

IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

Periodical Letter #49

July 2026

from

FREEMAN PATTERSON



PROPORTION

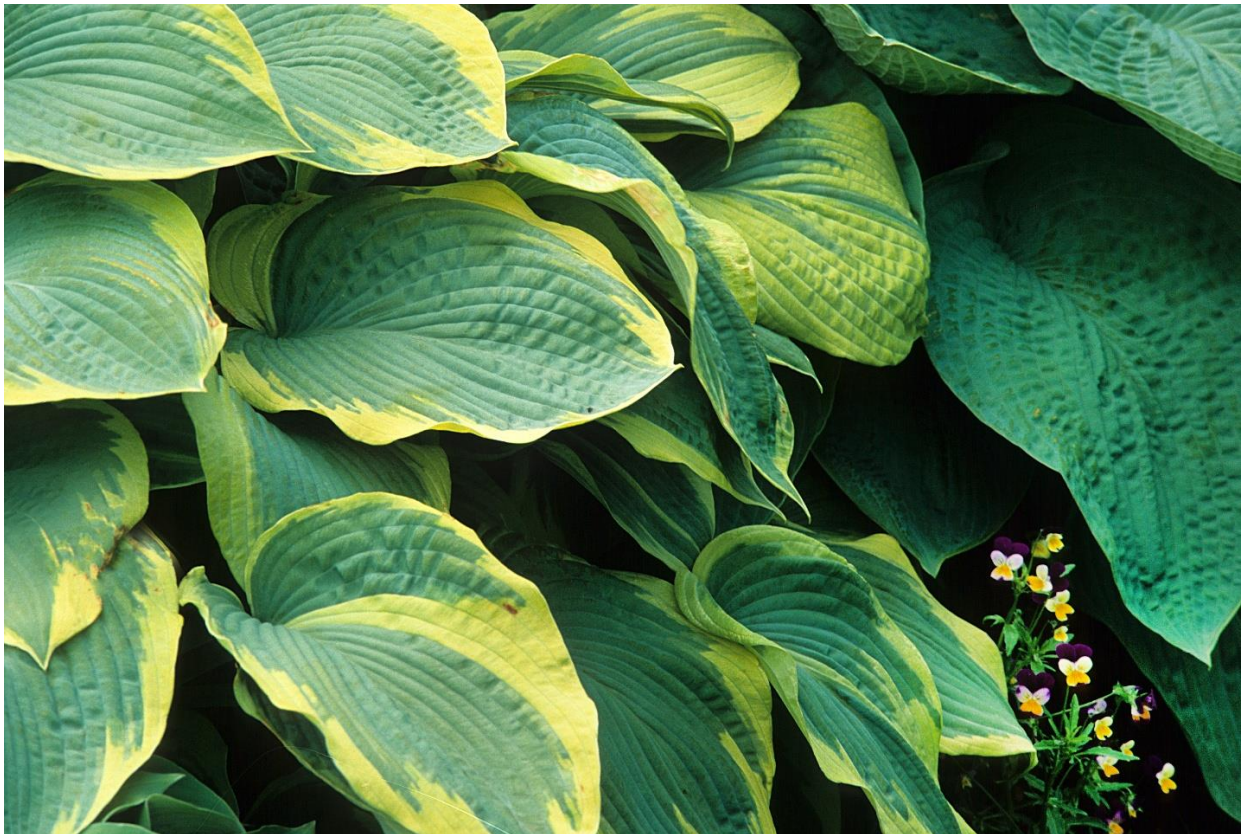
Many years ago, after having looked at hundreds of photographs of African wildlife made with long telephoto lenses, almost none of which showed the animals in their natural habitat, I decided to go to a game park with only a 50mm lens. The image on the preceding page was not made on that trip, nor with that lens, and not even in a game park, but it remains a personal favourite as it provides context. This oryx or gemsbok lives among the great sand dunes of Namibia, can go for days without water, but knows how to find it when it needs it.

The photo illustrates a couple of important points in visual design: 1/ making the main subject smaller in the picture space often makes it much more visually significant, and 2/ it provides a more accurate sense of scale or relative size.

