A painting of two white swans in a pond. The swan on the left is facing right, and the swan on the right is facing left. They are both looking towards each other. The water is dark green and reflects the swans. The background is a dark, textured green.

BECKONED  
INTO  
WONDER

SPIRITUALITY AND PHOTOGRAPHY

BARRY L. LIVELY

# BECKONED INTO WONDER

SPIRITUALITY AND PHOTOGRAPHY

BARRY L. LIVELY



My blog: <http://spiritandseeing.com/>

Get in touch by commenting on any post.

Copyright 2014 by Barry L. Lively. The book and all the images within are copyrighted. Please do not copy this book.

# Table of Contents

[Dedication](#)

[Preface](#)

[Introduction](#)

[History](#)

[Presence](#)

[\*Stillness\*](#)

[Wonder](#)

[\*Ah ha!\*](#)

[Connection](#)

[\*A deep connection\*](#)

[Gratitude](#)

[\*And another opportunity for gratitude\*](#)

[Expression](#)

[\*It started with a smudge\*](#)

[Sharing](#)

[\*Sharing has consequences\*](#)

[Postscript](#)

## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to my mother, Clara Lively, and my wife, Ellie Lively. Both have shown remarkable faith, love, restraint and patience.

## Preface

"To me, photography is an art of observation. It's about finding something in an ordinary place....I've found it has little to do with the things you see and everything to do with the way you see them."

*Elliot Erwitt*



*Fall Creek, Indianapolis, Indiana*

I believe that anyone who has passion for photography, anyone who picks up a camera and gets excited when they look through the viewfinder understands at some level that they are on a journey. In a technical sense, this journey is going to have many blind alleys, many "failures", a few successes and over time the photography will improve. At another level many of us come to understand that there is more going on here than photography and only photography. There is contact with the world, with what we can see. There is also contact with that which we cannot directly see.

Many of us are on a spiritual journey. Our spiritual life matures, perhaps it becomes simpler over time, for some it may become more nuanced and differentiated. In any case it often becomes a more central aspect of our lives. We come to see the world through a spiritual lens. We come to place a greater value on relationships with other people, the world at large and that which is beyond words and direct vision. The premise of this book is that our lives in photography and our spiritual lives are connected. They feed one another and are fed by a common source.

This book is written for two audiences. One audience is that group of photographers who sense that there is something more to their work than what appears in the viewfinder. This group will ask how some of the images were created. I've tried to provide enough technical detail to at least point them in the right direction. The other audience is that group of people who may or may not have an interest in photography. Whatever the interests of these two groups may be - photography, knitting, gardening, hiking - I hope they will find something here that leads them to look at their own interests in spiritual terms.

This book is for anyone who finds something in the last three paragraphs that speaks to them.



*White River, Indianapolis, Indiana*

## Introduction

I've wanted to write a book about spirituality and photography for some time. I've made many starts and none have gotten very far. While these attempts did speak from the heart they didn't come close enough to what it was I wanted to say. What I wanted to say was in there somewhere but it didn't come down to the level of writing or speaking. It was still in the clouds.



