

## WPPI PHOTOGRAPHY MONTHLY - JUNE 2008 - MEMBER OF THE MONTH

### Peggy Dyer: *The Chameleon Eye*

By CharMaine Beleele

Californian storyteller Linda King Pruitt once said, "Storytelling has become much more to me than just telling stories from history. It is a path I've chosen that takes me daily on a journey that I share with children and adults as I reach, teach and touch through the magic of story." The same is true for Peggy Dyer's storytelling images. Colorado-based photographer Peggy Dyer blends in whether she is at an East Indian wedding, on a Hawaiian cliff, atop a Rocky Mountain or in a family's home. She is a chameleon, donning the appropriate personality to blend into her clients' worlds, observing them as real people, in their truest moments with her unique style. Her images have taken her on a journey, a lifelong voyage in which each photograph reaches, teaches and touches the viewer, communicating not only the event but the emotion of the moment.

Recently *Life* magazine expressed interest in Peggy's work. "I was contacted by an editor from *Life* magazine several months ago. They were looking for interesting photographs depicting the theme of celebrations." *Life* was intrigued by the story of Angelo, who met his girlfriend, Leah, while she worked at Starbucks. Since Starbucks became a daily part of the couple's romance, "he felt it was only appropriate that he surprise her with his marriage proposal as he went in for his morning cup." Peggy beamed, "I was there and documented every moment from the walk through the door, to him falling to his knees and her exclaiming, 'Yes!' The editors loved the idea because we've all heard of stories about proposals, but rarely see one captured."



Peggy's vision, "to create artful, unique and powerful images that bring those fleeting life moments back to the surface, year after year," is clearly reflected in such works as "Soulful Life Moments." The recognition from *Life* also validated Peggy's twelve-year commitment to networking within her community. "The editors of *Life* magazine might never have had the opportunity to view my work in the first place," without her connections to local organizations like Becoming Mothers ([www.becomingmothers.com](http://www.becomingmothers.com)) and her friendship with the Adventure Rabbi Jamie Korngold ([www.adventurerabbi.com](http://www.adventurerabbi.com)). Peggy shares an important lesson, "Make friends with the people in your community."



Another way she has become known in her community is by sharing her talent with local charities. She has helped raise thousands of dollars for the Boulder County Humane Society. She also donates portraits to children's charities for use in their annual reports and presentations. "I feel very blessed to have this talent to share; it gives me such joy to know that my work is raising money to help the community, especially kids," says Peggy. "I strive to do more on a national level. Who knows what will be next?" Recently she has been concentrating her attention on children and lifestyle photography. "I love photographing kids. It's my passion, it's my calling and it's who I am. I play with them. I allow their little personalities to unfold during our time together. I've got several clients that I've been working with for years. It's so amazing to watch these kids grow up." She

continues, "Brendan, whom I first photographed at 5 with a 4 x 5 view camera and all natural window light, is graduating from high school this year in June. I have an irreplaceable visual story of his life already, and it's just getting started."

Peggy finds joy in watching moments bloom into images. Her photojournalistic style is designed to "become almost part of the family instantly and unobtrusively preserve special moments of the day." She even names her shoots Storytelling Sessions, and in her words, she starts by "building a rapport with her subjects that leads to candid moments that capture the essential expression of emotion." Cracking a pixie grin, she shares with WPPI her best secrets, deceptively simple and charming.

**Secret #1: Time.** "I spend time getting to know my client, deciding what they want to convey, a particular place that has meaning, a favorite sport or hobby. Then, during a session, I am studying their personality and incorporating the pieces into the moment I'm capturing." She adds, "I've heard from numerous clients that their favorite part of working with me was that they felt relaxed and comfortable. I work within their comfort zone and get right up to that line, and we play right to that edge and take it further. Without my photographs some moments of life would go unseen."

**Secret #2: Trained Observation.** Henry David Thoreau said, "It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see." Beneath her calm exterior breathes intensity and concentration. Like a cat that is fascinated by movement, she absorbs every bit of sensory data she can gather. "As an artist, I'm constantly taking in the information, the quality of the light, the curve of a cheek, the scent in the air gathering up the reserves of my visual library." How do you train your power of observation? She explained, "You watch, you listen and you become the



information through the camera. I feel my way into the moment and click, the image is captured." This eye for emotion defines her artistic style. "I capture memories; my work is creative, highly stylized, edgy and artistic."

**Secret #3: Imagination.** Imagination is the use of a unique personal vision to "render moments in a creative, expressive style" that allows clients to relive those memories for years to come. The imagination that has created the Dyer style was fostered even in her childhood from age 5. As a child, shopping for a frilly dress with her Nana reveals her creative side. "I wanted no part of it. All I really wanted was a new notebook and some crayons. Finally, Nana found a store, and purchased a newsprint tablet and some tiny Snoopy colored pencils. Even then I was anxious for the blank page, to tell my story in pictures, words and ideas." The Snoopy pencils transformed into a beloved 35mm camera when she studied photography in high school. Her imagination on paper was translated to the lens forever. Inevitably, she graduated from the Colorado Institute of Art in 1993. She immediately embraced her professional life in photography and began by building her business in commercial work, but found herself increasingly drawn to portraiture.

Kevin Kubota introduced Peggy to workflow, color management and actions at his Digital Bootcamp. Peggy says, "Photoshop helps me to achieve an artistic image that can be replicated and reproduced." She has created a set of customized brushes and a series of original edge treatments and textures that she



applies when it feels right. In addition to applying layers in Photoshop and adjusting the blending modes, Photoshop allows her, in her words, "to achieve a more painterly, ethereal look to the images." Once the artwork is complete, she sends the files to Jeff Jones ([www.jeffjones.com](http://www.jeffjones.com)), who creates large exquisite Giclée prints and binds them into hardcover books.

At Digital Bootcamp, she also met inventor Craig Strong, who was just introducing Lensbabies, his unique version of soft-focus bellows lenses. In fact Peggy nagged him into selling her pieces to make her own prototype, even though they had not yet hit the market. "I think from a technical standpoint, my most important lenses are my Lensbabies. For me, it is a natural extension of my vision of creating memories. When you close your eyes, the memories are soft, emotive and not always crystal clear. It's not about the focus, it's about the feeling."

Within the pages of her journals, she has written her personal mantra many times, "Don't ever waste your days not doing what you dream to do." At this moment in her life, Peggy is living her dream, traveling and photographing weddings, events and everyday life. Her destination weddings have taken her to Aruba, Hawaii, San Francisco, Florida, Tennessee and Pennsylvania.

In between her assignments, she created what is the ultimate vacation shot. The viewer sees a pair of perfectly relaxed feet, standing but submerged in at least four inches of silky water and an inch of velvety sand. You can almost see the toes wiggle, and an imaginative point of view makes it appear that they are the viewer's own toes. "I think that traveling around the world photographing people's lives is my

dream shoot!" says Peggy.

There is no doubt that her three key secrets of time, observation and imagination will unlock the doors to many more adventures for her. "Lately I've started to shift my focus and narrow where my talent serves the highest purpose," says Peggy. "I love to teach and inspire people to be creative and step outside of their comfort zone." If, as Confucius said, "words are the voice of the heart," then Peggy's images certainly must be the visions of the heart. See them at [www.peggydyer.com](http://www.peggydyer.com).



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