed the rain gutter downspout and the alarm company sticker on the door behind the models. I also cropped the image slightly tighter and then I stretched the perspective of the entire picture upward. This stretching created two visual effects. First of all, the building presented as taller and more ominous as it loomed overhead. Secondly, it also stretched the models thinner, giving them more the appearance of young girls. Plus, the models now appear to be leaning slightly forward at an unnatural (ghostly) angle.

For my next step, I wanted to give an illusion of a tunnel-like effect similar to Stanley Kubrick's style even though I didn't have a long hallway to work with. I did this by using Photoshop to darken all of the building and surrounding areas by several stops of light.



Image 026 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

If you study the third image (far right at the top), you will see how the models, their dresses, the floor they are standing on, and the two pillars on either side of them are brighter than the rest of the building. This will ultimately create a “tunnel effect.”

Now if you look at the bottom-left photo in Image 025, these were the final steps.

I changed the color balance to something a bit warmer and with a light touch of green. I applied a “grunge” overlay. I applied a soft focus vignette. Finally, I locally applied, using the adjustment brush in the Adobe ACR window, a touch of clarity to the two dresses.

Let’s look at the first shot (in-camera original) and the final shot side by side.

As you can clearly see, the storytelling effect of my image was significantly altered through post-production techniques.

T If you are unfamiliar with post-production techniques, then I highly recommend checking out the post-production guides we’ve included in the [resource section](#) of this guide.

4

STUDY THE WORK OF KNOWN STORYTELLING PHOTOGRAPHERS AND MOVIE FILMMAKERS

Think about the photograph that we just discussed with the two models. It began with the process of wanting to mimic a great filmmaker.

Yet, in the end, my version looks nothing like his original work, with the exception of the dresses.

However, by going through the exercise of recreating a film moment that really stuck with me, I was able to create a really nice shot for my portfolio!

Some of the most famous, impromptu storytelling photographers are photojournalists and street photographers.

Sit down and do some research. Make a list of the storytelling photographers' work that you find the most interesting and compelling.

Try to figure out what techniques they used to get their story arc across to you as a viewer.

Take lots of notes. Make a concerted effort to implement some of these ideas into your own photography, no matter what your genre is.

Finally, follow in my footsteps and try to recreate some movie scenes that you remember clearly and really moved you.

Watch these movies again. Study the light, the camera angle, the perspective of the camera to the scene, etc.

It is these types of exercises that will get you moving in the right storytelling direction!

Time to Have Some Fun...

06 CASE STUDIES

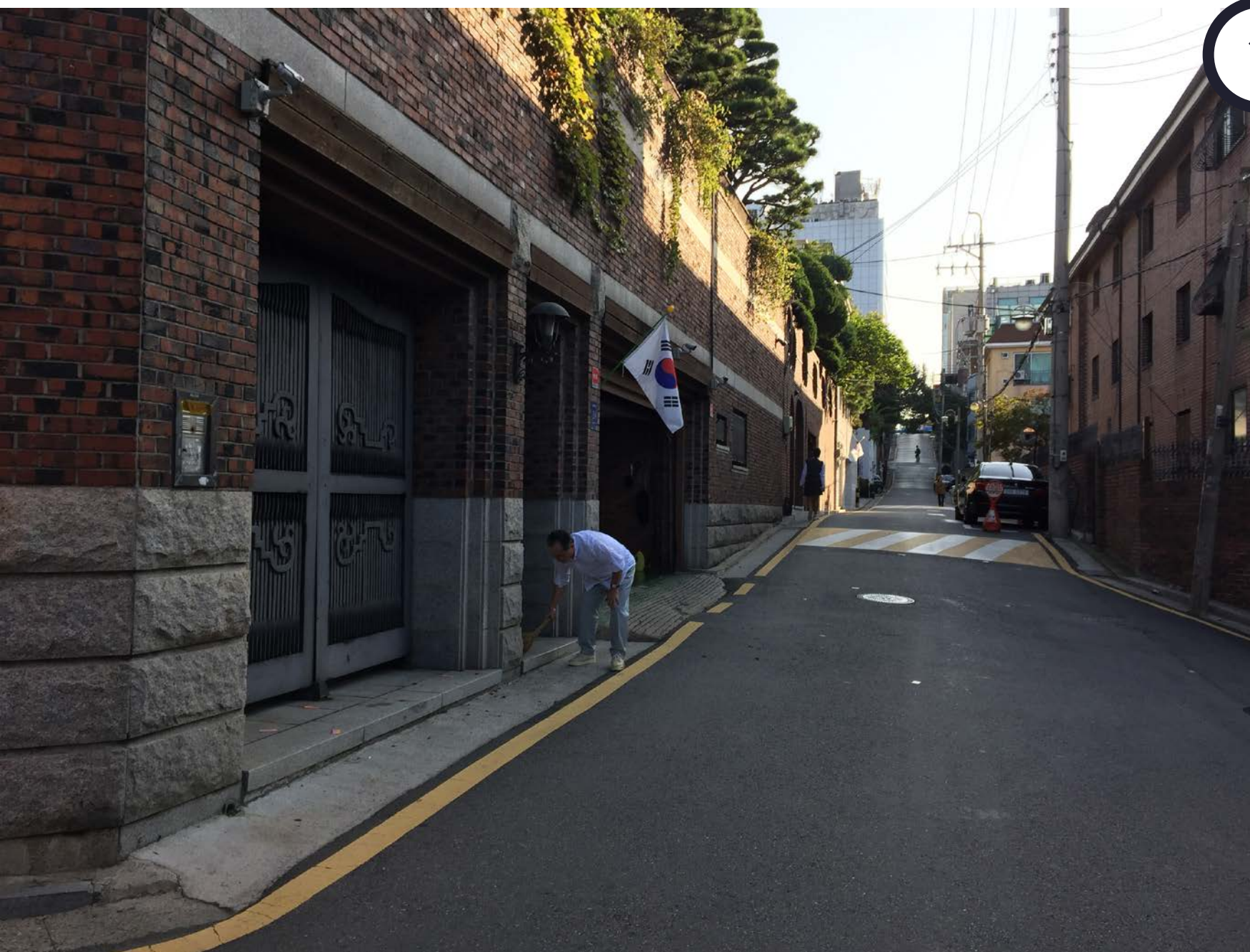


Image 027 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

1

HOW THE CROP AFFECTS THE STORY

How you crop your photograph, and also how you frame your photograph when clicking the shutter, is likely one of the most important steps in determining how well your story will come across to a viewer.

Background: I recently took a photo safari/vacation to South Korea. I spent most of my time in Seoul. Seoul, I discovered, is a beautiful city that everyone should put on his or her photography travel list. A “story” that rolled around in my mind while I was there was just how clean the place was. Koreans are a VERY clean people. I wanted to create a storytelling photograph that depicted that part of their culture.

The Situation: We stayed in a “neighborhood setting” by renting an Airbnb. Every morning we got up early, planned the day, and headed for the subway station. We walked down this street every morning, and every morning

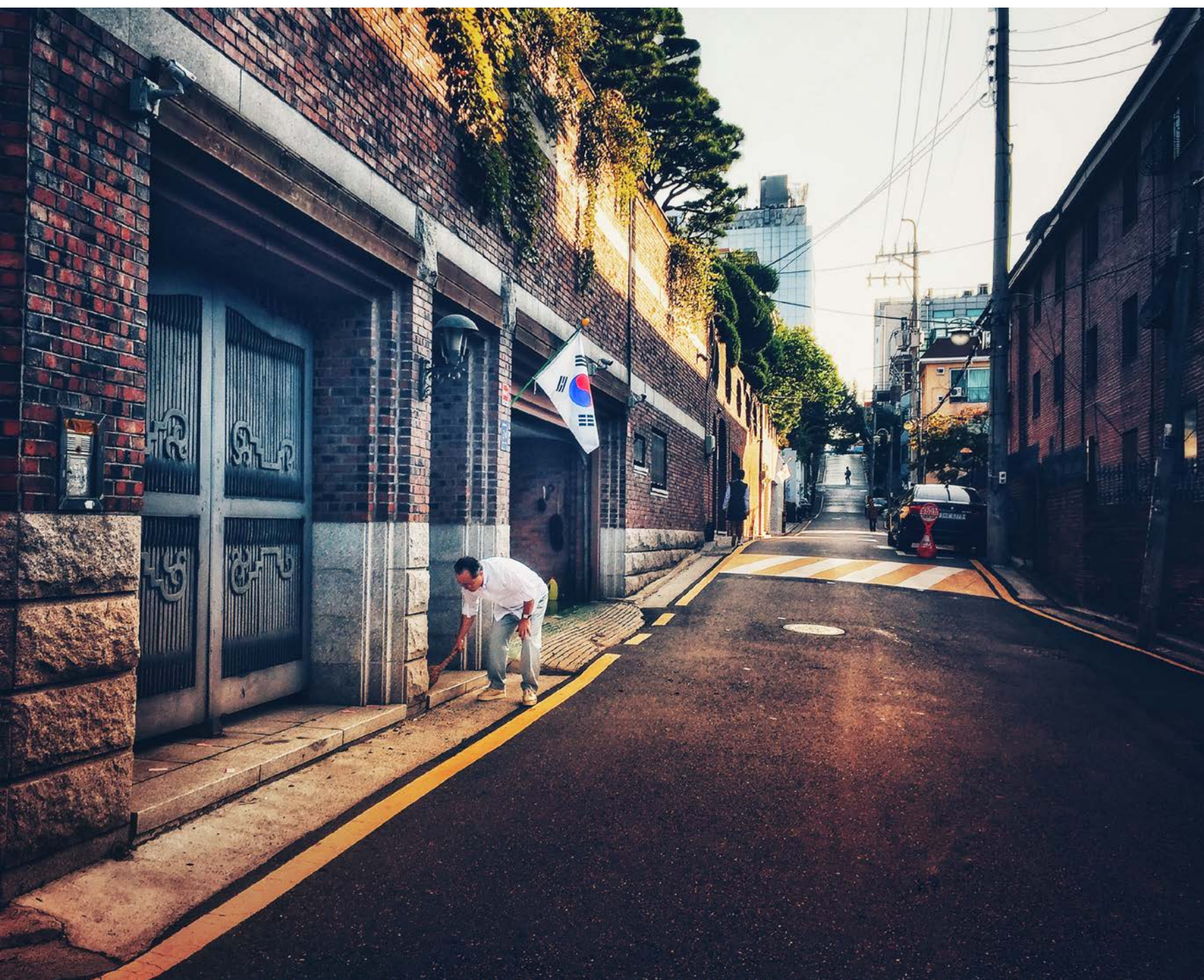


Image 028 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

this man was out sweeping around his garage with a hand brush. He was not only sweeping, he was also picking it up – not just sweeping it into the street.

The Shot: I created this photograph with my iPhone 6+. I've recently updated to an iPhone 8+. I'm very excited about that. I love using the iPhone for street photography because it attracts very little attention. I'm a bit careful about photographing random strangers in foreign countries, because I don't speak any language other than English. I don't feel this way, as much, when I'm in a crowded and public location. I'm very sensitive, though, to someone who is going about his or her personal business in a more secluded environment. That being said, as I approached this man sweeping – and the Republic of South Korea flag hung behind him, and the low morning light skimmed down the street, and there were several lone figures walking in the distance – it was everything my "story" needed. I raised my iPhone, composed on the fly, and took two quick shots.