The photograph of Adelie penguins illustrates the same points. Also, both images provide a good idea of where the creatures live, which closer-up pictures would not. When I'm making pictures of plants, flowers, or fungi I often back away from them for the same reason, as I've illustrated on the following page.



There are many times, of course, when moving closer to subject matter is desirable, even necessary. What's always important, however, is taking the time to consider the visual impact or overall effect of altering the proportion of the picture space that key elements occupy. In other words, it's a judgment call.



The PASSING of SPRING

No matter what the temperature or the weather here at Shamper's Bluff, I never think of spring as having transitioned into summer until the summer solstice. That evening I usually sit on my front deck and watch the sun set at the most northerly point on the horizon it ever reaches.

Spring is an attenuated season here and my favourite season of the year. In this time of burgeoning growth, everything good seems possible. I wish it would never end, that the days would not begin to shorten, but just hold in place for another month at least.

in 1989 I experienced five springs, each as beautiful in its own way as the other four – Mexico in late January and early February, Florida through Georgia in late February and March, New Brunswick from April through mid-June, Namaqualand in August and September, and New Zealand in late October and November. I dreamed of following spring around the world for 12 months and creating a book entitled Endless Spring, but it remained a dream.

I've always known, but only realized in mid life, how dependent emotionally I am on the botanical world, even in the very late autumn when the outdoor world at Shamper's Bluff is an intricate mix of greys, browns, soft purples, and dull greens. Plants feed my soul as much as my body. When the snow blankets my world, covering all the plants except trees, the evergreens seem to go black, the world becomes monochrome, and I feel an important part of me has gone missing. From the time the first snow falls, I am longing for spring.

But, now it's summer, and for a while the long days hover before shortening more quickly around the end of July. My last azalea blooms in mid- August, late summer and early autumn flowers abound in the fields, finally the annual carnival of autumn colours diminishes in intensity, and I'd love to begin spring all over again in New Zealand and Australia.



LITTLE SUMMERY THINGS

Do you suppose that because summer is warm and tends to encourage relaxation we notice little things more than at other times of year? I realize saying this is quite a stretch, but when I'm stretched out in a lawn chair or drifting languorously in a hammock that seems to be the case. In any case, it's good to keep a camera handy or your cell phone (turned off, of course.)

