

# IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

*Periodical Letter #47*  
*March 2026*

from  
**FREEMAN PATTERSON**



For many of you in the northern hemisphere who are receiving this letter, spring will already be well advanced. Alas, it isn't for me. However, in a year when winter exhausts itself and departs a bit early I might make the photograph on page one before the end of the month.

Besides the more than 5000-6000 daffodil bulbs scattered in groups here and there in the fields near my house, I've planted hundreds of other spring bulbs. Last autumn I added golden varieties of crocus in various places, as last spring they seemed to be outnumbered by all the other crocus colours.

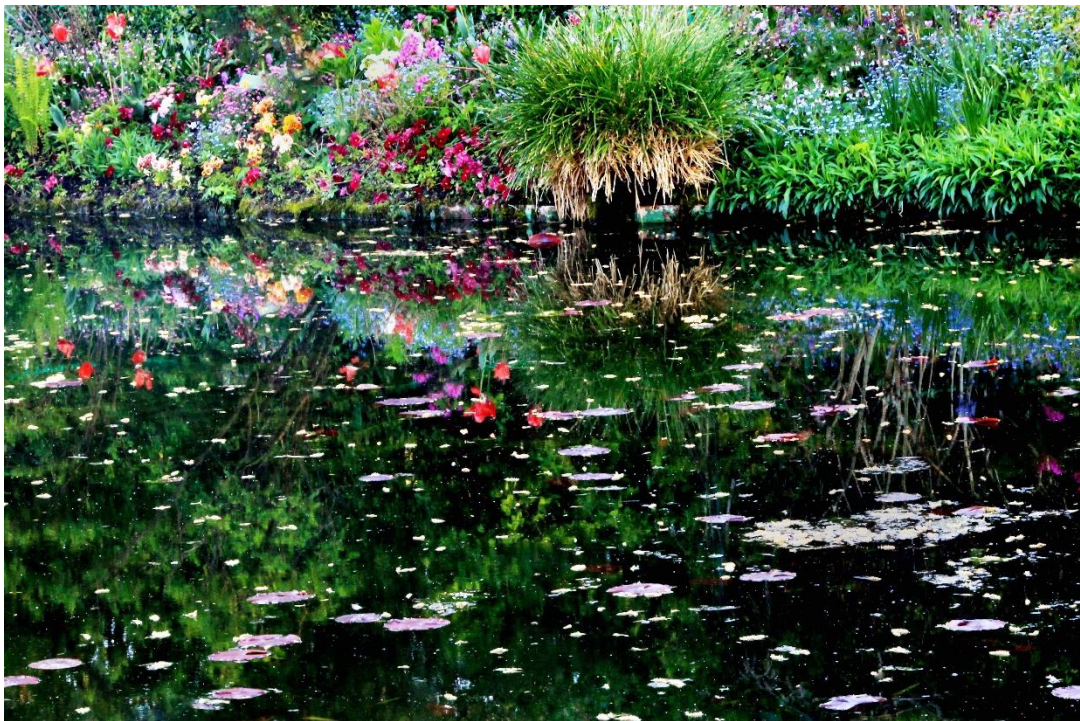
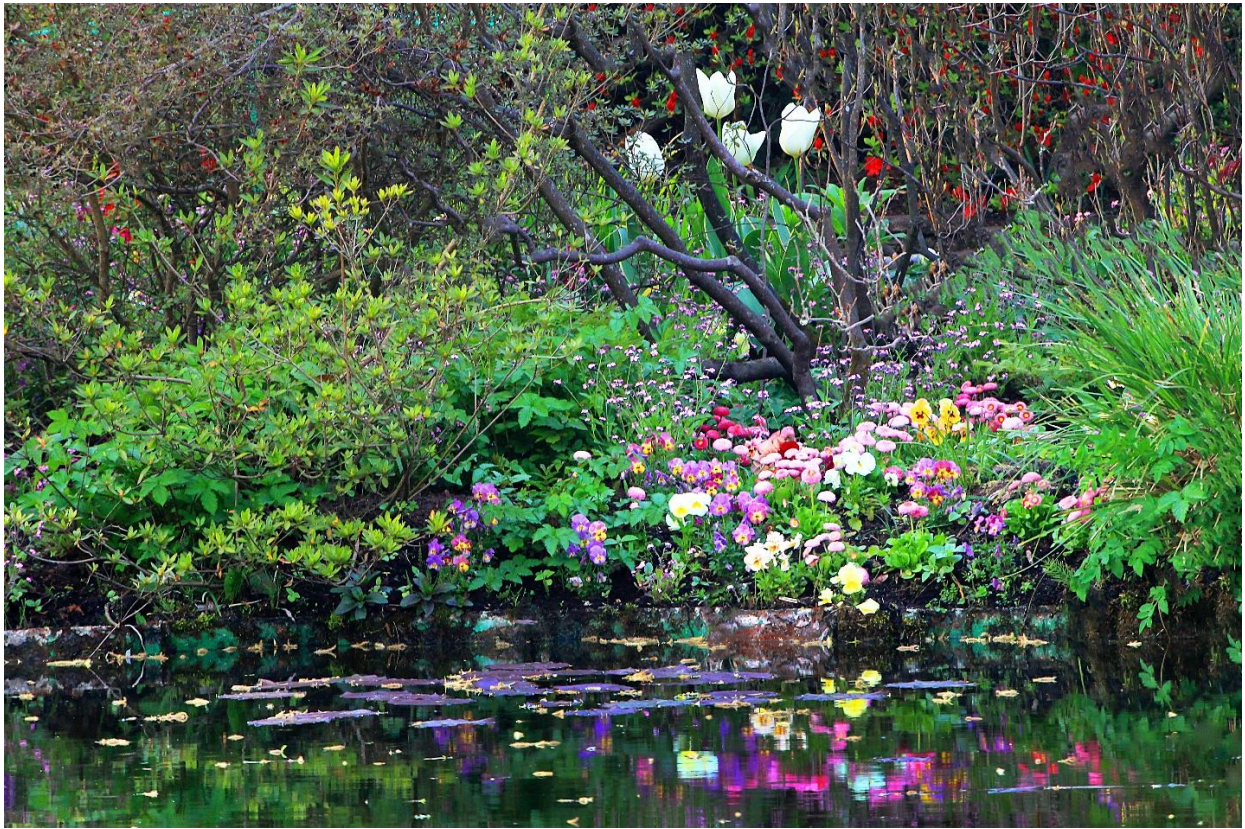
Because every spring the occasional Chionodoxa, commonly known as Glory of the Snow, pops up in an unexpected place, I also decided to plant a spread of these very early, small star-shaped flowers in a spot I walk by every day. Although I like the blue ones the most, for contrast I mixed in a few bulbs that will bloom white or pink.