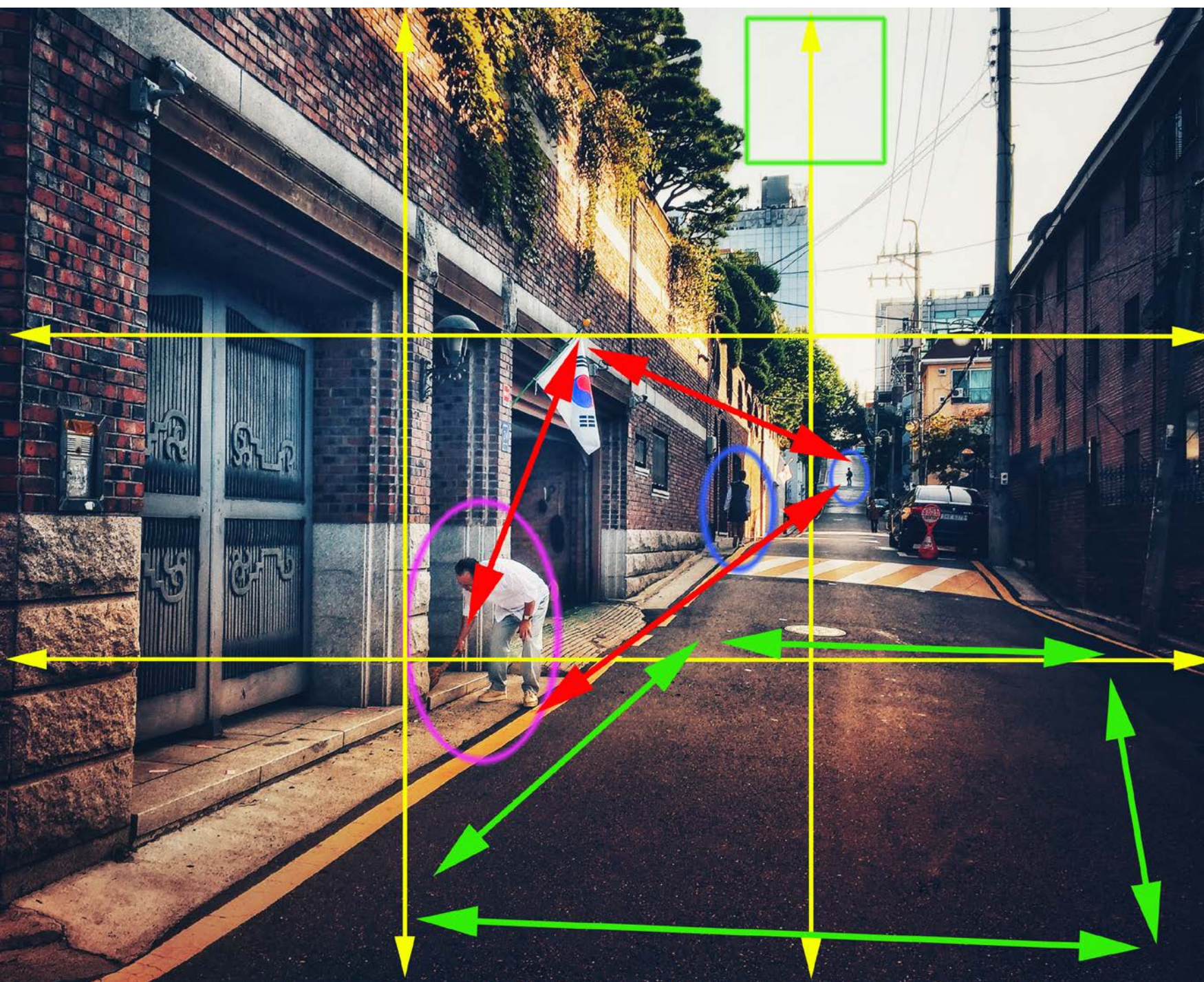


Image 029 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

The Post-Processing: Image 028 reflects my original framing of the scene almost exactly. There is just a minor crop to the left, as I wanted to position my “hero” (the man sweeping) closer to the Rule of Thirds crosshairs. I darkened most of the frame to the right. I added some light to where the man was working the area of the road to his left and along the yellow leading line that eventually completes the scene in the background. I bumped up the saturation levels. I also removed a couple of small items of trash on the road. I now felt that this completed my storytelling photograph.

The Final Storytelling Composition: You can see how my hero (my drama) is placed very close to the Rule of Thirds crosshair. The purple oval is my hero. The blue ovals are my sub-characters that help give the story a sense of early morning isolation. The red arrows indicate my triangulation (three-act story) and tie all of the main elements together. Most of my photography is created with the idea of selling it as stock photography. When possible, I include areas where an art director could place “copy” over the photo. The green arrows and box indicate copy areas.

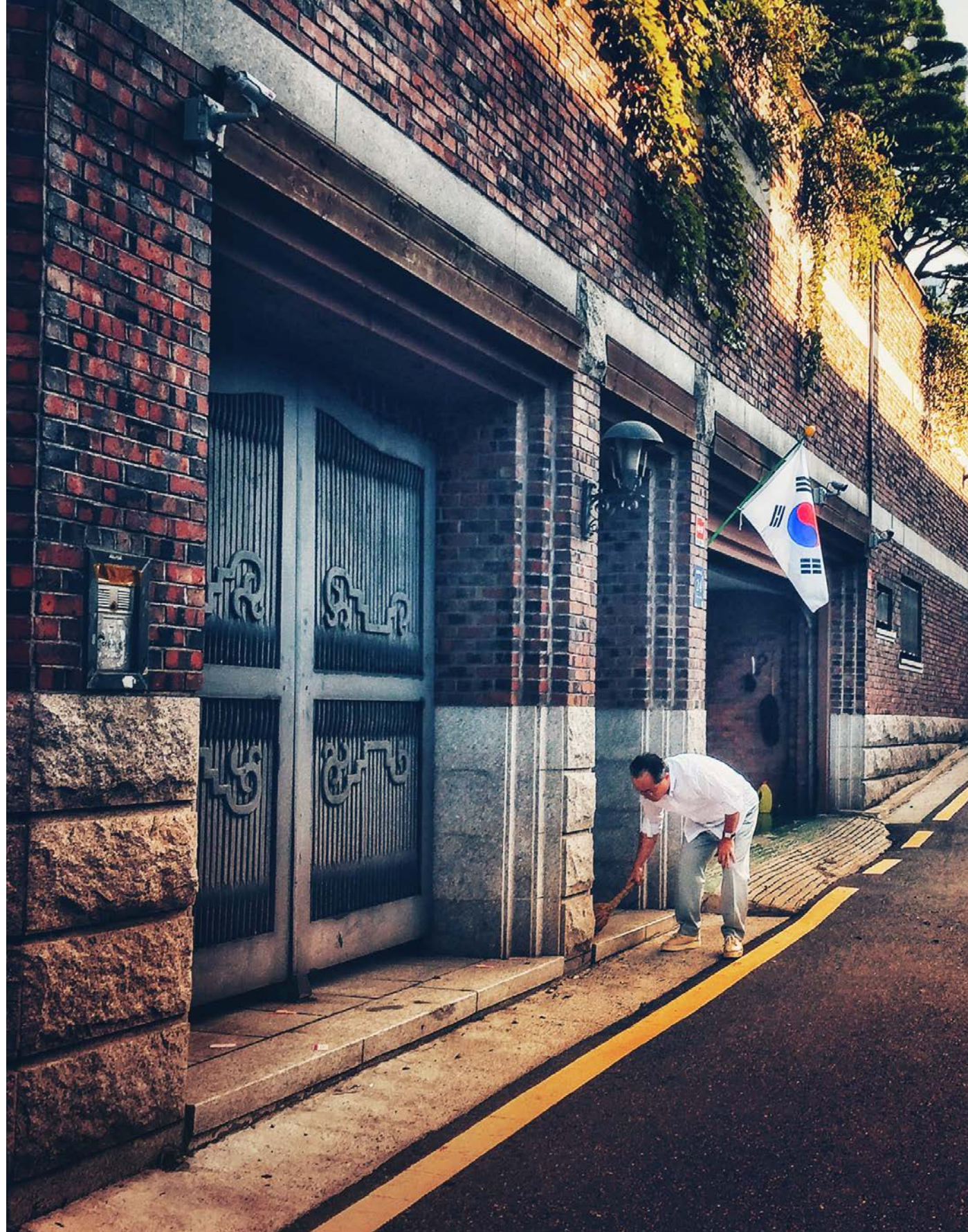


Image 030 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Let's take a look at how the crop can vastly change the story of the photograph.

Image 030 isn't a bad photograph, and in fact some people might prefer it because the hero, and his activity, are larger and easily visible within the frame.

However, in my opinion, it doesn't fully display the story that I wanted to tell. It tells part of the story.

Image 031 has a more panoramic crop. It's closer to my "chosen" final version. All the elements of the main story are still there; however, there are two issues with this crop. This option positions the hero closer to the edge of the frame, and so he loses visual strength. The viewer's eyes are pushed down the road more quickly and tend to focus in on the man in the distance. Again, there is nothing particularly wrong with this version; however, it didn't describe the storytelling voice in my head.

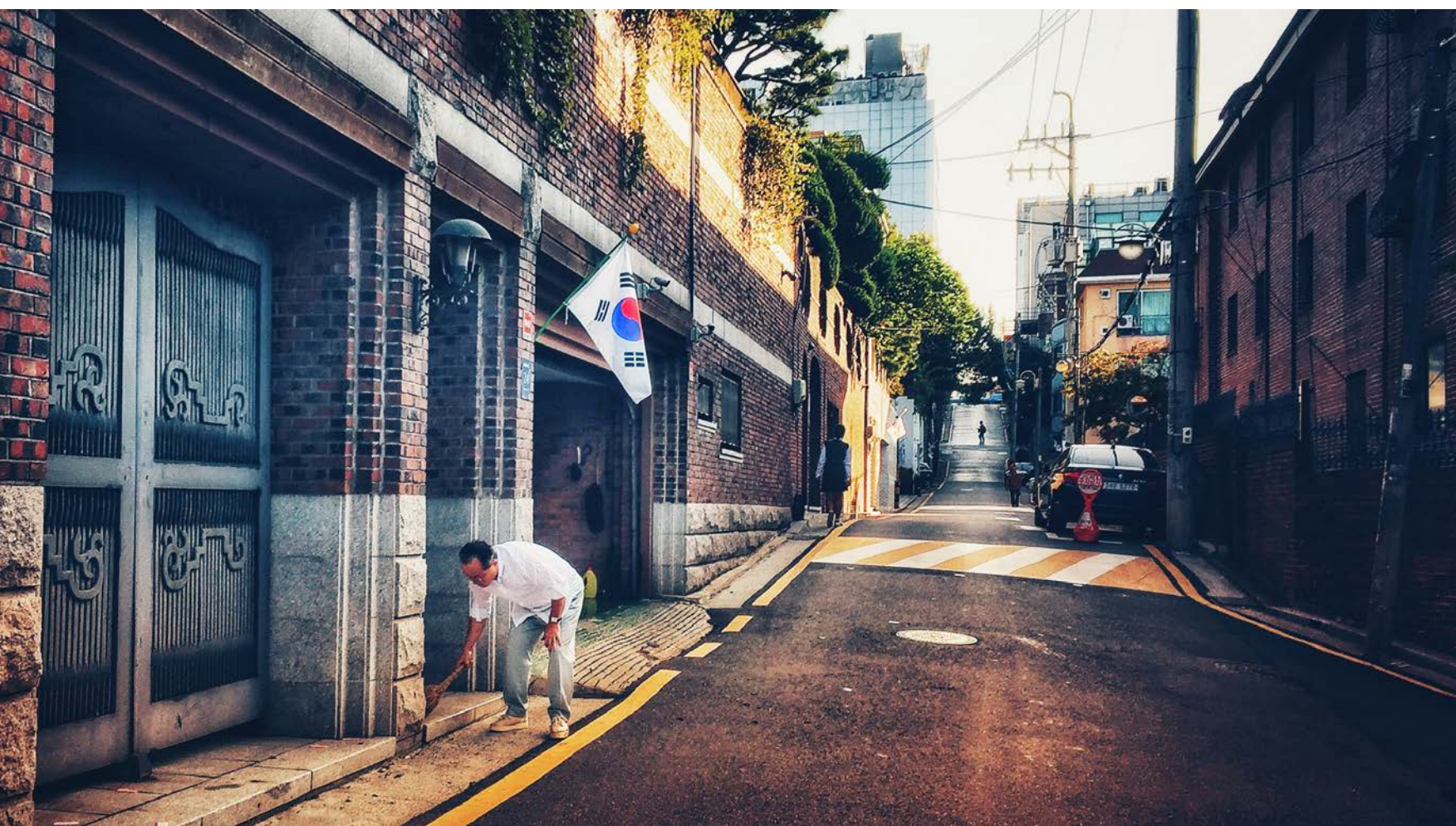


Image 031 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

💎 **Key Lesson:** When planning your storytelling photographs, think about the “BIG” picture. Cropping is a technique that you can take your time with. If I had shot my photograph like Image 030, there is no going back to Image 029. If someone wanted to purchase the rights to my storytelling photo but they preferred the crop in Image 031, they could do that. I’m not advocating that you shoot everything super wide. What I’m saying is: firmly understand what you want to say, what story you’re telling, and then compose to that story. If at a later date cropping seems to help your story, then go for it!

2

HOW THE CAMERA POINT-OF-VIEW (POV) AFFECTS THE STORY

A proper selection of the camera point-of-view (otherwise known as POV) is critical to your storytelling photographic efforts, and here's why.

This happens to all of us, even me who has over four decades of experience with photography.

When we come upon a scene that excites us and we want to take a picture, we tend to react without much thought. These types of photos are rarely (if ever) good storytelling photos. Sure, good storytelling photographs can be reactionary. However, that's not the best way to go about things, especially if you're just learning.



Image 032 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Background: One day while returning from an excursion to the outskirts of Seoul, my wife and I were on a city bus when we passed this magnificent statue located in the heart of downtown, near the Financial District of Seoul. As our bus sped by, I was captivated by this unique piece of artwork, and I was determined to go back and photograph it. I remembered approximately where it was located, and the next day we went on a photo safari to photograph it.