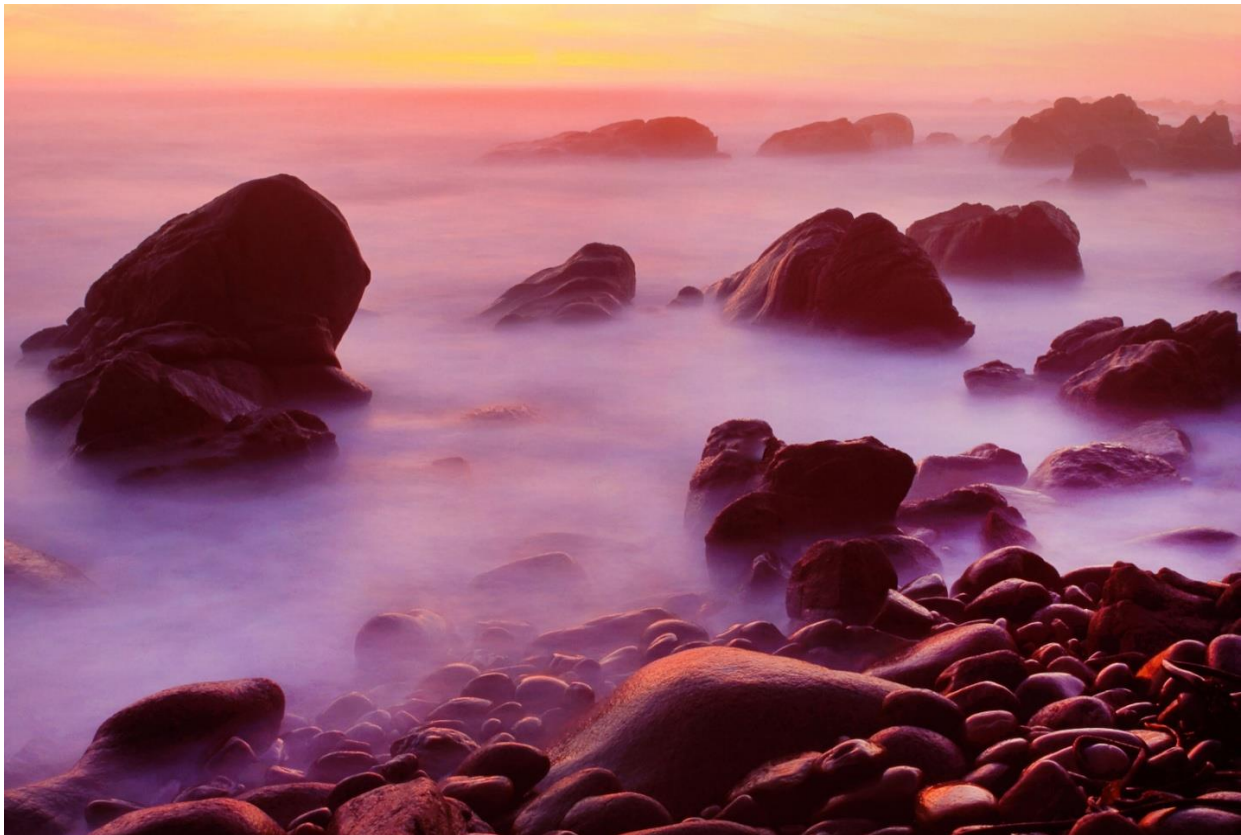


PHOTOGRAPHING WHAT YOU SEE and PHOTOGRAPHING WHAT YOU FEEL

When you replicate photographically what you see, you are documenting something visible, one of the great traditions of the medium. Honesty and visual accuracy are two terms that apply. However, when you photograph what you feel, you are giving visible form to something invisible and what you do with what you see is limited only by the accuracy with which your creation expresses what you feel.

I made the following image after a superb day of hiking along the Atlantic coast of South Africa. At sunset I was less than a kilometre from my campsite and feeling quite “blissed out” when I sat down on a rock beside this boulder-filled cove. The ocean, however, did not express my mood, as somewhere far out to sea a huge storm was creating gigantic waves that smashed relentlessly against the rocks. The sea was angry, but I was calm.

After I made the composition I chose the lowest ISO on my camera, set the lens opening at f/32, and let my camera sit on the tripod until my camera called for a shutter speed of 30 seconds. Only then did I press the shutter release for the first time, knowing that each wave would move through the picture space without registering distinctly in any one place, creating the soft, dreamy impression that expressed how I felt.



Two more examples of photographing what I felt – without any explanation or comment.



BOOKS

WHY WE SLEEP: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams

When I want to read a mystery or any other book that I'm reasonably certain I'll only read once, I'll buy it for my Kindle, as it's less expensive than buying a paperback. However, if I feel there's a likelihood that I'll want to peruse a book a second time, or that I may want to make notes in the margins, then I'll choose a printed edition.

This was the case with WHY WE SLEEP: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams by Dr. Matthew Walker, a professor of neuroscience at the University of California Berkeley, the director of the Centre for Human Sleep Science, and former professor of psychiatry at Harvard. It was recommended to me in 2019 by a friend in Alberta, Dr. Stewart Hamilton, and I recall devouring it at the time. Recently I picked it off my book shelves again and I've found reading it a second time an even more fascinating and worthwhile experience. It's one of those books I refer to as "non-downputtable." I wrote about the book in a previous periodical letter, but it is so valuable and so readable that I have no hesitation in recommending it to you for a second time.

Walker creates this fictitious advertisement:

AMAZING BREAKTHROUGH

Scientists have discovered a revolutionary new treatment that makes you live longer. It enhances your memory and makes you more creative. It makes you look more attractive. It keeps you slim and lowers your food cravings. It protects you from cancer and dementia. It wards off colds and the flu. It lowers your risk of heart attacks and stroke, not to mention diabetes. You'll even feel happier, less depressed, and less anxious. Are you interested?

