

IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

Periodical Letter #9
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from
FREEMAN PATTERSON



Jean

Every now and then somebody asks me, "How come you don't make photographs of people?" to which I almost invariably reply, "Well, I photograph people just as often as any other species." Quite often the response to this is a slightly screwed-up face - until the person realizes that I'm both half serious and half joking. I'm also being honest. As much as I genuinely and deeply value and appreciate my many friends and acquaintances and the innumerable contributions of humankind, I don't regard the human species as fundamentally any more or less important to the great scheme of things than spiders, salmon, elk, chickadees, roses, and oak trees. Or, for that matter, than earth (rocks, sand, soil), air, fire, and water. We are a planet and a universe in which everything large, small, and in-between depends on everything else. This means that I do photograph my own species, people, quite often and I'd like to show you a few of the pictures I've made and to tell a bit about why I made them.

Jean Isaacs was a good friend and my first secretary. She had four younger brothers, all of whom lived in Ontario. One day on the phone I said to Jean, "Not one of your brothers has any good pictures of you, does he?" "No," she answered, "and all of them have asked me for some." "Okay," I replied, "I'll be over in an hour."

When I arrived Jean asked, "What would you like me to do?" "What's the first thing you do every morning?" I queried. In reply, Jean jumped into the shower and peered out from behind the curtain. And so we began!

Jean was an inveterate reader and could carry on a great conversation about just about anything, so an hour of good fun later I asked her to sit in her favourite reading spot for a final photograph. Little did I know at the time how important this picture would become to me. One morning seventeen years later, when Jean was 93, a neighbour found her sitting there, her book closed forever.



With our ubiquitous cell phones we make more photographs of our families and friends, even of strangers, than we ever used to, but perhaps we don't make them as thoughtfully. There's an enormous tendency to "grab" pictures these days, not to think about "making" them with respect or thoughtfully. Personally, I prefer to photograph people informally in their personal environment, sometimes including that environment and sometimes not. A relaxed, unhurried atmosphere provides some of the finest opportunities. Here are a couple of my favourites: my grand-niece Esther mimicking her parents using a cell phone and my biker "bro" Kevin in a pensive moment.



I cherish the photographs of people I made in Botswana in 1967 on my very first trip to southern Africa, because for a large part of three months I was traveling in virtual wilderness, in "old Africa," long before the age of instant communication. I was fully present there; I simply couldn't be anywhere else at the same time. Hit [BOTSWANA](#) to view some images of people scanned from my original slides.

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The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep, loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen."

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

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I cannot think of a person to whom Kübler-Ross' observation applies more aptly than Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist and psychotherapist (1905-1997), who believed that the primary motivation of an individual in life is the search for meaning and that the primary motivation of psychotherapy should be to help the individual find that meaning.

In 1942 Frankl, who was chief of neurology at a psychiatric hospital in Vienna, and his family were sent to concentration camps due to the rise of anti-Semitism. His wife and both parents perished there. As Frankl observed the brutality and degradation around him, he theorized that the inmates who had the most meaning in their lives were more likely to survive. After his release Frankl returned to Vienna and to neurology and produced his classic book **Man's Search for Meaning** by dictating its contents to a team of assistants within nine days. Frankl had carried the original draft with him to the concentration camp, where it was destroyed, but his ability to observe objectively the horrible experiences he had endured there greatly enriched the final text. (The first printing sold out in three days and the book has sold more than nine million copies in 28 languages.)

A couple of years ago my friend Leonard Segall presented me with a copy of Frankl's **The Doctor and The Soul**, first published in 1955. Both books continue to enrich my life.

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One of most naturally funny persons I've ever heard about is the famous Rev. William Archibald Spooner after whom the term "spoonerism" was named. The good Rev. Spooner, who lectured at Oxford University for 60 years, had an intellect so keen that it frequently ran faster than his tongue, causing some embarrassing or "delightful" moments. Here are just five verbal accidents attributed to him.

"It is kisstomary to cuss the bride."

"I remember your name perfectly, I just can't remember your face."