The Situation: This is a case where excitement took over, and to begin with, I didn't pay any attention to my storytelling voice. All I was thinking about was that I wanted to photograph this statue... and that was it. We all get this way when we have our camera out somewhere new and foreign to us. My first thought was to take the photograph from approximately the same POV that I originally saw it from the bus. Image 032 is that photograph.

The Shot: About the only planning that went into Image 032 was the fact that I found the location, found the POV, and then took a photograph. However, when I reviewed it in-camera, my balloon of happiness slowly lost all of its air. The picture didn't capture the feelings and the emotion (a.k.a. the story) that I felt when I first saw it from the bus. Only then did I begin to slow down and listen to my storytelling voice. I didn't think Image 032 was awful. However, I began the process of questioning myself as to what it was that I "saw" the day prior. I came to the conclusion that the story (the drama) was the positioning of this colorful and quite oddly shaped structure in the middle of what has to be one of the most conservative spots in Seoul. The statue is quite literally surrounded by steel and glass. My first storytelling move was that I needed the statue to be more dominant.



Image 033 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

In Image 033, I changed my camera POV. Was my story now being told correctly and clearly? Not really. The statue was clearly more dominant in the frame, but it was missing something. Then I asked myself. “What am I really trying to say here with my story?” It was **only** at this point that I fully realized what my story was. My story was this beautiful, yet somewhat absurd looking piece of artwork that was surrounded by the iconic conservatism of business, money, power, banking, etc. It was surrounded by an environment which, traditionally (at least in American culture), couldn’t care less about art.

I now fully understood my story and had to locate my POV for the camera to tell that story.



Image 034 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

The Post-Processing: Once my story was fully understood, I was able to find the correct camera point-of-view almost immediately. Notice how Image 034, which was my final photograph, eliminates everything but my hero (the statue) and the adversary (the tall glass and steel pillars of banking and finance). Image 034 is my exact framing from the camera. In post-production I upped my hero's presence by increasing saturation levels slightly. I also made my adversaries a bit more menacing by lowering their brightness value and saturation levels.

The Final Storytelling Composition: In this case study, you can see how I ignored the Rule of Thirds and instead utilized the composition tool of symmetry. I wanted a viewer's eyes to come to rest at the purple circle at the top of the statue. I wanted the viewer's eyes to travel there by moving up the statue (Image 035), beginning at the bottom (as indicated by the second purple oval). The surrounding buildings, and the foliage in the foreground, form strong frames around the hero that force the eyes inward and

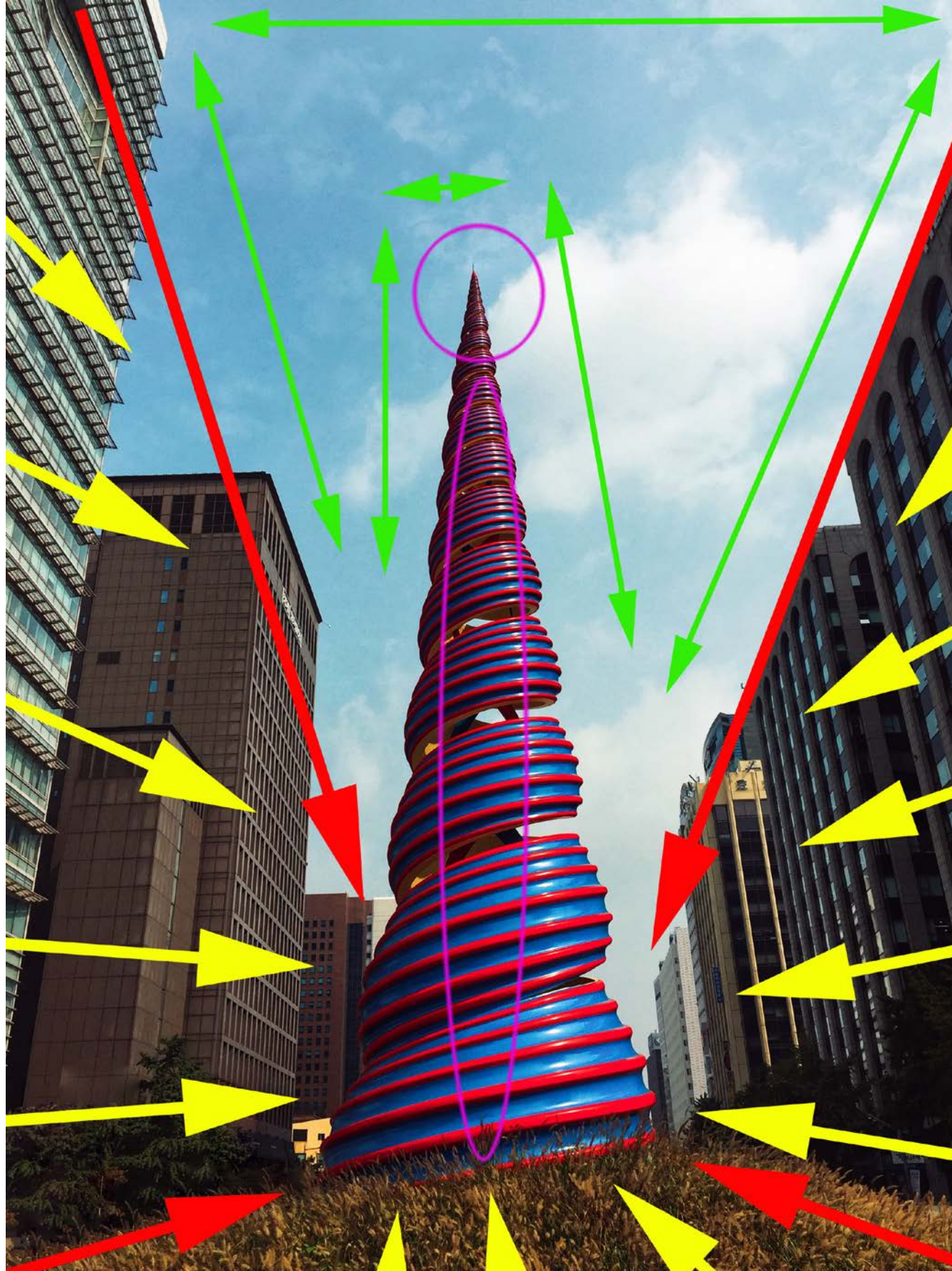


Image 035 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

down toward the top of the statue. The green arrows indicate potential areas for an art director to drop copy over the photograph.

If you Google "Spring sculpture in the shape of a shell at the Cheonggyecheon Plaza in Seoul, South Korea," you will find that my "storytelling" shot of this famous piece of artwork is one of the strongest photographs out there for stock photography purchase!

💎 **Key Lesson:** Storytelling photography can be broken into two parts: Part 1, identify **exactly** what the story is; Part 2, **keep exploring** the camera POV until you discover the perfect spot to tell your story.



HOW LENS FOCAL LENGTH AFFECTS THE STORY

You probably already know this, but just in case you don't, a 50mm lens is generally regarded as a "normal" lens. By "normal," it means that it most closely represents the angle of view and perspective to the human eyes.

This was originally determined back in the days of 35mm film photography. So this would still hold true if you were shooting a camera with a full frame sensor.

If you're not, and a huge majority of us are not, then the normal lens differs slightly. For the APS-C sensor size the normal lens is the 28mm focal length.

For the 4/3 mirrorless camera sensor, the 20mm lens is considered the normal lens.

All this really means is that for these particular camera sensor formats, these particular focal length lenses closely match the human eye in terms of angle of view.

For the sake of this discussion, let's just concentrate on the 50mm lens as the normal lens.

Knowing this, every lens focal length above 50mm is considered a telephoto. Every lens focal length below the 50mm mark is considered a wide-angle. If your camera has an APS-C sensor, then just convert the numbers. If the lens focal length is above 28mm, it is a telephoto. If the lens focal length is below 28mm,

then it is a wide-angle. And then you can do the same for the 4/3 camera sensor format.

The higher the number is above the normal mark, the more telephoto the lens angle of view is.

The lower the number is below the normal mark, the wider the lens angle of view is.

Now that you understand all of that, **this is very important!**

Telephoto lenses compress the foreground and the background. The longer the telephoto lens is, the more compressed the view will become in your photograph.

Wide-angle lenses expand the foreground and the background. The shorter the wide-angle lens is, the more expansive the captured view will be.

This is very important to storytelling photography.

For example, let's say you're vacationing at a horse ranch in Wyoming and you discover the bleached-out skull of a deer lying in the middle of a never-ending desert. If you wish to capture that story, it wouldn't likely be a good choice to use a telephoto lens. The telephoto lens compresses, and your never-ending desert landscape will look wimpy (it will lack drama – get it?).



Image 036 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Let's examine how a simple change in the lens focal length can vastly alter the story you are going to tell.

Background: I was standing up on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. There was a tourist concession that was offering boat rides down below me. Two boats were tied up at a makeshift dock and a third was cruising in with a boatload of tourists.

The Situation: I thought this was an interesting scene, and that it had stock photography potential as a travel photograph for this location.

The Shot: I took several photographs, and in a minute I'll lay out what my storytelling composition was. But then I noticed something changing within the scene. A new story was developing, and in order to capture it **I had to change the focal length of my lens**. Image 036 was taken with the following settings: f/8, 1/320, ISO 200, and using a 50mm lens.

Image 037 was taken within seconds of Image 036. The settings for this photograph were: f/8, 1/200, ISO 200, and using a 105mm lens.



Image 037 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Now, consider these thoughts:

- Image 037 is a completely different story than Image 036. Image 037 tells a story about two people walking together in quiet conversation. They are having a personal moment (a relationship), while Image 036 is about a group of people having fun together.
- I could have shot Image 037 with the 50mm lens, but it would have lacked the drama needed to tell the story about a relationship between these two people walking alone.
- I could have shot Image 036 with the 105mm lens, but the story about the location, the environment, and the excitement would have been lost. It would become simply a shot of a boat speeding around some body of water with people in it.

The Post-Processing: Both of these photographs are pretty much as I saw them, without a lot of post-processing magic. For each of them, I just did some fundamental editing steps.

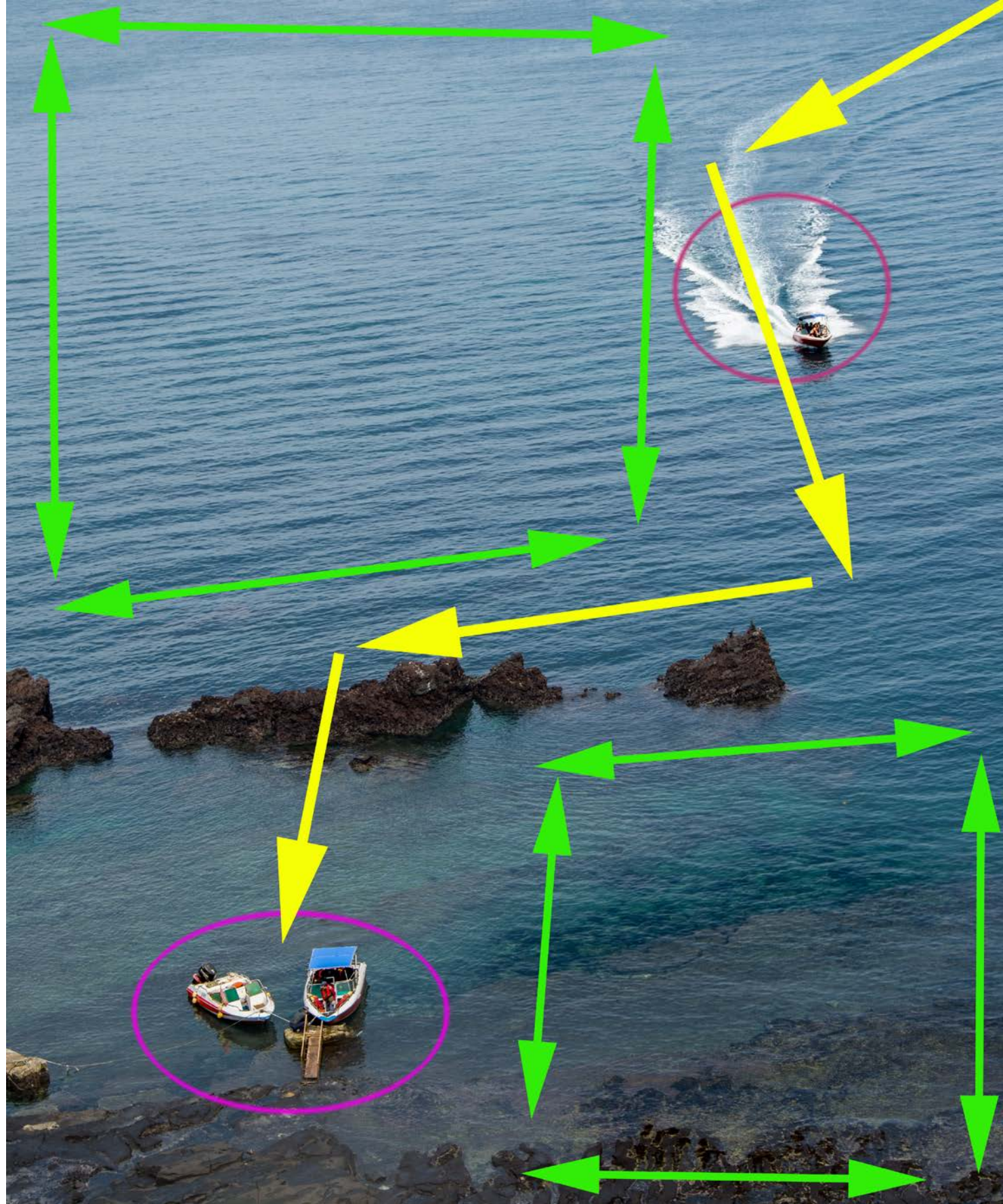


Image 038 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

I'll be the first to admit that neither of these two example photographs (Images 036 or 037) are "perfectly" composed. All I can say is, "Welcome to the world of professional storytelling photography."