The brilliant colours of the early bulbs punctuating still-brown grassy expanses literally make my spirit soar. I have been released from prison, having served time for a crime I did not commit. Bees obviously feel the same way, as they are immediately at work gathering nectar for honey production and pollen as a source of protein. When the first Chionodoxa or crocus opens for business, there are always waiting customers.

Spring may begin with a burst of activity, then pause seemingly in exhaustion and dream itself slowly into full presence. Sometimes there is a sense of unhurried promise that will stretch for days, titillating my imagination and trying my patience. This image suggests what I mean.



And, then ...



## Some Thoughts on FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY

The term “fine art photography” seems to be very much in vogue these days but, alas, it often comes across as an attempt to claim that photography really can be an important medium of visual expression. I haven’t read or heard of anybody discussing fine art painting or claiming to be a fine art sculptor, to mention a couple of other visual media. Photography has been listed among the “beaux arts” for well over a century, so there’s no longer a reason for trying to prove the point. So what’s going on with photographers?

Art refers to a wide variety of human activities and products that involve creative and imaginative talent. It includes various forms, such as painting, photography, music, dance, literature, and many more. It can be created for several purposes, including personal expression, social commentary, and entertainment.

Fine art is created primarily for aesthetic appreciation and to evoke emotional response. Its main goal is to communicate feelings and ideas through artistic skill.

Nobody is an artist because she paints. Nobody is an artist because he sculpts. *The medium does not determine who is an artist or who can create fine art!*

Does it matter if what we produce is considered fine art by ourselves or anybody else and why should it? That seems to depend on the person. It doesn’t matter to me, because mostly I make photographs for myself. I’m endeavouring to engage with my world in a meaningful way. If others like my photographs that’s a bonus, not the reason I make them.

However, calling one’s images fine art may matter to others. For instance, a person whose life work has been far removed from the arts may find in retirement that she loves carefully documenting a favourite spot, returning in all seasons and at all times of day. Instead of just pointing the camera and quickly snapping a few images or “taking” pictures, she’s now observing with care, seeing what she’s looking at, and then deciding how to “make” the photograph. One day she may realize that her creations transcend pure documentation and are expressing something ineffable. It might even be called “making love.” Then, if using the term “fine art” has personal accuracy and meaning, she should use it.