*Sunset, Lake Michigan*

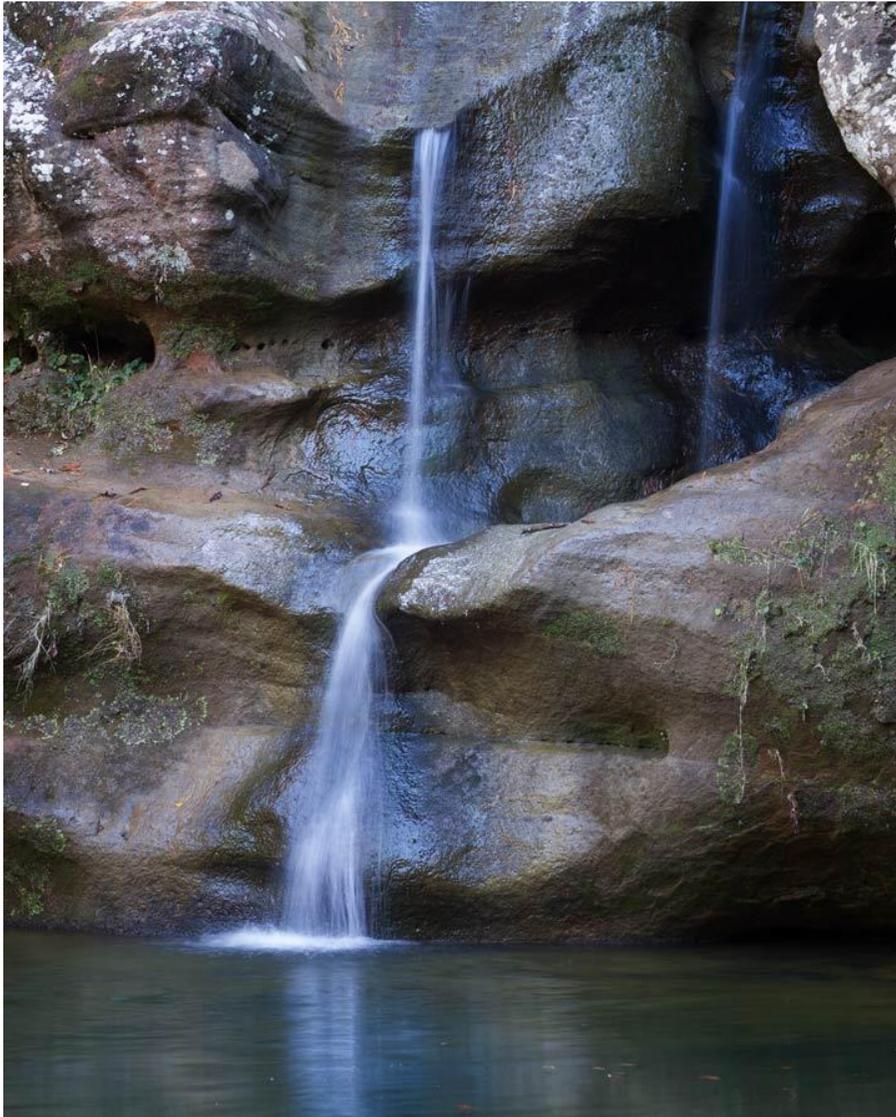
In the end no words will suffice and what I say here will be only a rough outline. I hope this is enough to get the idea across. And as Jim Harrison writes in "The River Swimmer", "How wonderful it [is] to love something without the compromise of language."

Recently as I was thinking about yet another beginning, six words came to mind. The words are presence, wonder, connection, gratitude, expression and sharing. If I were to pick six words that characterize what I wanted to write about, those would be the words. Each of the words has a spiritual dimension as well as meaning within photography.



*Leaves*

I think of these words as symbols for a process that flows from one stage into another. These words in sequence are like a segment of a stream we see flowing down a hillside starting with presence, flowing into a sense of wonder, making connection with the subject followed by expressing it in some form and ending in a pool to be shared with others. In that moment of connection we don't experience its beginning or its end.