Sometimes you won't be presented with the perfect composition, or the perfect light, or whatever else life might throw at you. It's your job then to do the best that you can with what you have.

In Image 038, the purple oval at the bottom left is my primary subject. The maroon oval is my secondary subject. Looking at this shot in literary storytelling terminology, the purple oval is my hero and the maroon oval is my sidekick.

The yellow arrows indicate how I would like a viewer's eyes to travel through the photograph. It is very possible that the eye movement might go from front to back versus back to front, and in this particular case I don't believe it really matters, as long as they travel that path.

Again, the green arrows indicate areas where copy could be dropped in an editorial application.

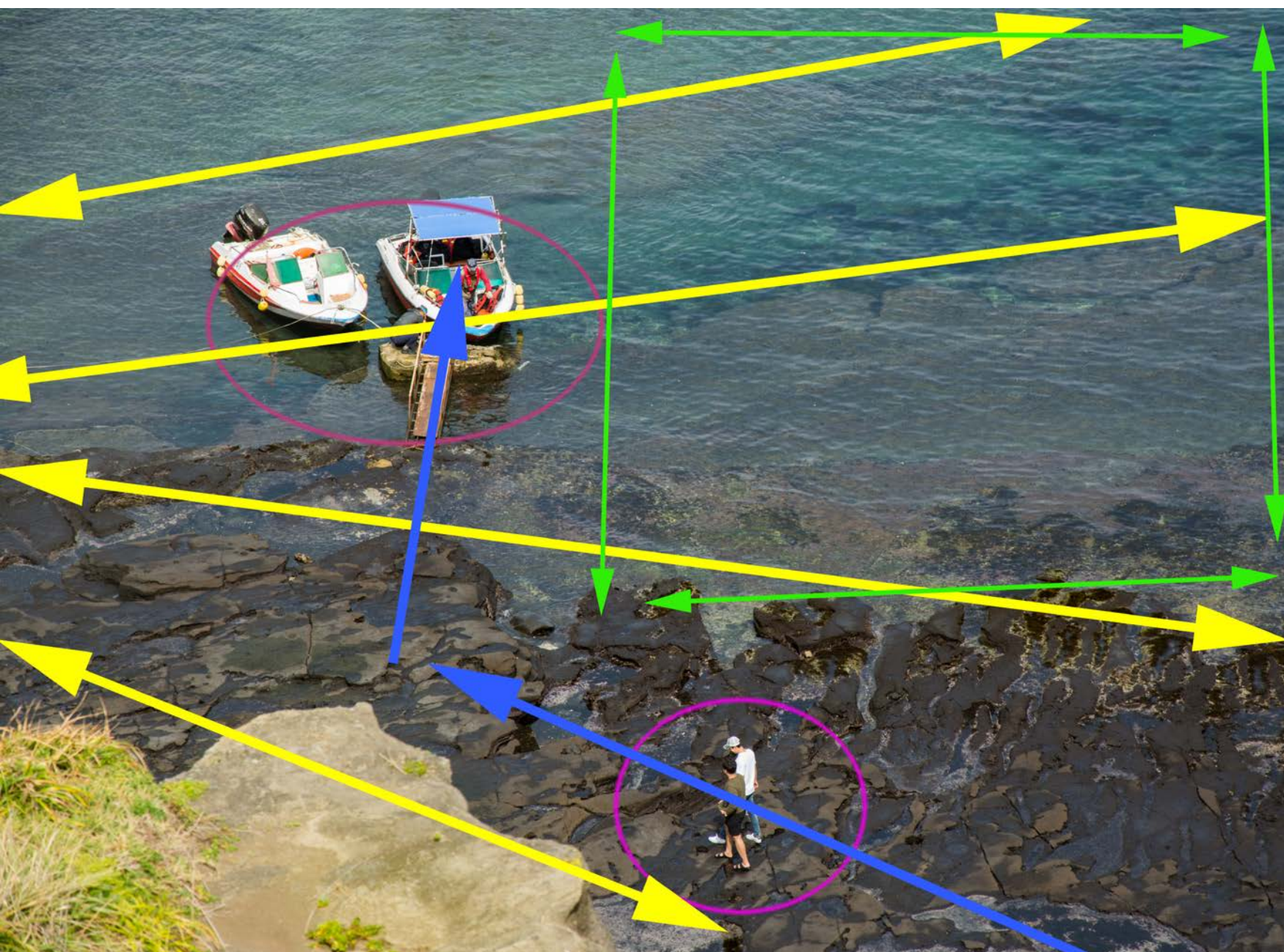


Image 039 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

In Image 039, the purple oval represents my primary subject, my hero (my drama). The maroon oval is a secondary subject, which in this case plays a very small role, merely adding some interest to the environment.

The blue arrows indicate the path that I wish a viewer's eyes to take into, and through, the photograph.

The yellow arrows indicate that I used a tool of composition known as layering.

T If you'd like to learn more about composition tools, you may want to check out the [resource section](#) found at the end of this guide for recommended readings and videos to help you understand composition better.

Lastly, the green arrows once again indicate where copy could be dropped.

Key Lesson: Your choice of lens focal length will vastly change the story that comes across to a viewer.

4

HOW SHUTTER SPEED AND APERTURE AFFECTS THE STORY

I was unsure if I even wanted to address shutter speed and aperture selection in this premium guide.

Most of us already know that the aperture selection is going to change the depth of field (DOF), and the shutter selection is going to change whether moving objects are blurred or sharp.

Beyond that, it's really a matter of what effect you need to tell your story.

But I thought about it, and I decided a few examples couldn't hurt.

For this section, my example photographs are going to be from a wedding that I photographed a while back.



Image 039 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

This photograph was created with the following settings: 85mm lens, f/5.6, distance approximately 8 feet. This resulted in a shallow DOF.

I decided to use these photos for the examples for two reasons:

- 1) Successful wedding photography is highly reliant on good storytelling.
- 2) Depth of field and shutter speed selection really (really) do matter when you're professionally shooting a wedding, and they do play a large role in the storytelling of a wedding day.

Aperture Selection (DOF)

The Background: A wedding story is all about the bride and groom. However, the people that surround them are definitely an important part of the story.

The Situation: For Image 040, a shallow depth of field was the correct choice, because the moment, the story, and the drama surrounds the bride. The maid of honor, while clearly visible, is out of focus. This concentrates the story to the left side of the photograph. A viewer's eyes will always concentrate on the area of a photo that is in focus. If everything is in focus, then you need other tools of composition (story tools) to direct the viewer's attention.

The Shot: In Image 040, the bride and her maid of honor had just exited the area where they prepared for the wedding. The bride was about to walk down

the aisle. The story was the bride. This was her moment, and she was quite contemplative as she was about to take this big step in her life. The maid of honor was the bride's best friend. I didn't want to exclude her from this moment. However, I didn't want her to have equal visual weight, as the strength in the story was not with her. I used a short camera-to-subject distance along with a wide aperture and a shallow DOF, which focused the story (literally) upon the bride.

Here you can see what the reverse looks like (Image 040). This photo was taken almost immediately after the wedding ceremony had ended. I'm still focused on the bride. It's her day and her story. In this case, the happy friends are adding to the story.

I made a storytelling decision to deepen the DOF, because all of the other elements of composition kept the bride as the "hero." Right? Every element in the shot "points" toward her.


 **Key Lesson:** Depth of field is a useful tool to assist you in your storytelling photography. However, do not come to rely upon it. Simply having a shallow DOF does not create a story, and I think this is where a lot of photographers go wrong.



Image 040 – Photograph by Kent DuFault



Image 042 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

This photograph was created with the following settings: 16mm lens, f/4, 1/30th and an electronic fill-flash. This resulted in image blur around the edges of the dancing women.

Shutter Speed – Using Blur

Background: The reception was outdoors, and it occurred post-sunset. It was approximately 9 P.M. when this photograph was taken.

The Situation: We've all seen the "flash effect" of wedding dance photography where the subjects are caught static. That style of photo really lacks any drama and story.

The Shot: By using a "slightly" slower shutter speed along with an electronic flash, a little bit of drama (story) was put into this shot through "edge blurring." If you look closely at both women, especially around their faces, you will see the tiniest bit of blurred motion. This use of a slower shutter speed significantly adds to the "story" of movement and revelry.

For Image 043, I increased the shutter speed to 1/60th of a second. The bride and groom were definitely moving around, but not as quickly as in the dancing shot.

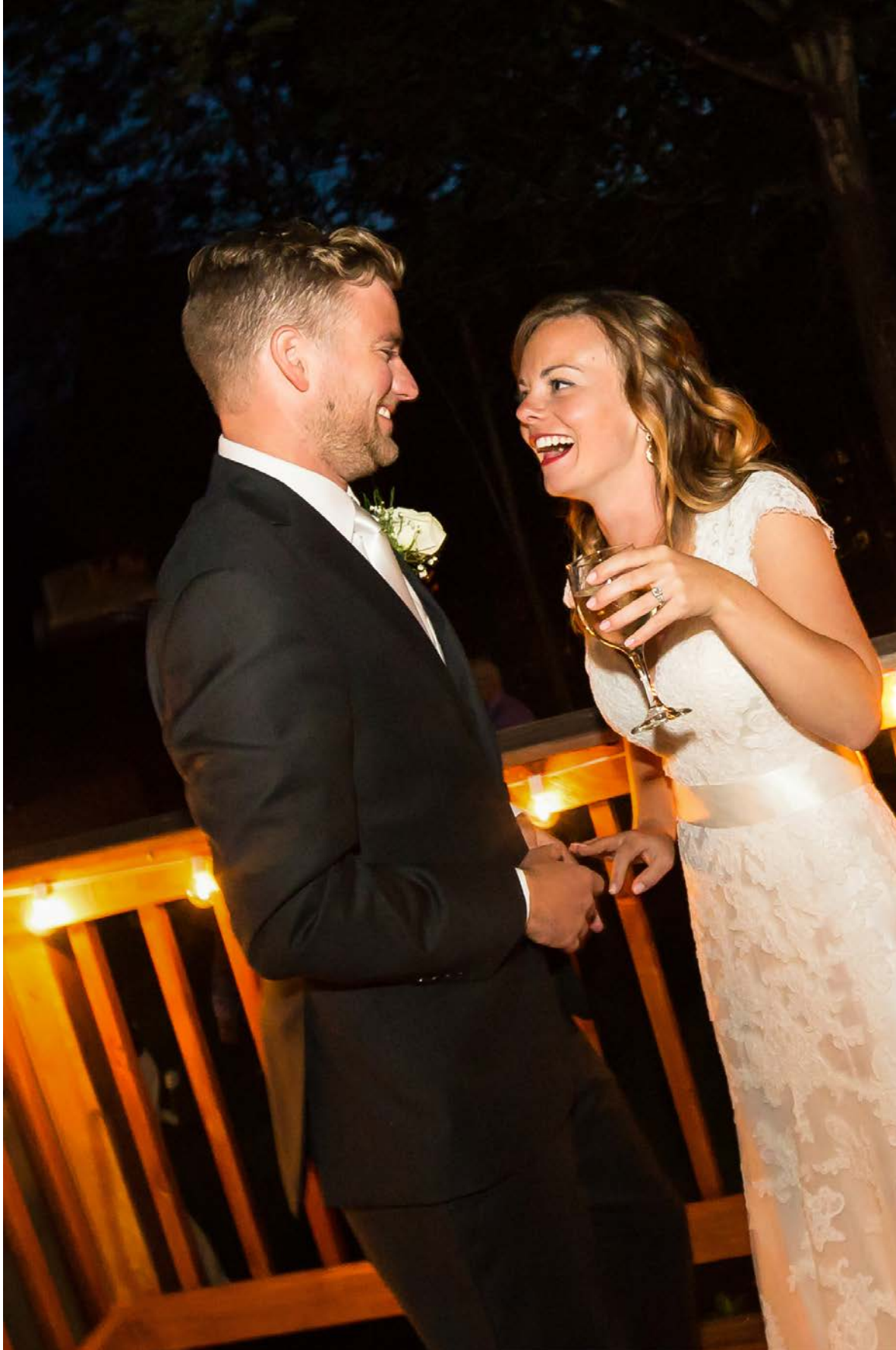


Image 043 –
Photograph by Kent DuFault

*This photograph was created
with the following settings:*

*16mm lens, f/4, 1/60th
and an electronic fill-flash.*

*This resulted in no image
blur around the edges of
the wedding couple.*

The story (drama) in this photograph revolves around the man and woman looking at each other. It includes their expressions of joy and love. Including motion blur would have detracted from that story by drawing attention to the outside edges of their bodies.