"A well-boiled icicle" for "a well-oiled bicycle"

To a lazy student: "You have tasted a whole worm."

Paying a visit to a college official: "Is the bean dizzy?"



My friend, Helmut Kohrs, co-owner of the Kamieskroon Hotel, N.C., South Africa (Namaqualand)



Friends I made at a H.O.G. rally, Wellington, N.S.W., Australia

As I mentioned in my July letter, I'll be returning to Israel in January 2020 and teaching two five-day workshops in Paran in southern Israel while I'm there. (For details, please go to the [Workshops page](http://www.freemanpatterson.com) on www.freemanpatterson.com.)

On my previous trips I've taught once in Ein Gedi (on the Dead Sea) and twice in Paran, a moshav well south of the Dead Sea on the edge of the Arava desert. A moshav, unlike a kibbutz, is a cooperative settlement of small individual farms. Paran is in the shape of a wheel; there is a paved perimeter or rim road and streets/paved roads in the form of spokes that run into the hub, where there are shopping facilities. Beyond the moshav lies the desert, a nearby small flat section covered by hundreds of fabric greenhouses, most of which contain peppers or flowers being grown for the European market. (In "[Images, Ideas, and Reflections #4](#)" I wrote about how these greenhouses functioned as powerful symbols for me and included a hyperlink of nine photographs.)

As one drives south from Tel Aviv, the land becomes increasingly arid and the topography increasingly evocative for me. By the time I reach the Dead Sea I am "somewhere else" in my heart and in my head. I love deserts and many parts of southern Israel affect me profoundly. My response, always, is to make photographs, never snapshots. In deserts one often sees the bones of Earth. Although at one level I am documenting the Earthscape when I make photographs, at another level I am travelling deeply inside myself in time long past and in time yet to come. Frequently, the more arid the desert, the greater sense of eternity it evokes for me.



Near Timna (area of King Solomon's mines)



Morning light on the Dead Sea

While I'm in Israel I'll be staying and traveling with my long-time friend Susan Meyer, who was born in Namibia, lived in South Africa, and emigrated to Israel. Susan has visited Canada on numerous occasions and, although she and I don't see each other frequently, every time we get together, it seems we've never been apart. And, for reasons neither of us can really explain, we each tickle the other's funny bone. It's wonderful to have a friend with whom you can discuss anything and laugh yourself silly.

Susan and I will be staying with Danny and Susan Hadas in Paran. Danny is a keen photographer who loves the desert. This is the third time Susan and Danny have organized the workshops in Paran.

You can view some of my favourite images from southern Israel by hitting [ISRAEL](#).

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"Night poured over the desert. It came suddenly, in purple. In the clear air, the stars drilled down out of the sky, reminding any thoughtful watcher that it is in the deserts and high places that religions are generated. "

Terry Pratchett

"The desert could not be claimed or owned – it was a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held down by stones, and given a hundred shifting names... Its caravans, those strange rambling feasts and cultures, left nothing behind, not an ember."

Michael Ondaatje

Shamper's Bluff is the opposite of a desert – an example of Earth covered and quilted. This year summer here has been as magnificent and as temperate as any place I've ever visited and it's still unfolding – the very antithesis of winter. I've been up every morning at crack of dawn to witness the soft, changing colours, hear the chirping, calling, and singing of birds, and feel the caress of the cool, fragrant air. This part of the day is pure gift for me and being present is to receive the experience and to say, "thank you."



The coming of the light on the morning of the year's longest day, 2019 – from my front deck

From my front deck an ever-changing bouquet of wild and naturalized wildflowers stretches more than half a kilometre through the fields down to Belleisle Bay, the junction of the St. John River and its tributary, the Belleisle. Except for paths that wander through them, the fields are never mowed until mid-September and October, when all the birds that nest in them, such as Goldfinch and Bobolink (a threatened species,) have moved on and all the flowering plants have dropped their seeds. The mowed plants, including grasses, are left to rot and become both food and mulch for succeeding generations.





Female Bobolink (above) and male (below), photographed by my neighbour Evelyn Symons in the fields below my front deck



It's always summer somewhere. Enjoy! **FREEMAN**

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