Another example might be of a photographer who chooses an image as a starting point, then uses image-editing and graphic design software, such as Photoshop or Light Room, to alter the original image in ways that evoke or greatly affect emotional response.

However, don’t cheapen the term fine art by using it simply to describe camera movement or another technique that renders the subject matter unrecognizable or unusual. In fact, instead of trying to claim anything, why not just do what you love and let the viewer decide whether or not your creation is fine art, if she or he even thinks about the label.

*The two documentary images on the following page have great personal meaning for me – the first (the skeleton of the greenhouse and the black shroud) is a symbol of my near death from liver disease, the second a vibrant graphic interpretation of my return to full health after two liver transplants. A person who has no knowledge of my experience could not possibly recognize them as metaphors and, therefore, would necessarily respond to them very differently from me. They do not fall within the definition of fine art, but does it matter?*



## WONDER

The space-ship Voyager 1 left Earth on September 5, 1977 and by sometime in November 2026, having flown for more than 49 Earth years, it will have travelled one light day. Our galaxy is 1.9 million light years across. Current estimates suggest that the observable universe contains between 100 billion and two trillion galaxies, with the total number in the universe being much higher or even infinite. On average the distance between galaxies is one to five million light years. Voyager 1 has barely got off the ground.

.....

The observable universe is about 100 million billion times larger than a person, while a person is a million billion times larger than a proton in the nucleus of an atom.

.....

A mushroom is the fruiting body of a fungus, like apples on a tree. Most of the fungus is hidden underground - a branching network of tubular filaments called mycelium. If you take a teaspoon of healthy soil and line up all the mycelium within it, it will stretch for up to 10 km.

.....

The chances of winning the Lotto Max jackpot are one in over 33 million. The chances of having been conceived on the particular day that you were are one in over 100 million. Even at those odds, you won the first lottery in which we were ever entered. The jackpot – LIFE!

However, for you to win both of your parents had to win, and their parents before them, and theirs before them, back to the beginning of the human race and beyond. So the odds of any particular person being born are incalculable. Yet, here you are!

.....

Today I picked a dying leaf off a dwarf red geranium on the windowsill above my kitchen sink. For several months it had served as one of the plant's primary food factories, converting light energy into chemical energy through a process called photosynthesis. It had facilitated the exchange of gases between the plant and its surrounding environment. It had played a significant role in the movement of water throughout the plant and in regulating its temperature. The leaf had lived a productive life. I held it in the palm of my hand and studied the beautiful pattern of its veins. Then I said, "Thank you," and tossed it into the compost.

.....

Red blood cells carry oxygen to the tissues of our bodies. The number of red blood cells ranges from four to six million in each cubic millimetre of human blood. We have a lot.

.....

When I was 32 I had my palms read for the first and only time. Miss Tiffany took my hands in hers and studied them for an extraordinarily long time. Finally, she released them and said, "Freeman, in mid-life you will have a serious illness, so serious that it could kill you. The reason that I studied your palms for so long is because it was almost impossible to tell whether you will live or die. However, finally I could determine that you will live and then go on to live a long and happy life."

Thirty years later, almost to the day, I was allowed to wake up from the induced six-week coma following my second liver transplant within five days. And, I have lived a long and happy life.

## BOOKS

If you want to read a compelling mystery that's not a murder mystery, may I suggest [VANISHED BEYOND THE MAP](#) by Adam Shoalts. It was recommended to me by my friend Susan Kiil, editor of six of my books. Here's Amazon's description:

"In November 1910, explorer Hubert Darrell vanished in the uncharted wilds of the Northwest Territories. A prospector who had been swept up in the Klondike Gold Rush, Darrell later made his name as an expert guide, trapper, and restless wanderer who ventured where few others dared. At a time when travel by dogsled in the North was the norm, Darrell became legendary for traversing thousands of kilometres alone and on foot; ranging over mountains and across windswept tundra from Alaska to Hudson Bay. During his epic journeys, he helped rescue sailors trapped in sea ice, led Mounties on their patrols, and even guided some of the era's most famous explorers. Roald Amundsen, the first person to reach the South Pole, held Darrell in awe, remarking once that with men like him, he could go to the moon. Contemporaries regarded Darrell as the hardest, most competent explorer of his day. Despite clues reported by Inuit trappers and Mounted Police inquiries, his fate remains a mystery. While his disappearance sparked headlines around the world, Darrell's name would soon also vanish from the history books, ironically, just as surely as he had in the wild.