Then, Walker goes on to say, "While it may sound hyperbolic, nothing about this fictitious advertisement would be inaccurate. If it were for a new drug, many people would be disbelieving. Those who were convinced would pay large sums of money for even the smallest dose. Should clinical trials back up the claims, sharp prices of the pharmaceutical company that invented the drug would skyrocket. ... Of course, the ad is not describing some miracle tincture or a cure-all wonder drug, but rather the proven benefits of a full night of sleep. ... As for the prescription cost, well, there isn't one. It's free! Yet all too often, we shun the nightly invitation to receive our full dose of this all-natural remedy – with terrible consequences."

The book is chock-a-block full of interesting and useful information. The 17 chapters include: Losing and Gaining Control of Your Sleep Rhythm, Changes in Sleep Across Life Span, Sleep Deprivation and the Brain, Sleep Deprivation and the Body, Dreaming as Overnight Therapy, What's Stopping You from Sleeping, and Twelve Tips for Healthy Sleep.

On the inside back cover of my copy of WHY WE SLEEP I've made a list of all the pages where I've put a pencil check mark beside a paragraph or a sentence that struck me as particularly important or useful. This book will never leave my shelf, except to visit my lap.

THE PERFECTION OF THE MORNING

In a 2020 periodical letter, I wrote about Sharon Butala's THE PERFECTION OF THE MORNING: An Apprenticeship in Nature, a book that had moved me profoundly when I first read it back in 1994. Sharon's evocations of the vast rolling prairie of the southwest corner of Saskatchewan and the emotional and spiritual impact it had on her after she moved there in her mid-thirties have stayed with me all these years.

Sharon, an academic at the University of Saskatchewan who gave up academia to marry a rancher in the southwest corner of Saskatchewan, wrote in her preface to the original edition "Having made the fateful decision to throw up my former life in favour of a brand new one, if in the beginning I often found myself having a difficult, even painful time in finding a footing and in feeling I could even become a member of my new society of rural, agricultural people, in my awe at the beauty and openness of the landscape, I felt as if my soul had at last found its home.... Slowly, I began to see new things, to see my life differently. ... I came as a stranger to this magnificent but in some ways terrible place to live, with its more tragic than triumphant history and, gradually, although never easily, I found a way to feel at home in my own skin and in this place. ... As I wrote and rewrote, I began to see that there was no separating my spiritual journey, my life, from the reasons for and the effects of my daily contact with Nature."

Sharon followed this book with COYOTE'S MORNING CRY: Meditations and Dreams from a Life in Nature. In the introduction Sharon writes, "COYOTE'S MORNING CRY is a series of small essays or meditations on matters of spirituality. These meditations on my own spiritual life are not separated from my everyday, fleshy life; the two inform each other. I believe as firmly in the reality of my mental life, including dreams and visions, as I do in the reality of the dishes I wash every day, the beds I make, the husband I cook for and sit beside evenings, watching television or reading. Neither of them is possible without the other."

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BEAUTÉ INTIME

"Intimate beauty," the English translation, doesn't quite capture the full meaning or sense of the French term, which implies the closeness of deep friendship, of being emotionally bound to the object of beauty.

My good friend, Jean-Pierre Beaulieu, has just published his fourth limited edition book, BEAUTÉ INTIME: Errance aux marais and kindly sent me a copy. "Errance aux marais" or "wandering in the marshes" is a love story in photographs.

This is Jean-Pierre's fourth self-published book about beauty. This and the first three, BEAUTÉ FURTIVE, LA BEAUTÉ DES GESTES: Artistes et artisans à l'œuvre, and LA PHOTOGRAPHIE ET MOI: À la recherche de la beauté are powerful confirmations of something I have long believed: "*The pursuit of beauty requires no justification.*"

Why?

Because it is a spiritual pursuit! Fundamentally our search for beauty is coupled with our search for meaning.

BEAUTY: The Invisible Embrace

This book by John O'Donohue, the Irish priest who died far too young, is another book I reach for again and again. My copy is studded with yellow "Post-its," alerting me to paragraphs that I've read again and again. Here are the opening sentences to a couple of these challenging and thought-provoking paragraphs.