💎 Key Lesson: You can use shutter speed and the resulting level of blur, or no blur, to help tell your story. However, just as in the aperture lesson, you cannot rely on it as your sole storytelling source (most of the time). I also want you to take notice that I only varied the shutter speed by one stop, and yet it created quite a difference. I've seen a lot of wedding dance photos where the photographer slowed the shutter speed down so far that the people in the photograph aren't even recognizable. Remember, a good story needs a hero and drama. If the hero is so blurry that they are unrecognizable, well, that's not much of a story. Go back and study the blur effect in Image 042. It is very slight, and yet very powerful!

5

HOW ISO SELECTION AFFECTS THE STORY

Again, I almost decided to leave this out of the premium guide. However, I then decided it warrants at least a short discussion.

T We are likely all aware of how ISO affects image quality. If you're not, please check out the ISO recommended readings that I've included in the [resource section](#).

Here is the quick and dirty on the ISO setting. In digital photography, the higher the ISO setting, the more you will see "digital noise" in the final photograph. With photographic film, the higher the ISO rating, the more you will see "grain" in the final photograph.

The Background: I was out on a photographic safari one autumn afternoon. The weather turned bad, very bad. I was about to head home when I came upon this deserted farm scene. It



Image 044 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

This photograph was shot on Kodak Tmax p3200 film and was processed with a push to ISO 6400 in the development stage. Massive image grain was intended for the "story" within this photograph.

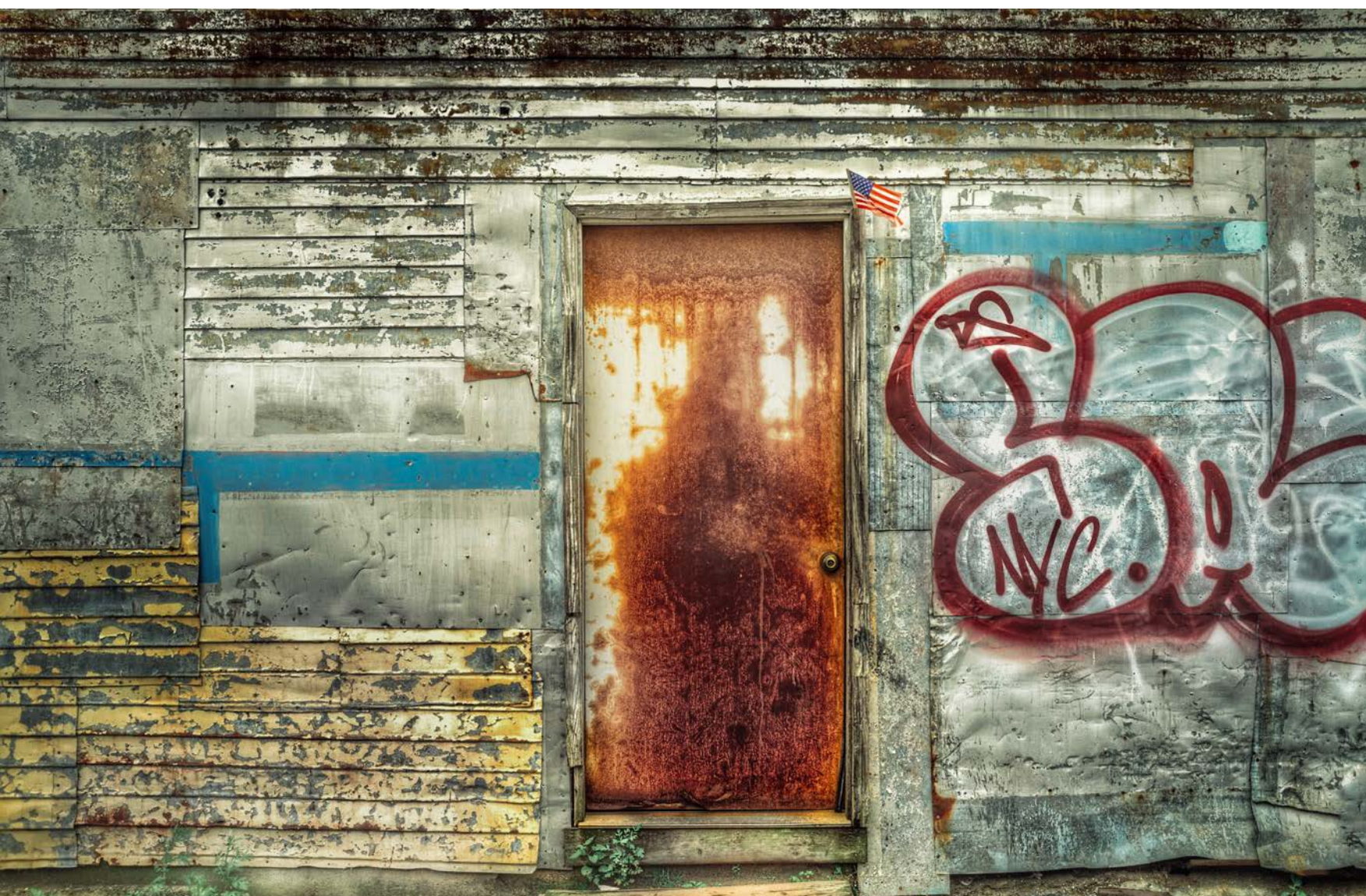


Image 045 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

This photograph was shot with a Fuji X100 digital camera that had the ISO set to 1200. This resulted in noticeable digital image noise.

looked like it was scripted right out of a horror movie. It was very desolate.

The Situation: I was quite intrigued by the light-toned gravel road and the white deserted farmhouse that was surrounded by all of this “blackness.” The light intensity at this point was low. But not so low that I couldn’t have gone with a slower film with less grain.

The Shot: I did feel that a strong grain pattern would up the ante on this already scary-looking scene. So I loaded the camera with the fastest (high ISO) film that I had, which was Kodak’s Tmax 3200. I made my exposures slightly under what the camera meter indicated, because I knew that I wanted to increase the development time to bump up the grain pattern.

Image 045 is a digital example of putting high ISO noise to work as part of the storytelling process.

Background: I was walking around Portland, Maine, taking photographs near the docks in the harbor, when I came upon this scene in a deserted alley. I was immediately stuck by the storytelling nature of the scene. It seemed rather poignant, given the state of the States in the last few decades.

The Situation: There wasn't anything particularly complicated about photographing this scene. The light was fairly low. I could have gone with an ISO setting as low as 800 and still got the shot. However, I felt that a bit of noise might actually add to the story of the derelict building. The United States flag was small and bright, and I knew that there wouldn't be much digital noise showing up there. That was important to my story: the juxtaposition between the bright waving USA flag and the derelict building.

The Shot: Having tested the noise levels on my Fuji X100 camera, I knew that noise would begin to become evident at ISO 1000 and be quite evident at ISO 1600. So I went with ISO 1200. I wanted it noticeable, but not overwhelming.

The Post-Processing: Image 045 has very little cropping. I bumped up the saturation and clarity levels of the flag and some of the surrounding area, including the upper doorway frame and upper left graffiti area. I wanted a viewer to take in the entire scene but focus in on the storytelling component of the waving United States flag.



Key Lesson: I do not use the ISO setting as a tool of storytelling very often. You should know about how ISO works and the affect it has on your images. At low ISO settings, there really isn't a storytelling effect. Low ISO simply presents the scene as our eyes viewed it. High ISO can lend a sense of mystery, destruction, or other possible emotional triggers depending on how you use it.

6

HOW WHITE BALANCE SELECTION AFFECTS THE STORY

White balance selection is one of several possibilities that determines how colors are going to be rendered in your final photograph.

Rarely (I will go so far as to say never) will white balance selection be enough to fully complete a storytelling photograph.

That being said, it can go a long way toward assisting in “knocking home” your storytelling message – if it’s used properly. If you don’t use it properly, well then it just looks like a mistake.




Image 046 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Background: I was driving in near blizzard conditions.

The Situation: I recognized this as being a great opportunity for a stock photograph. I was sitting at a red light. Traffic was barely moving even with the green light.

The Shot: I used my iPhone 6+ to create this photograph. I'm sure that you can see how I used some other storytelling techniques besides just the white balance. The most notable one would be the use of a grunge overlay in post-production. But let's talk about the color balance. As you can see, the color has been definitely skewed in the direction of blue/cyan. This was on purpose, as it helped reinforce the story of "cold," "winter," "blizzard," "weather," and possible danger. There is significant training that a photographer should go through regarding the use of color in their photography. In fact, I am working on a color photography course for Photzy that should be ready for release sometime in the first quarter of 2018. Be sure to keep your eyes peeled for that. It's going to be super cool and extremely informative!

The Post-Processing: As this was shot with my iPhone, I did all of the post-processing on my iPhone with the app "Snapseed." That includes altering the color balance and adding the grunge effects.

 **Key Lesson:** Color balance changes will rarely be enough to completely tell a story. However, they can be an extra element that adds impact to the story that you're already telling!

7

HOW INNUENDO, JUXTAPOSITION, TIMING, AND FOCAL POINTS AFFECT THE STORY

I'm sure that by now you have come to the conclusion that good storytelling photography can be created by using any number of factors.

The better you get at recognizing the tools available, the better storytelling photographer you will become.

In some cases, you will have plenty of time to react to the situation, and in many cases you won't have much time to react at all. So practice makes perfect.

Let's look at some examples where quick thinking, lightning reflexes, and a trained eye paid off in an interesting storytelling photograph.



Image 047 – Photograph by Kent DuFault



Image 048 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Innuendo

What is the definition of innuendo?

Here it is, straight out of Webster's Dictionary:

AZ Definition: Innuendo – an allusive or oblique remark or hint, typically a suggestive or disparaging one.

In Image 047, the signage below the man says "LOOK." This is an innuendo that helps tell my story within the photograph.

I use innuendo a lot in my storytelling photography. However, it's kind of tricky, because not everyone will get your innuendo.

The innuendo in Image 047 is pretty simple, and quite visually striking. So even though the shot doesn't tell a strong story, it still works.

Background: I was walking down a street in one of the very busy shopping districts in Seoul, South Korea.

The Situation: The man, with the cross on his back, was walking along very nearby me, and he was very loudly preaching the wonders of Christianity (to anyone that would listen) using a portable megaphone system, which he was carrying in a shoulder bag.

My storytelling mind fired up, and I fell in behind him thinking something interesting might develop. Before long these three nuns came out from a side street and started following the man as well, right in front of me.

The Shot: The three nuns were chatting and giggling most of the time that I was near them. In my mind, the story was that they found this man humorous with his loud gadget and boisterous manner. I started gaining some ground on the nuns and positioned the man in between them. Since I didn't really know what the nuns were laughing about, I was creating an innuendo storytelling photograph. I already had my storytelling title in my head. It was, "Preaching to the Choir."

The Post-Processing: I did very little to this image. I cropped a little from the top, bottom, and right. I brightened up the nun's habits, and I also warmed up the color temperature of the habits as they photographed quite blue in the shade. I upped the saturation level of the man's vest and hat. I also brightened the cross a little bit.

This was my composition plan.

The purple oval is my hero (my subject); this is where I want the viewer's eyes to come to rest.

The lighter purple square are my sidekicks (a storytelling literary term), which in photographic terms we call the sub-subject. They aren't the focus of the picture. However, they are very important not only to the composition but also to the story.

The blue arrows are all leading lines that will direct attention right to the man.

Now, let's talk about the innuendo.

In Image 047, the innuendo was pretty obvious. In Image 048, it's a bit more of a stretch, as I try to make my storytelling point.

Now consider this: This is a photograph that I made "for me." I don't see it having any kind of value to anyone other than myself. Still, a lot of folks have liked it and have told me so.


 **Key Lesson:** Innuendo is tricky. It can be very powerful. It's also a lot of fun. Many people will not understand your innuendo story. However, that's okay, because some will. And some folks will like the innuendo story, but they won't even know why. They just know "something" is there. Finally, as you train to become a better storytelling photographer, you should also practice the art of creating great titles. A great title can be an extra "oomph" in getting your story across. This would be the case with "Preaching to the Choir."