Yet Darrell left behind a trail of letters, journals, and hand-drawn maps. With these faded clues and his zeal for adventure, Adam Shoalts retraces Darrell's forgotten routes through the wilderness, searching for cabin ruins and old campsites. He unearths water-stained records and tracks down elderly individuals in the hopes that they might remember someone who'd known Darrell. Part detective story, part biography, and part first-person adventure narrative, *Vanished Beyond the Map* combines expeditions with historical research to solve one of exploration history's enduring cold cases—the mystery of Hubert Darrell."

Another compelling book is [THE EMBODIED MIND](#) by Thomas R. Verny. "In *The Embodied Mind*, internationally renowned psychiatrist Dr. Thomas R. Verny sets out to redefine our concept of the mind and consciousness. He brilliantly compiles new research that points to the mind's ties to every part of the body." In short, memory is not just a function of the brain.

In addition to the science the book provides examples of anecdotal evidence that memory is not retained solely by the brain. Most striking, perhaps, is the experience of a heart-transplant recipient, a lesbian who was heterosexual after her transplant. Another was that of a woman who received a new heart and subsequently developed a craving for Kentucky Fried chicken and beer. A while after that she met the parents of her organ donor, who told her that these were favorite foods of their teenaged son who had died in a motorcycle accident.

Although I sometimes found the medical terminology in the book difficult to follow and found myself skipping explanations in order to concentrate on conclusions, I valued greatly the new insights gleaned from the scientific research and realized that the book could be an easier read and even more useful to other people. So, I gave my copy to a grief and trauma therapist-friend, who told me a few days later that the new information the book provides is extremely helpful to her.

**Taking a book to bed with me is a lost cause. I'll probably fall asleep before I turn the first page. Whoever slept in the bed pictured below must have been the same – not a book anywhere in sight!**



### **CATapulting!**

**Humans have vastly increased the planet's cat population by keeping cats as pets, but the result has been a corresponding decline in the population of song birds. The United Kingdom estimates it loses 2.7 million birds a year to cats, Canada between one and 3.5 million, the United States somewhere between one and 3.5 billion, and the domestic cats of Cape Town kill approximately half a million every year. Domestic cats are responsible for the extinction of at least 40 species of birds worldwide.**

**The problem, of course, is not the cats, which are merely doing what comes naturally to them. We're the problem.**

**Many of my friends have cats as a pet or a companion, but only one couple I know always keeps their pet indoors, providing it with its own small "mud room" where it has its meals and goes for its bowel movements. There may be others who are equally thoughtful, but this is a problem that doesn't seem to occur to most cat owners, especially those who keep a cat to control mice and rats, or to those who have bird feeders that all too often attract rats to the spilled seeds and draw birds into the range of cat predation.**

**It seems to me that keeping birds safe (especially ground feeders) when you have a cat should be a matter of thoughtful management.**

## **DOGgedly**

**It's been a long while since I showed you a picture of my German Shepherd, Tess, who turned four in October and likes nothing better as a treat than a raw bone, which keeps her happily engaged for hours. She's oblivious to cold, as you can tell from her coat, and from her cushion in the porch or bench on my front deck rushes forth into my rhododendrons and azaleas or near woods whenever she gets a whiff of a deer or other marauding beast. She earns her bones, believe me.**



**When my previous German Shepherd, Gaia, was with me a friend told me that she thought I was being very cruel not to bring her indoors on cold nights. My reply was that if I were to do that, then I should be equally considerate of the foxes, coyotes, racoons, and other animals that live around here and that I simply don't have enough space.**

**At the moment Tess is sleeping at my feet. She snores lightly and dreams frequently, like all my dogs have done. I can surmise the general nature of her dreams by observing her body movements – her feet twitching in an apparent attempt to chase an animal or a thumping of her tail on the floor to express her pleasure at meeting a friend.**

**If Tess is indoors in the early evening, she always lets me know when she wants out and I will receive no requests for re-entry until the middle of the following morning. She knows she has work to do.**

## PRESENTATIONS

If you are in charge of programming for your photographic or other group, I know you'll be planning far ahead, even for next year. Here is a list of presentations that I am prepared to offer by ZOOM or a similar platform. Each is 60-75 minutes in length, not counting questions and answers at the end and is available this year during March, April, October (last two weeks,) November, and December and January through April 2027.