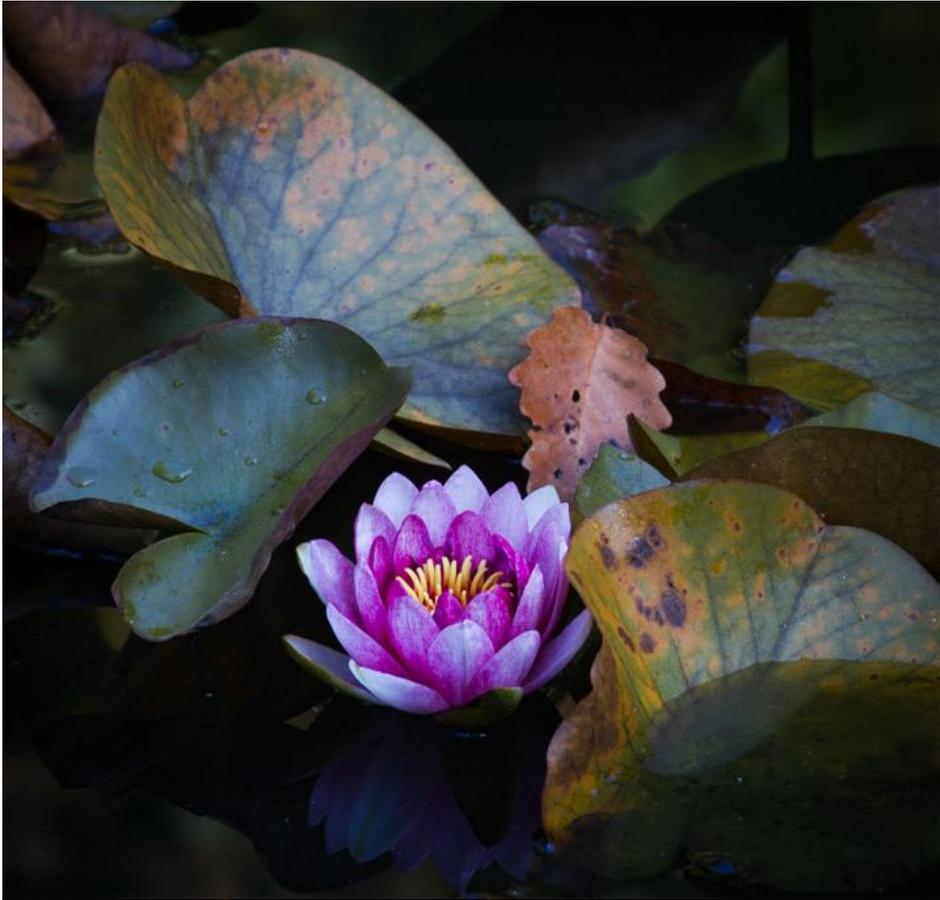
*Hocking Hills, Ohio*

That describes my spirituality and, I think, my photography as well. At their best, my photographs originate in my being present to the moment. Being present, for me, means being open to what is there rather than what I want there to be. This flows into a sense of wonder, looking for and finding miracles. Perhaps another way of saying this is to say I'm looking for the eternal in the present. The miracle might be exotic.



*Wilson Lake, Wilton, Maine*

It is more likely to be the small miracle of a single flower blossom. The Buddha gave a sermon by holding up a single flower, illustrating "suchness" or the flower as flower without context. Being present in wonder at this "small" miracle leads to connection with the flower, an interaction with meaning that doesn't translate into words.



*Pond, T. C. Steele State Historic Site, Nashville, Indiana*

For this I am profoundly grateful and I want to express that gratitude in some form. I take it home and work at expressing not only what I saw but what I felt. That form might be a straight photograph



*In the Upper Peninsula, Michigan*

or it might be some transformation which better expresses my experience of it. That might be moving the photograph into something that resembles a painting. Then, if it is good enough, I want to share it as I am doing now, not as "my" work but as something in which I have participated.



*In the Upper Peninsula, Michigan*

The rest of this ebook will take up how I came to see that spirituality and photography, at least for me, are deeply intertwined. After a brief history, I organize the rest of the book according to the topics Presence, Wonder, Connection, Gratitude, Expression and Sharing. There is one additional section. It summarizes much of what appears earlier in the form of a tribute to my mother. You will see that while each topic is devoted to fleshing out one of these terms, traces of all of the terms show up just about everywhere.

## History

It took me many years to wake up to spirituality and its connection with photography. I now see spiritual connections among the interests and events in my life that I did not see before. The roots of our spiritual lives run deep. I will write about my history here in hopes that it will encourage you to do the same. You may be surprised at what you find when you look back.

I was born at the outbreak of World War II, in 1939 in southwestern Pennsylvania. My father went off to the Navy toward the end of the war and my mother, brother and I lived with my father's parents for awhile in Waynesburg, PA. Parents then didn't worry so much about children being abducted so I walked to school by myself.



*Fountain Park, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania*

School was about 10 blocks from home and a park, four blocks long, was along the way. Since the park offered piles of leaves to kick, buckeyes to pick up and shine on the side of my nose, a fountain and a pond with frogs and goldfish as well as a woodland fragrance that had more come hither to it than an expensive perfume, I took my time on my way to school. Since I went home for lunch and then back to school, well, four trips a day by the park was more temptation than an inquisitive

six year old could deal with. There were ~~conversations~~ monologs at home about being late to school.