Image 049 – Photograph by Kent DuFault



Image 050 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition is very similar to innuendo in that some folks will not get your storytelling message.

However, do not let that deter you.

These types of photographs are the ones that will truly bring you satisfaction internally. Sure. If you're creating a shot to be sold as a stock photograph, the storytelling message has to be clear. If you're shooting a wedding or creating a portrait then the storytelling message must be obvious to your client.

The photos that fall into this case study are generally (not always) self-satisfaction photographs. I say "not always" because over the course of my career my self-satisfaction photos have sold on occasion and have also brought me assignments and attention.

Background: I was visiting a place in Argentina called “Aborigine Colonia.” This is the Argentine equivalent to an American Indian Reservation in the United States.

The Situation: I had been invited to visit this place as part of a group from a University where I was teaching English through a basic photography class. The living conditions for the people that lived here were “less than ideal.” The government there treated them pretty much how the United States government treated the American Indians. The town had one small building that served as a medical facility for everyone. I was hanging around that area.

The Shot: I saw this man drive up on that little motorbike. His son had been hanging onto him. The undernourished dog had been chasing after them. As soon as I realized that he was bringing his sick child to the medical building, I moved around to the side of the building. I was about to incorporate juxtaposition into my storytelling photograph. On the side of the building was a painted mural that depicted a battle that had occurred at this very spot. European settlers crushed the local Aborigine tribe killing virtually everyone including women and children. I had noticed the mural earlier and was told the story by someone traveling with me from the University. I wanted to juxtapose this historical

depiction against this man, who was currently still struggling and trying to survive as best he could with his family.

The Post-Production: This image appears pretty much as I shot it. I lightened the man, boy, bike, and the dog a little bit. I also darkened the mural, the post on the right, and the rooftop in the background a little bit. My intent was to create a frame around my hero through contrast and brightness level. The mural attracts attention, especially at first glance. However, it has leading lines that bring the eyes to the man and his child.

Epilogue: I shot these photographs for my own self-satisfaction. However, the University was part of a joint effort trying to improve the living conditions for the folks in Aborigine Colonia. When they saw my photographs, they purchased the rights to print them in a donation request booklet that was sent out across the country.



Image 051 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Timing

As a developing storytelling photographer, developing a keen sense of timing should be a priority on your list. I see so many images online where it looks like the photographer had a great situation but missed the story by a millisecond. A keen sense of timing can only come with practice.

Background: I really wanted to touch upon as many genres of photography as possible in this guide so that you can see that storytelling can play a major role in any type of work that you might be doing. In this case study, we are looking at portraiture.

The Situation: I was hired to photograph these two brothers, on location, at the beach. In a pre-shoot meeting the mother warned me that her oldest son was quite cooperative, but her younger son was moody, and often times didn't like taking pictures. This is not an uncommon scenario. When photographing family portraits, there will often be a member or two that is uncooperative, and as the photographer you must figure out a way to work around it.

The Shot: When working with children, a huge part of the portrait process is getting them to believe that they are doing what they want to do, and not what you want them to do. Often times that involves creating a play-like environment. That's what I was

attempting to do with Image 051. As you can see, the older brother cooperated quite enthusiastically, while the younger brother did not. In the end, I created a storytelling photograph of these brothers that the parents absolutely cherished. It really defined their boys at this point in their lives. They ended up buying a *huge* framed print to hang in their home. The storytelling aspect of this portrait is completely reliant on my sense of timing in taking the shot.

The Post-Production: Just the standard fundamental edits were completed on this photograph.


 If you have a particular interest in portraits, check out the [resource section](#) for a list of guides that give numerous tips on shooting portraits.



Image 052 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Background: My wife and I had lunch at a traditional Korean restaurant in Seoul, South Korea. This was the type of restaurant where you sit on the floor.

The Situation: I noticed the couple (Image 052) that was dining near us as we were eating our lunch. They were quite vibrant and happy, and in my storytelling mind I knew they were a couple in young love. We finished our meal and got up to leave. I pulled out my iPhone, as I often do. Being a diehard street photographer, I'm always at the ready.


The Shot: We were on a second level within the restaurant. I walked around the corner and stood at the top of the stairwell to go downstairs. (The stairwell is just out of view, below where you see the woman in Image 052.) I looked up just as she laughed, and then she leaned forward and grabbed

the other person's hands. Boom! The camera came up, and I got two shots before she moved her hands back into her lap. This picture could be interesting no matter what just because of the unusual framing and the décor. However, it was the hand gripping that took this from "okay" to an outstanding storytelling photograph! **Timing is everything. Plus, you need to be ready.**

The Post-Production: I warmed up the image a little bit. There was glass between where I stood and where the woman was sitting. I captured quite a few reflections. I didn't really mind that. In fact, I felt that it added to the story by giving them a sense of privacy. However, there were a couple of dominant reflections on her hair, so I toned those down with some cloning.

Focal Point

In this case study, I selected a photo (Image 053) where the “focal point” is not only a focal point – it is also the subject **and** the key storytelling element (the hero).

 If you're unfamiliar with what a focal point is, check out the premium guide recommendations on composition in the [resource section](#). If you study those guides, you will have a thorough understanding of most aspects of composition including focal points.

Background: This photograph was also shot during a blizzard, just like Image 046. However, in this case, I didn't want to tell a story of “cold” “dangerous” weather. In this case, I wanted to tell a story of “isolation” and “loneliness.”

The Situation: I was driving home in a heavy snowstorm when I saw this railroad conductor walking along some tracks with a train slowly following him. I was immediately captivated by the story of this man out in the elements by himself, doing his job, so that his train could get through safely.

The Shot: I had very little time to set up for this. In fact, I took it through the car window. I often utilize grunge effects when shooting in snowy conditions. It mimics the visual effect of falling snow, but it is more dramatic. Since I had no time to worry about eliminating the reflections, I used them to my advantage and to help tell my story. I positioned myself so that the triangular reflection pointed right to the man (my hero). That positioning of the reflection totally made this shot work. It gave the man the visual weight to become not only a focal point, but also the subject, and this is despite the fact that he is the smallest element in the picture!

Image 054 displays the composition. The conductor is a focal point **and** the subject. The reflection (indicated by the yellow arrows) points right at him, giving him additional visual weight in the composition. This is important because it actually changes the story of the photograph. Without him having that visual strength, the focus of the story turns to the weather and the train. Notice the repetitive use of the three-point triangles.



Image 053 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

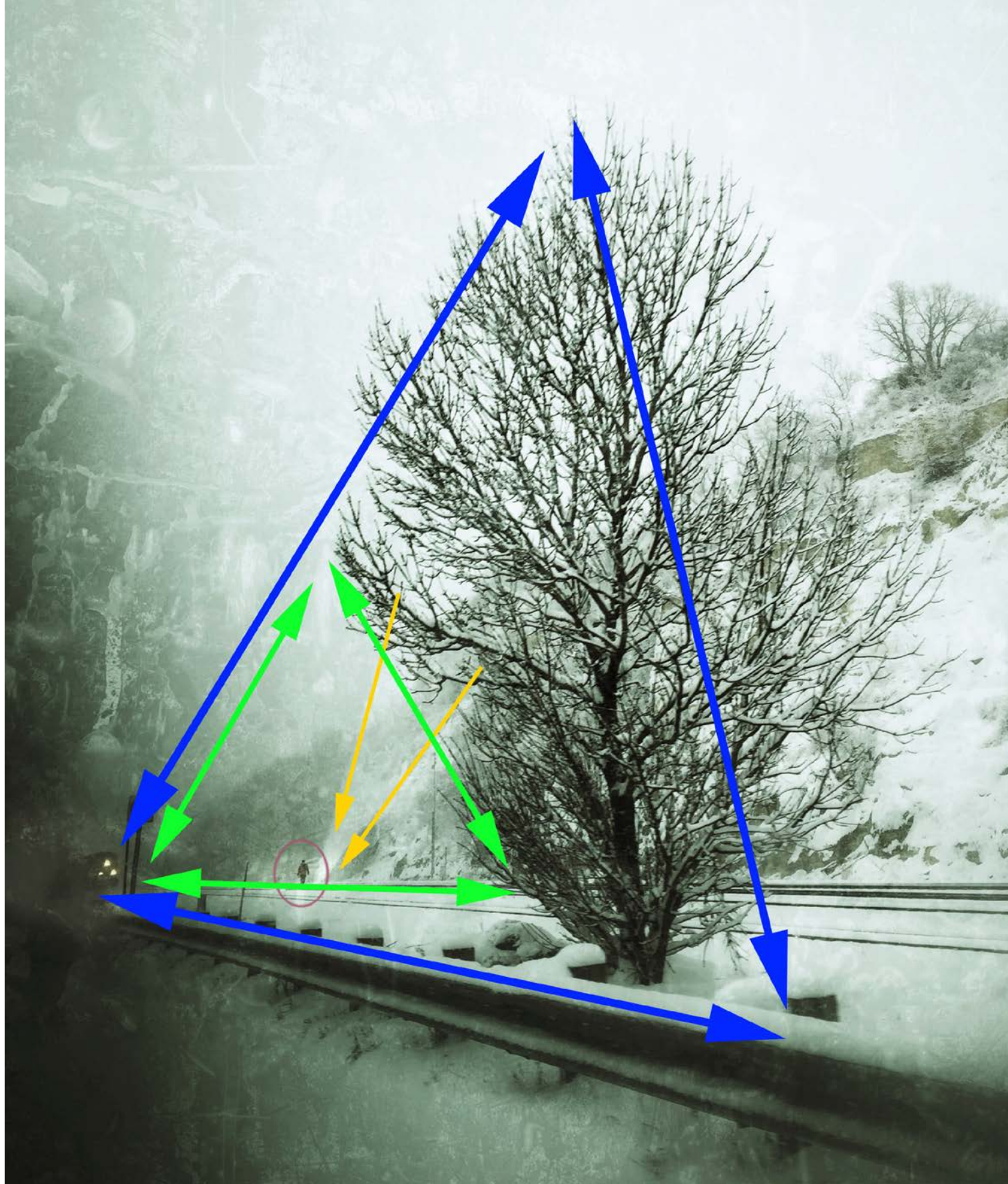


Image 054 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

The Post-Processing: I processed this photo in Snapseed. One particular thing that I wanted to mention is the use of a color balance shift. In Image 046, I shifted the color balance toward blue/cyan to strengthen the story of cold and wintry weather. In this case, I shifted the color balance (a.k.a. white balance) toward a green/yellow hue. Now, as you may or may not be aware, color can significantly alter the message (story) of a photograph. Each color has known psychological effects on the human mind. The color green, depending on the shade and brightness level, can signify fear, angst, seriousness, overworked, stormy, depressed, intense, and it also has strong emotional correspondence with the concept of safety. All of those possibilities play wonderfully into my story for this photograph!

8

HOW TO TELL A STORY IN STILL LIFE PHOTOGRAPHY



Image 055 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

It probably seems a lot easier to tell stories with photographs that have people involved, because people create drama.

How do you create drama with a still life photograph?

Let's dissect three storytelling still life photographs, so that you can go about setting up your own possibilities...

Background: Image 055 was part of a photo essay that I produced on "Life in Argentina."

The Situation: I had intimate access to a family in Argentina. I spent a lot of time in their home. Through that experience I began to learn what was important to an Argentine family.

The Shot: I pulled together the elements that you see in Image 055 to make a photographic story of this particular family's life. The father read the Bible every day. He was a devout Catholic. As part of their Catholic belief they would light a candle every day to honor the Saints, hence the inclusion of the candleholder. There were five women in the household; three adults and two teenagers. An interesting aspect of Argentine culture is how the women are defined by the straightness of their hair. Curly hair is a curse to a woman in Argentina. The women will go to great lengths to straighten their hair, which is why the hair straightening appliance is included. The mother and father were both professional theatrical actors and the announcement brochure under the Bible was a play that they were both appearing in. Finally, almost all Argentines are addicted to tea made from the Yerba plant. This tea

is called "Yerba Mate." Now, with my description, the storytelling aspect of this photograph probably makes a lot more sense. This is something to think about, because you can choose to tell a story in a single photograph or you can choose to tell a story with a series of photographs. I'm going to touch upon that idea of multiple photographs again in another case study.

The Post-Processing: This photograph received the fundamental edits and that was all.


 For more information about fundamental edits, check out the [resource section](#) found at the end of this guide.



Image 056 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Background: I was working with a food blogger to create images for her articles.

The Situation: The images that I created for the food blogger were pretty straightforward. She would create a dish, and I would light it and photograph it. What I want you to take away from seeing this shot is the addition of the dripping honey. That component added drama (story) to what would otherwise be a very static food shot.