The Distinction Between Craft and Art and Why It Matters to Photographers

The Building Blocks of Visual Design (two or three presentations)

The Two Gardens of Claude Monet/ Les Deux Jardins de Claude Monet

Out of the Northwest Passage – Canada and Greenland

The Flora and Ecology of Namaqualand

Also, I hope to have ready by autumn this year:

Southern Jordan: The Hidden City of Petra and the Great Bedouin Desert of Wadi Rum.

Please contact me by e-mail [freemanpatterson23@gmail.com](mailto:freemanpatterson23@gmail.com) for information on presentation contents and fee.



## WORKSHOPS

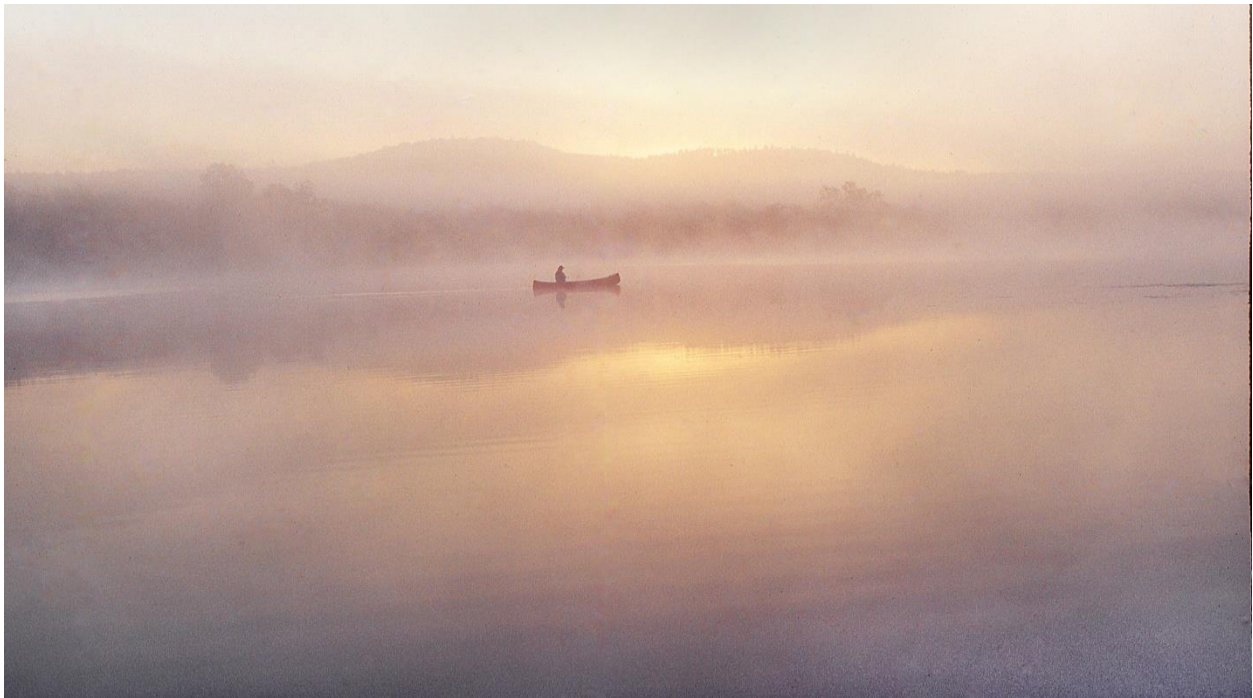
As of March 1 there are still places available on the following workshops:

Photography and Visual Design – with André Gallant, September 13-18

Exploring Autumn – with André Gallant, October 11-16

One-day workshops for one to three persons at Shamper's Bluff, to April 30

For full information please see my website [www.freemanpatterson.com](http://www.freemanpatterson.com).



*Sunrise on Kingston Creek, which flows along the eastern side of Shamper's Bluff*

**“Some old-fashioned things like fresh air and sunshine are hard to beat.”**

*Laura Ingalls Wilder*

.....

**“An individual human existence should be like a river — small at first, narrowly contained within its banks, and rushing passionately past rocks and over waterfalls. Gradually the river grows wider, the banks recede, the waters flow more quietly, and in the end, without any visible break, they become merged in the sea, and painlessly lose their individual being.”** *Bertrand Russell*

## An Unsolved Mystery



**Gelukkige lente**

**Joyeux printemps**

**Happy Springtime**

**FREEMAN**

[www.freemanpatterson.com](http://www.freemanpatterson.com)

[SUBSCRIBE \(for free\)](#)

[freemanpatterson23@gmail.com](mailto:freemanpatterson23@gmail.com)