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ARTICLES & INTERVIEWS

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

An Interview With Scott Trees

"I am extremely lucky in that I have been able to make a good living from my passion. I never dread going to my job." —Scott Trees

Q: How long have you been in business?

A: This year (2018) will mark my 48th year in the photography business.

Q: That is certainly a long time, how did you get started?

A: Well, I got interested in photography while a sophomore in college. I had borrowed my mom's SLR, a Minolta SRT 101, which of course was a film-based camera. I was shooting black-and-white film and I loved the darkroom process. That is what really got me hooked. I returned her camera three months later, got a job in a camera store, and started learning about photography equipment. I had that job all through college. I also started a business photographing fraternity and sorority parties. I was the first one to do it on my campus, Colorado State University, and the business did so well that it helped me buy more equipment and pay for school.

Q: Did you major in photography?

A: No, my major was in psychology! I didn't even take any photography classes. I got some books from the campus library about taking pictures and darkroom technique. I have always been the type of person who jumps in and learns how to swim.

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS—SCOTT TREES

Q: Do you think a photography education is necessary?

A: Well, certainly from my own experience, it wasn't! Having said that, I don't think it can hurt. When I lived in California there were a couple of excellent photography schools that certainly taught the technical side of photography. However, my innate strength is my eye, and that is something that can't really be taught. I think schools can help build confidence from the technical aspect, but they may not teach a lot about what it takes to make photography a successful full-time business.



Head Study in Black and White, shot on assignment.

Q: Would you care to elaborate?

A: Sure. A lot of people look at how I travel the world taking pictures and think it must be a glamorous life. Certainly, parts of it are, but the majority of it is a lot of grunt work. The truth of the matter is the majority of time is not spent taking pictures. There is a lot that goes into making any business work, and photography is no exception. Talent alone does not assure you of success as a photographer. It takes a disciplined work ethic, willingness to put in the time (often years) to build a good client base, some business sense, and a thicker skin to deal with the rejection of your portfolio from potential clients.

Photography, especially today, is a very competitive field. In my workshops, I often share with my students that if you want to make a million dollars in photography you better start with two million dollars. The point to that being, you need to have some cash reserves to keep your business going. You aren't going to start making a profit right out of the gate, and there is going to be an ebb and flow to your business. So, having something in the bank to cover the slow times is important.

Q: That doesn't sound very optimistic...

A: As I said, today photography is very competitive. The digital age has made the act of taking a picture exponentially easier and less costly. Today, everyone seems to be a photographer, which means there is much more competition than when I started. One of the