There was nothing wrong with school, I just found the park more interesting and for that matter, more nourishing. I find it interesting that for most kids the park was usually just a place to pass through, perhaps because there were no swing sets, roundabouts or sliding boards, but for me it was a destination. I felt more alive there, more in tune with something larger than myself. To this day if I am sitting in a boring meeting or just need calming down I go back to the park in my head. It has a connection for me that it took many years to recognize as spiritual.

One of the reasons recognition of the connection as spiritual was delayed is that I grew up in the '40s and '50s, a time when connection to the earth was either not recognized or not considered very important in the mainline Protestant churches that I attended. Views of spirituality were equally narrow. The emphasis was purely on personal salvation and doing good works for other people. There is a lot of good in that, it isn't to be slighted in the least, but the implicit assumption at the time was that the Earth, our planet, is here as a stage on which to live our lives as people to be saved.

No particular intrinsic worth of the planet was explicitly recognized: animals are nice but they don't have souls; trees need to be harvested for building houses; beautiful property needs to be developed; strip mining isn't a great idea but it is efficient; that's money coming out of the smoky stacks at the steel mills etc. There was little recognition of the need for a balance between purely human considerations and the needs of the Earth at large.



*Smoke stacks*

As a young teenager this was also the time when I was going through the "I need proof of God's existence" phase. My mother had a deeply abiding religious faith that showed in every aspect of her loving and forgiving life. Her response to my

skepticism was "You have to take some things on faith". The teacher was there but the student was not ready to hear the message. I continued to go to church but I wasn't getting much out of it.

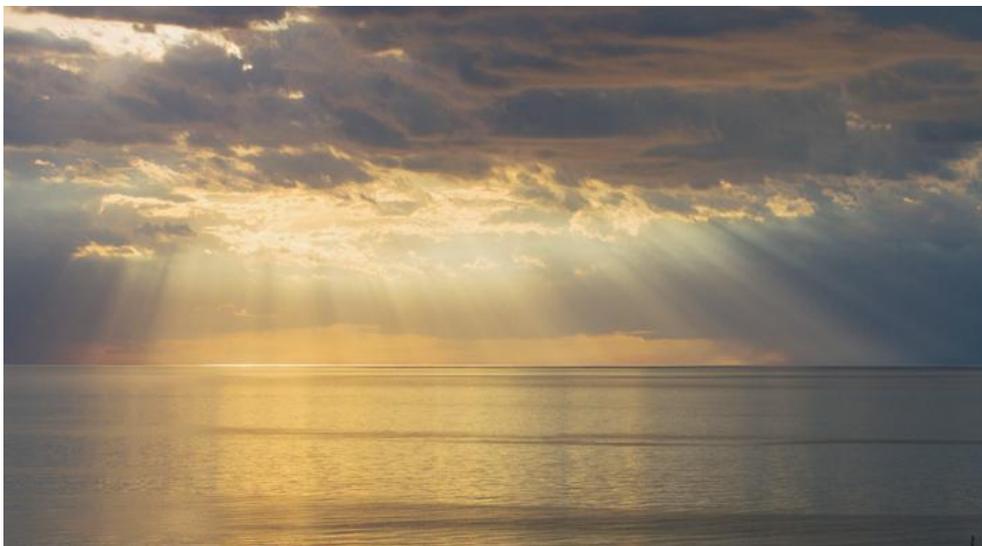
Several years later my wife, our two children and I were members of a church in New Jersey. One Sunday a student pastor was preaching and asked the question "do you love God?" The only concept of God I had then was as a rather moody authoritarian father figure and it was difficult to think of God in loving terms. The question resonated in me but didn't get a good answer. However, it did stick.

Some years later I read three books that reframed my spiritual journey. Actually there was more to it than that, I found I could actually have a spiritual journey. This was new territory. Sallie McFague's "Models of God" was downright exciting in that it offered many ways of thinking about and addressing God. She offered the possibility of thinking of God as Father, Mother, Lover, Friend, etc. Take your pick of these or something else entirely. All of these models and more are offered in the Bible.