"In a sense, all the contemporary crises can be reduced to a crisis about the nature of beauty."

"When we awake to the call of beauty, we become aware of new ways of being in the world. We were created to be creators."

I could quote O'Donohue at great length, but I'd rather you purchase the book for yourself and experience total immersion.

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"A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. A person who doesn't read lives only one." *George R.R. Martin*

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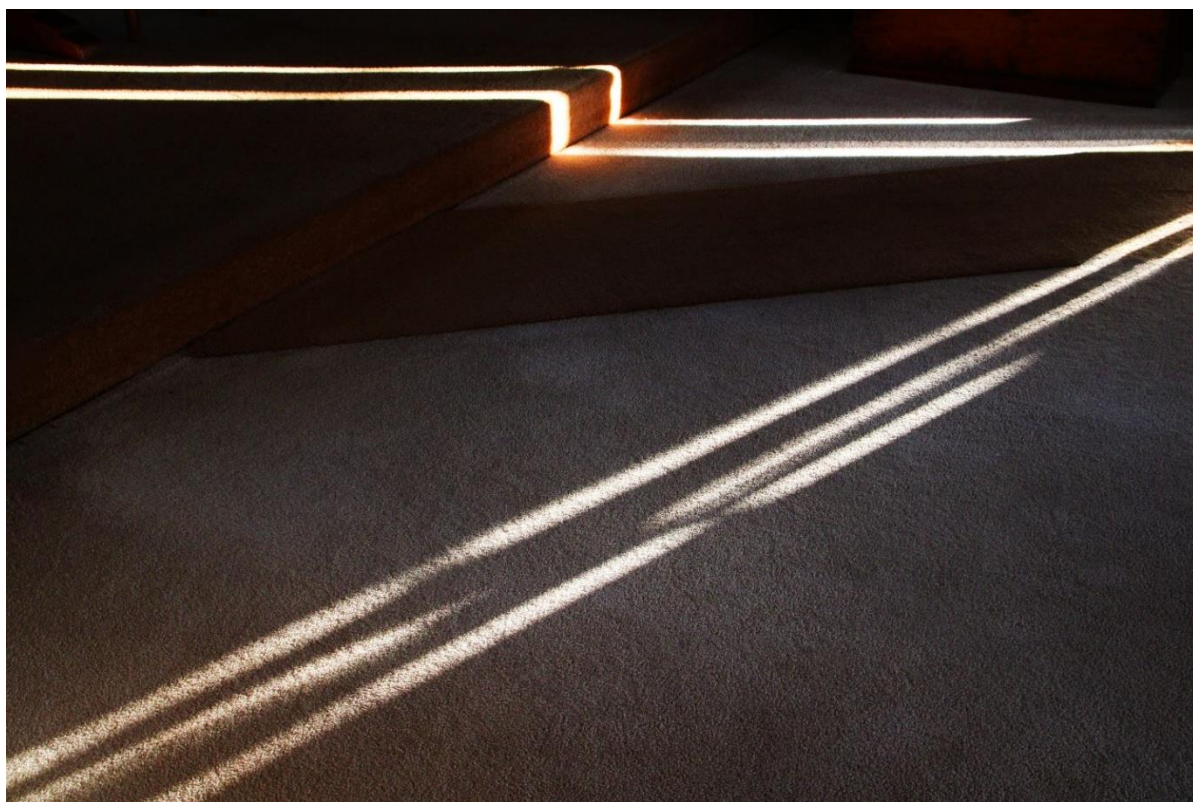
Ordinary Moments



The last rays of sunlight skimming a wall of my barn



Last light of an autumn day



Evening light streaming across my living room floor



Low light streaming across an old sofa

May the season bless you with warmth, with flowers, with hope and possibilities, and most of all with love.

Que la saison vous bénisse de chaleur, de fleurs, d'espoir et de possibilités, et surtout d'amour.

Mag die seisoen jou seën met jou warmte, met blomme, met hoop en moontlikhede, en die meeste van alles met liefde.

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