The Shot: My associate created the dish. I set up a cutting board as the base of the set. I used a piece of white decorative paneling as the background. The light was provided by a window just off to camera right. A white bounce card was added, close to the dish on camera left, to lighten the shadows. I took some shots to test the exposure and DOF. When everything looked good, I instructed my associate to dip the wand into the honey and hold it about 3 to 4 inches above the dish. It took us several tries, but we got a perfect shot. **The story here is in the action provided by the drip.** The action leads to a tension, which creates drama, in a still life situation.

The Post-Processing: This shot required only the fundamental edits.



Image 057 – Photograph by Kent DuFault


Background: While visiting Mexico, I was in a small tavern that was primarily visited by locals. The tavern was located next to a town plaza that held numerous tourist attractions.

The Situation: I was sitting at a table near the door, when a member of a mariachi band came inside and hung his instrument on the wall opposite my table. He then went over to the bar and ordered a drink while chatting with some friends. I was staring at his guitar hanging on the wall. My storytelling mind saw something developing, but at that point the story wasn't clearly evident.

The Shot: Although I was interested in the guitar hanging on the wall, something was missing. I continued to nurse my drink when the man went into a back room. He emerged a few minutes later with his costume on. He walked over to the wall where the guitar was hanging and hung up the clothes hanger (he had been carrying it with his costume) before going back to his friends at the bar. I raised my camera and took several shots of this still life situation.

The Post-Production: This image required a little bit of color balance correction, but that was about it other than the fundamental edits.

Epilogue: I love this picture. I love the story that it tells. I've had a lot of people express how much they enjoy this shot. Most of them have no idea what the story behind it is. However, they find it intriguing. They often find it intriguing enough to ask about the story behind it is.

 **Key Lesson:** There are different ways that you can judge the success of your storytelling images. One level is when a random viewer totally gets the story. However, there is another way. Think about a famous mysterious novel. Part of the entertainment value, for a reader, is to NOT know exactly what the story is. The entertainment comes from the intrigue, the suspicion, and the guesswork. I see many photographers out there who fail to tell a proper story with their photographs in one of two ways. First, they don't tell any story at all, and this is rampant. I think many photographers really don't have a clue as to how to tell a story with their photos or why it's important. So by reading this premium guide you are way ahead of the game! Second, the photographers tell a story that is so straightforward that it leaves nothing for the viewer's imagination. **Image 057 is an imagination photo.** Imagination photos are very powerful!

9

HOW TO TELL A STORY WITH A SERIES OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Telling a story with a series of photographs may seem easier at the outset. The key to a strong series of storytelling photographs is that they must relate in a way that a viewer can understand.

Otherwise, it will simply look like a mishmash of photos that were just simply assembled with no purpose.

Also, you must take into account that each photograph, within the series, must be strong enough to stand alone. If not, it will drag the value of the entire series down with it.

Photojournalists are masters at building a story through a portfolio of work.

Image 058 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

At one time in my career, I did quite a bit of photojournalism. I was never a full-time photographer at a newspaper or a magazine. However, I was often hired as a freelance magazine photographer.

There is something very satisfying about creating a body of work on a particular topic.

I highly recommend that you give it a try.

The subject of your photojournalism story doesn't have to be complicated or exotic.

However, it should have enough depth that you must really dig into it and not just go about snapping some pictures.

For example, let's say that you have a son who plays on the junior high basketball team. You decide to do a photojournalism story on the basketball team but place an emphasis on your son.

Don't just shoot pictures of him at the basketball games.

Show the little details, the practice, and the dream to make it on the high school team; perhaps even show some defeats. Show the big picture, the

smaller picture, and even the tiniest storytelling picture. Perhaps it's a bloodied nose after pulling in a rebound and scoring the game's winning shot.

Now, for this last case study, I want to talk about diptychs and triptychs.

Are you familiar with these terms as they relate to photography?

A diptych is two images placed together on a single frame.

A triptych is three images placed together on a single frame.


Diptychs and triptychs don't necessarily have to be a storytelling sequence. However, I believe they present a stronger message from you, the photographer, when they do!

Image 058 began after creating the image on the left. I have personal knowledge of the subject in the photograph, and she suffers from severe emotional swings. After creating the photo on the left, I asked her to jump for me for the photo on the right. This example tells a powerful story about her life, and it has proven to resonate with people who suffer from the same issues.



Image 059 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Image 059 is a triptych. This storytelling photograph occurred in a much different manner than Image 058. The diptych began with one image, and the second one was planned. In this case, the story unfolded in front of me, and I just kept shooting pictures as it evolved.

 **Key Lesson:** If you examine Image 059, one could determine that any one of the three shots could work singularly while still having a story to tell. I believe that the story is stronger by showing the progression. Don't be stingy when shooting frames as a storytelling photographer. You can always edit later.

10

HOW USING A ZOOM LENS CAN GIVE YOU STORYTELLING OPTIONS FROM A SINGLE VANTAGE POINT

Hopefully, you have a good understanding of how lenses operate. In other words, do you understand the optical characteristics of different focal lengths?

T If not, check out the [resource section](#) found at the end of this guide for recommended readings and videos to help you understand lenses better.

Most of us understand that a longer focal length (telephoto) lens pulls distant objects in closer. We also know that a wide-angle lens will take in more of the scene. If we are a little savvier about lenses, we understand that focal length affects the depth of field. Now, let's take a look at how focal length can affect the story of a photo.



Image 060 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Panasonic Lumix GX-85 mirrorless camera with a 14-150mm Panasonic zoom lens. The lens was set at 14mm. The ISO was set at 200. The shutter speed was 1/200th, and the aperture was set at f/11.

The best way to examine this is to look at a single subject as photographed with varying focal length lenses.

Background: I was on location and photographing the coast of Oregon. This particular scene was taken at Cape Meares State Park.

The Situation: It had been raining on and off all day. As you can see, there were breaks in the cloud cover. The light was not warm in color temperature, and it was also very omnidirectional and flat. For those reasons, one of my storytelling “choices” was to make my images black and white monochromes.

T If you were not familiar with why that lighting scenario would cause me to make the choice to create a black and white monochrome image instead of a color image, check out the recommended reading list in the [resource section](#).

The Shot: I walked around for a bit and found a good vantage point to photograph the rocks that jutted out from that peninsula of land. My initial idea

for the story was to show the dramatic nature of this location, while focusing a viewer’s attention on those rocks. The bird flew into my frame and was a bonus as a focal point. The bird mostly adds a sense of drama and visual perspective. I still wanted the rocks to be my subject and the focus of my story.

The Post-Production: I shot this image in the raw format and then created the black and white photograph utilizing the techniques discussed in the *Better Black and White* premium guide as well as the *Ultimate Guide to Fundamental Editing* premium guide (links in the [resource section](#)). My purpose – my story – was to roadmap a viewer’s eyes to those rocks while taking in the vastness of this scene.

Epilogue: After creating Image 060, I began changing the focal length of my lens to change my story. I’m now going to present to you how that played out.

As you examine Images 060-064, write down what you think my intended story was.



Image 061 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Panasonic Lumix GX-85 mirrorless camera with a 14-150mm Panasonic zoom lens. The lens was set at 50mm. The ISO was set at 200. The shutter speed was 1/400th, and the aperture was set at f/11.



Image 062 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Panasonic Lumix GX-85 mirrorless camera with a 14-150mm Panasonic zoom lens. The lens was set at 75mm. The ISO was set at 200. The shutter speed was 1/400th, and the aperture was set at f/10.



Image 063 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Panasonic Lumix GX-85 mirrorless camera with a 14-150mm Panasonic zoom lens. The lens was set at 125mm. The ISO was set at 200. The shutter speed was 1/320th, and the aperture was set at f/11.




Image 064 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Panasonic Lumix GX-85 mirrorless camera with a 14-150mm Panasonic zoom lens. The lens was set at 150mm. The ISO was set at 200. The shutter speed was 1/400th, and the aperture was set at f/10.



14mm

If you haven't quite picked up on this yet, this is a good time to plant this thought in your mind.

 **Key Lesson:** The tool that a novelist uses to tell a story is words. The tool that a photographer uses to tell a story is composition.

In order for a viewer to "get" your story, they must be able to follow your intent by following your composition path through the shot.

If they get lost, or don't follow the path correctly, chances are they will not (or will have difficulty) comprehending your intended story.

It's the same with reading a book. Have you ever started reading a book and somewhere in the first chapter you start thinking, "I have no idea what this is about! It makes no sense. I'm lost!" Inevitably, you will put the book down.

It's hard to write a good fiction story in a book.

It's almost as hard (but not quite as hard) to tell a good story with a photograph.

There is nothing super complicated depicted in Images 060-064, is there?



50mm



75mm



125mm



150mm

Image 065 – Photographs by Kent DuFault

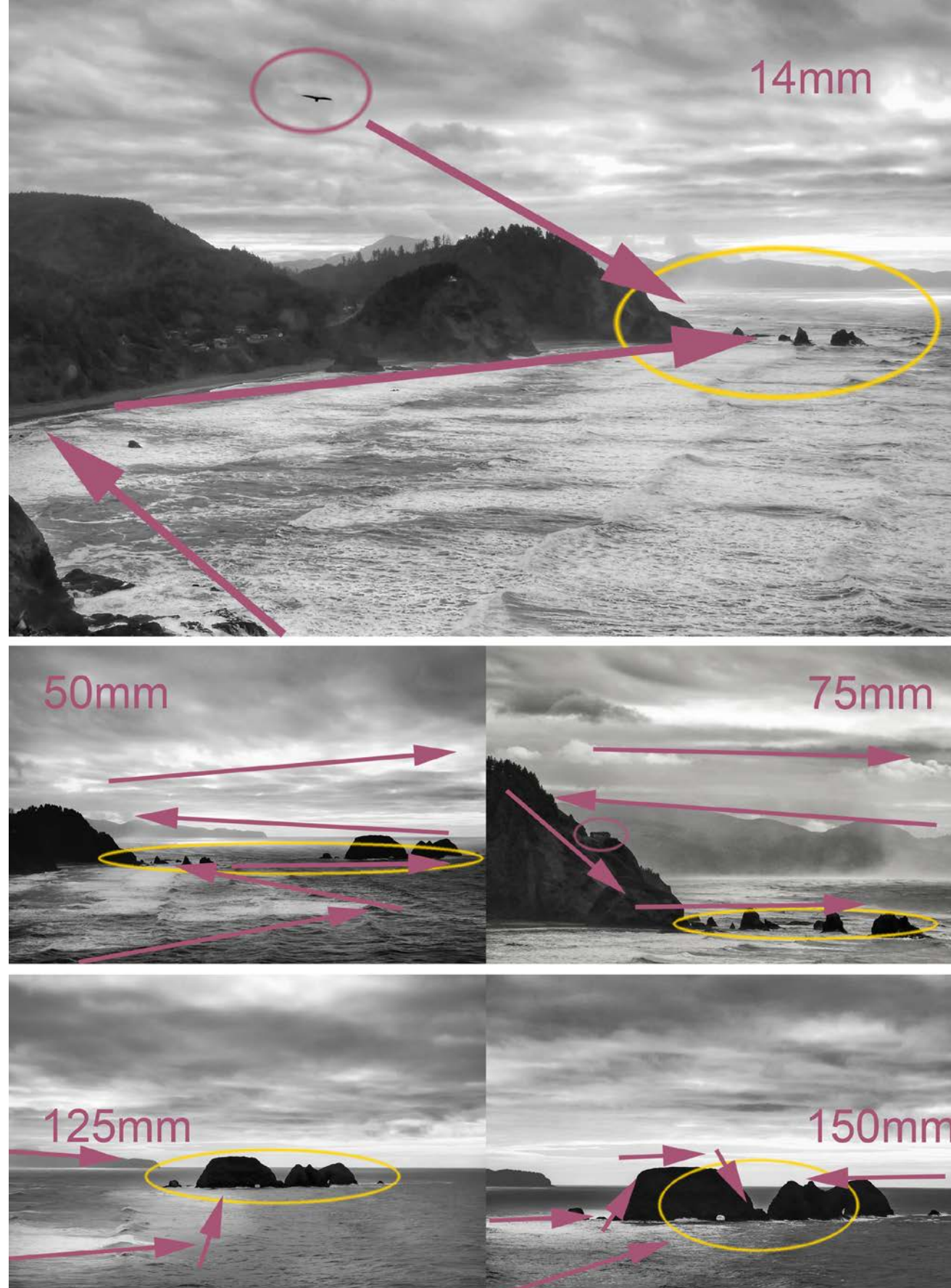


Image 066 - Photographs by Kent DuFault

I grouped the images together so that you could easily see how the focal length of the lens changes the story through changes in framing and composition.

Now, let me show you what my intent was – my story – for each frame.

