

Raymond Klass Photography Newsletter

Inspiring the Next Generation of Nature Photographers

by Photographer Raymond Klass



One of the most influential experiences I had as a young student was attending the North American Nature Photography Association's (NANPA for short) high school scholarship program more than a decade ago. It was an amazing opportunity to learn from professionals, meet photographers whose work I had only seen on the pages of magazines, and be inspired by some of the most fiercely dedicated individuals exploring nature today. I left knowing that I was a part of a larger group – that there were all these hundreds of people, young and old, novice and professional, who shared the same passion that I have for experiencing nature through photography.

Looking back, the week long scholarship opportunity was about much more than improving my technical skills or using the fancy equipment sponsors like Canon, Bogen – Manfrotto, and many others lent us. It was truly a life-changing experience for me. I still vividly remember listening to Tui De Roy's inspired presentation about growing up in the Galapagos Islands, and her life-long passion to protect and share the amazing natural resources of this world with her audience.

A lot has changed since I attended the Austin Texas summit in 2000. At that time, digital photography was very much in its infancy, George Lepp was for the first time using a digital projector, and the first version of the popular Adobe Lightroom wouldn't be released for another 7 years. The photographic industry has been turned upside down by some very significant changes over the last decade, but despite these new developments, the inspiration I took away from the conference continues to play an important part in my life.

Fast-forwarding to today, I'm honored to be working with this year's class of scholarship students as the committee chair for the program. I feel lucky to have such a wonderful group of instructors to work with, and a talented group of students who will be attending this year's summit in McAllen Texas. The program has grown to match the big changes in the industry – students now use digital cameras and we're able to critique their images as they download them to computers.





Over the past few years, we've seen a definite change in the dynamic of the applicants to the program – students are coming to us with more refined technical and digital skills, and our curriculum has evolved to meet the needs of these individuals. I suppose this change shouldn't really surprise anybody, it's the direction photography has been heading in since it's invention in the early 1800s. The process of creation has slowly moved from a specialize skill few possessed, to a mainstream activity the masses could participate in, to an almost transparent technology that today is incorporated in nearly all things digital – from your phone to your point and shoot and beyond.

For us as instructors, I think the question of what our responsibility is to the next generation of nature photographers is always in the back of our minds. Our approach has been to teach a combination of the technical skills required to make images and the inspiration young photographers need to be confident and successful regardless of what they choose as a career. One of the pitfalls we try to avoid is looking at the scholarship as a career development program – in no way do we assume that these young students will necessarily go on to be professional photographers.

The most valuable lessons we instill in the next generation of photographers is to be confident in their beliefs, know that they are an important part of a group that shares their interest, and that whatever they choose to do professionally, photography and nature appreciation can always have a place in their lives. I think it's important to recognize that as technology is evolving, and nature photography in particular is becoming more abundant in the marketplace, there is a shrinking demand for new nature images. For that reason, the next generation of photographers is far more likely to incorporate photography into their career, rather than making photography the whole of their career.



We are always amazed to see students leave the program with the confidence to fight for their vision, and the skills to make their vision a reality – whether as dots on a page or pixels on a screen. I got started as a nature photographer because I so deeply enjoyed simply being outside in nature – and it's important to not to lose sight of that inspiration as we inspire the next generation of nature photographers.

All high school students are eligible to apply for the yearly NANPA High School Scholarship. If you have a student, son, daughter, friend or relative who you think would benefit from the program, I encourage you to have them apply. The experience is a truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Form more information on the program visit the NANPA website at <http://www.nanpa.org>