14mm Story – The vast sweeping landscape with the dramatic conclusion occurring at the dark rocks jutting out from the peninsula. The bird acts as a focal point, and also a point of drama. However, the bird doesn't carry enough visual weight to become the subject, which is good because that was not my intent. The landmasses form leading lines that guide a viewer to the conclusion of my "third act" – the dark rocks.


50mm Story – The 50mm version has narrowed the field of view to the point that the story is no longer a sweeping landscape. In order to establish a new story, I changed the camera point-of-view (POV) slightly to the right to include the larger rocks that were further off the coast. Why didn't I include those rocks in the 14mm version? They would have

carried too much visual weight to the far right border of the picture. In the 50mm version, they now help create a balance. The dramatic conclusion now extends from the tip of the peninsula all the way to the larger rocks on the right. There are no strong leading lines. The composition for the story is a “layered” composition.

75mm Story – The field of view has narrowed to the point where my story can no longer include all of the rocks. I must choose what is important to tell my story. At this focal length, the “lonely” building becomes prominent enough to be seen. I still want the rocks to be my conclusion, but the building is the source of drama. This particular focal length provides a frame that includes “layers” and “leading lines.”

125mm Story – The field of view has narrowed considerably, and I can no longer create a good composition (a storytelling roadmap), which includes the rocks off of the peninsula. So I decided to make my story about the larger rocks further off of the coast. Here, the story becomes the unusual shape of the rocks and the “holes” that the ocean has made through them. The element of composition that helps to build that story is “contrast.” Of all five versions, I think this one is the weakest.

150mm Story – Pushing the focal length out just a bit further accomplished what I was looking to do in the 125mm version but failed to achieve. The telephoto effect has now really focused the story on the shape of the rocks and the holes in them.

 **Key Lesson:** All five pictures in Case Study #10 were taken from the exact same position. All I changed was the focal length of the lens and the camera POV. Yet, it is clearly evident how different the story is in each version. We all have zoom lenses these days. Make use of them. Experiment. Don’t settle with the first version that pops into your head. Explore your subjects with different focal lengths and attempt to improve or change your story. Make sound decisions as to what story each version is trying to say. This case study illustrates how even the simplest subject can tell a story, or different stories. You don’t have to be photographing a toothless monk in Nepal for your image to have storytelling impact.

07 WRAP UP

If you weren't already aware of this, you now know how important the skill of storytelling is to your photographic efforts.

Storytelling is the oldest form of human communication, and in recent years it has seen resurgence in everything from advertising to the Internet.

Storytelling adds an additional element to your photography that creates interest beyond being just a picture. When the story is strong enough, it even trumps technical quality in a photograph.

This is something that many photographers don't understand. They spend a huge amount of energy working on the technical, which is important, but they ignore the message. If your photograph has no message, it will be forgotten immediately.

Always remember that a key element to a good story is drama, and drama is created by conflict. For the photographer, conflict can be a visual element within a composition that creates tension.

The reason that storytelling works so well is that it engages two important aspects of the human mind: memory retention and the need for entertainment.

Storytelling is difficult to define. You must practice

the art, and discover your own style. This is what will set you apart from everyone else. When you become proficient at storytelling with your photography, your images will become valuable and be totally accredited to you, because no one else sees the world exactly as you do. Think about my examples with Multnomah Falls!

You learned about the literary elements of storytelling, and then we discussed how to take those concepts and turn them into visual elements. Try to include as many of the story elements as possible in your photography: audience, key point, conflict, hero, adversary, and the resolve.

Develop your own sense for what the above terms mean. Conflict doesn't necessarily mean that someone is getting kicked while they are on the ground. Conflict (visually) can mean many things. As you're learning, think of conflict as a point within your photograph that a viewer simply cannot get past without stopping for a moment, thinking about it, and spending some time staring at it. Practice assigning the literary titles to different parts of your photographs. Who is the hero? Who, or WHAT, is the adversary? Where is the conflict (this is of utmost importance)? Where does the resolve occur? As a viewer, where am I going to find the drama in your shot?

Repeat this over and over – peak action, peak action, and peak action!

Peak action is so important to telling stories with photographs, and it doesn't mean you have to be shooting sports or street photography. If you go back and review Images 060-064, those landscape pictures were carefully timed for peak action. So what is peak action? Anything that's moving! In those landscape pictures the water was moving, the clouds were moving, and birds were moving.

Embed this learning point in your mind as well. Photographic composition and storytelling are dependent upon each other. Rarely (maybe never) will you create a good storytelling photograph if the composition is poor. By the same token, creating a great composition, without some sense of drama doesn't work well either. Think about both facets as you create your images.

In order for your storytelling photos to work they must be true, real, and valid. Remember my flopped image of the two girls ice fishing? Viewers know when they are looking at something that is not true, real, and valid.

Along that same line, you want to touch a human emotion. Your photos don't have to make someone cry or laugh out loud, but they need to feel something. Otherwise, your photo will be forgotten immediately.

Simplicity rules. I can't emphasize that enough. Humans are all different. A hundred of us can all stand in a line, looking at the same object, and we all see something different. The simpler your story is, the more people out there that will understand it.

Work on your post-production skills. Go back and review the photographs from my tribute to the movie *The Shining*. Without great post-production skills, that photo simply would not have been possible. Use your shooting skills to lay the framework for your story, and then use post-production skills to fine-tune the end result.

Take some time with the case studies in this book and then go out and do some of your own case studies. Check your results by asking for feedback from friends, family, coworkers, online strangers, etc.

Self Check Quiz

- 1) What is the oldest form of human communication?
- 2) How should you prioritize these three elements of photography: technical, storytelling, and composition?
- 3) Story always trumps _____.
- 4) What is the basis of all literary stories?
- 5) What is a story trope?
- 6) The origins of storytelling were born from what six human needs?
- 7) What is an accepted definition of storytelling?
- 8) A story will have an audience, a key _____, a conflict, a _____, an adversary, and a _____.
- 9) From a photographic standpoint, it's typically the resolve that you want to capture, or just before the resolve. You should be aiming for "_____ action."
- 10) While the three-act structure is a literary term, it can help you to define storytelling elements within your photographs. A three-act structure divides a narrative into three parts (or acts) often called the "setup," the "_____, " and the "_____."
- 11) Storytelling works when it is permeated with _____, meaning, and _____.
- 12) True or False: Small everyday events cannot make a good storytelling photograph.
- 13) Storytelling can create a ' _____ and _____ ' in the mind of the recipient.
- 14) True or False: A viewer can learn something from your storytelling photo.
- 15) True or False: If you want fantastic storytelling street photography, it should not entertain a viewer but only shock them!
- 16) True or False: A story and an anecdote are the same thing.
- 17) True or False: It's important to be trendy when telling stories with your photos.

- 18) Storytelling is NOT simply a _____, _____, and a _____.
- 19) True or False: Sometimes, the drama can be "implied" in a photograph.
- 20) True or False: By concentrating, and practicing, the art of storytelling photography, you will create amazing images that no one else gets.
- 21) Complete this sentence: "A story for everyone is a story for __ _____."
- 22) Keep it _____!
- 23) True or False: Great titles or captions can add a little something extra to your photograph's story.
- 24) True or False: Considering the "crop" of a photograph is very important to its story.
- 25) True or False: It's a good idea to only shoot one photograph of your subject because it's important to trust your gut.
- 26) What does POV stand for?
- 27) A telephoto lens has what optical effect?
- 28) What focal length is considered the standard angle of view for a 35mm (otherwise known as full frame) format image?
- 29) True or False: With a 4/3 mirrorless camera, a 20mm focal length lens is considered a wide-angle.
- 30) True or False: The shutter speed doesn't affect the story. The primary function is to make sure your picture is sharply focused.
- 31) For a good storytelling photo, the ISO must always be at the lowest setting possible.
- 32) True or False: Innuendo cannot be a storytelling element in photography. It only works in literary storytelling.
- 33) True or False: In order to have a storytelling photograph, there has to be a person in the shot!
- 34) A photograph that is comprised of two photographs is called a _____.
- 35) True or False: If you have a zoom lens, it is a good idea to explore different possible stories by changing the focal length of the lens.

Assignments:

- 1) Create a storytelling photograph inside your home that says something personal about how you feel today.
- 2) Photograph a family member, or a friend, with the intent of creating a funny storytelling image. Post-process your image to enhance your story. Share the image with 20 different people. Keep track of how many people tell you that they found it funny without you having to ask.
- 3) Find a building and shoot a storytelling photograph about the building.
- 4) Attend a public event and create storytelling photos while practicing the art of capturing "peak action."
- 5) Set up a shot where there is an obvious hero and an adversary.
- 6) Create five candid photographs that you believe show conflict. Provide no direction to anyone that appears in the photograph.
- 7) Create three landscape photographs where the composition leads the viewer to the resolve of your story.
- 8) Practice shooting photographs that make use of three distinct elements in composition and story. Here you are practicing triangulation composition. Remember, one point of the triangle must be the key point – that is the subject, or otherwise referred to as the hero.
- 9) Choose a book or a movie and stage a storytelling photo session from one of the scenes in that book or movie.
- 10) Create a storytelling photograph from a simple everyday event.
- 11) Write down three short stories about your life. Choose one, and then create a storytelling still life photo about that story.
- 12) Take a walk and create at least five storytelling images while you are on your walk.
- 13) Create a story photo using a pattern.
- 14) Create a story photo where you have specifically thought about and selected a camera point-of-view to tell that story.

- 15) Write down ten of your personal values that you hold dear. Create a photograph that displays at least two of them.
- 16) Ask one of your friends or family members to tell you a story from their life. Imagine you're working with an art director at a national magazine who wants to hire you to create the cover photograph for your friend's story because they're going to publish it. Now create that photograph.
- 17) Travel to a town that you've never been to and create five storytelling photos about that town. Keep in mind that if you show those photos to a random viewer they should come away with a solid opinion of that town based upon the emotions they felt while looking at your photographs.
- 18) Photograph a landmark in your town and present at least 8 different story perspectives on that landmark.
- 19) Create three photos that you will solidify the story using post-production.
- 20) Take all of the photos that you've created in these assignments and mark them up (just as I did in the examples in the guide) showing the composition path. Write down how the composition is enforcing your intended story.

Self-Check Quiz Answer Key

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| 1) Storytelling | 14) True |
| 2) Storytelling, composition, and then technical | 15) False |
| 3) Technical | 16) False |
| 4) Drama | 17) False |
| 5) The word trope is used for describing common recurring literary and rhetorical devices, motifs, or clichés in creative works. | 18) Start, middle, end |
| 6) Human need for play and entertainment, explaining the physical world, belief in a higher power and placate supernatural forces, human need to communicate and experience one another, fulfill a need for beauty/regularity/self-expression, to record history. | 19) True |
| 7) Storytelling is the process of formulating ideas and thoughts within your own mind, and then transforming those thoughts into a form of communication. | 20) True |
| 8) Point, hero, resolve | 21) No one |
| 9) Peak | 22) Simple |
| 10) Confrontation, Denouement (resolve) | 23) True |
| 11) Emotion, truthfulness | 24) True |
| 12) False | 25) False |
| 13) Cause, effect | 26) Point-of-view |
| | 27) Compression |
| | 28) 50mm |
| | 29) False |
| | 30) False |
| | 31) False |
| | 32) False |
| | 33) False |
| | 34) Diptych |
| | 35) True |

FURTHER RESOURCES

Composition

- [How to Use Leading Lines](#)
- [How to Use Negative Space](#)
- [Understanding Composition](#)
- [Advanced Composition](#)

Post-Processing

- [How to Improve a Wildlife Photograph with Post-Processing](#)
- [Fixing a Photograph – Woman on a Bridge](#)
- [Fixing a Photograph – Baby Ducks](#)
- [The Ultimate Guide to Fundamental Editing](#)
- [Better Black & White](#)

ISO

- [Understanding ISO](#)
- [The Exposure Triangle](#)
- [Camera ISO](#)

Portrait

- [Creating an Environmental Portrait](#)
- [Headshots 101](#)
- [The Art of Portrait Photography](#)

Lenses

- [A Beginner's Guide to the Wide-Angle Lens](#)
- [Using Selective Focus for Better Images](#)
- [Understanding Lenses](#)

Black and White

- [Color Versus Black and White](#)
- [Short Guide to Black and White Photography](#)
- [Producing Top Photography In Bad Weather](#)
- [Better Black and White](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kent DuFault is a professional photographer and author.

LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/kentdufault/>

Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/people/35449761@N04/>

Clippings: <https://www.clippings.me/kentdufault>

Gurushots: <https://gurushots.com/kentdufault>

500px: <https://500px.com/kentdufault>

Congratulations! You've completed this Photzy guide!

If you liked this tutorial from Kent, you may be interested in his other books.

Check out Kent's premium post processing guide where you can learn the fundamental editing steps that will help make your photos pop!: [Ultimate Guide to Fundamental Editing.](#)



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LEARNING AND IMPROVING
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