*Still waters*

The power of this approach is suggested in a couple of examples. Suppose you have had a difficult time with your father. Would you find it easier to address God as Father or perhaps as Mother? As another example try the following exercise. Imagine God as a strict authoritarian father and then imagine God as an understanding mother. Write prayers to each and compare them. If you are like several people who did that exercise, the prayers will be dramatically different. How you think of God affects how you address God and very likely where you see signs of God in the world. Now there was a God in whom I could have faith.



*Toward sunset, Lake Michigan*

Another of the books had been suggested by the patent attorney at work. It was "The Dream of the Earth" by Thomas M. Berry. The third book was Matthew Fox's "Original Blessing", recommended by a wise pastor friend.

It wasn't so much that the books by Berry and Fox imparted a lot of new information. What they did more than anything was bring to the surface ideas that I wasn't aware that I had and give them a coherent framework. After reading them I had the beginnings of my own cohering view; it wasn't yet coherent but it was making progress. Without going into a lot of detail – for all I know these books would be of no interest and something else might be far more appropriate for you – here is a brief statement of that evolving view:

\* God is in everything, everything is part of God, everything in the Universe is connected at a deep, spiritual level.

\* God is the original creator and continues to create.

\* We humans, as part of God, participate in creating.



*Mt. Owen, Grand Teton National Park*

With these books and the Bible as backdrop, my experience in the park growing up was more understandable; I was going to church. I've been to places of great beauty including several national parks - Rocky Mountain, Great Smoky Mountains, Yosemite, Glacier, Yellowstone, Grand Tetons, the Badlands, as well as Custer State Park in South Dakota, and many other inspiring places. They all share the ambiance of holiness for me, and, for that matter, so does our backyard. Now that I had different ways of thinking about God I could answer the question about whether I love God. I do indeed. And beyond that I could begin to understand what those connections that sometimes are sensed in photographic moments are – they are connections back to God and God's creation; they are spiritual.



*Canyon de Chelly, Arizona*

The premises mentioned above form the basis for my understanding of what spirituality and photography have to say to one another. The six words - presence, wonder, connection, gratitude, expression and sharing - describe the process that brings them to life.

The rest of this book consists of a number of short essays I have written (based on blog entries in many cases) that I hope will illustrate different facets of how I have come to see the hand of God in creation. I'm hoping some of these work for you as well but if they don't I hope they stimulate you to work out what your premises and process might be. Welcome to the journey!



Near Custer State Park, South Dakota

## Presence

Being in the present requires that I be "Here we are" rather than "I was" or "I will be". It is being here and now as part of the local environment ("Here we are") rather than in some remembered past or imagined future. This is hard for us because we have these large brains that are very good at remembering, thinking, imagining. Perhaps part of the value of being in the present is that it is a rare event. And even when we are in the present there is so much to experience.



*Clematis*

We all go through life not noticing much of the world around us. This makes sense. We have a limited capacity to process incoming information, and as a result, we attend to some things at the expense of not attending to other things, many other things. I suspect that even this blue heron is not aware of much more than what is going on in the water around it.



*Great Blue Heron, Fall Creek, Indianapolis, Indiana*

Although it did seem to notice me.



*Part of the Great Blue Heron, Fall Creek, Indianapolis, Indiana*

We all know about this limitation, but it can be surprising how severe it can be. Imagine that you are watching a video of six people who are tossing two basketballs to one another. Three of the people have black shirts and three have white shirts. The white shirts are passing a ball to other white shirts and the black shirts are throwing to other black shirts. Two balls constantly in motion and six people wandering around also constantly in motion. Your task is to count how many times the white shirts pass the balls. This is a somewhat demanding task. Let's suppose that when you finished the task, you counted the correct number of throws by the white shirts. That is, you were concentrating pretty closely on the task at hand and were successful at it. Now, let's suppose that in the middle of the action, a young woman in a gorilla suit comes in at the right, walks among the players (who are ignoring her), stops in the middle facing you and beats her chest. She then walks off to the left. What are the odds that you would have attended closely enough to the ball throwing task to get the right count AND see the gorilla?

It turns out in replication after replication of this experiment, conducted in many different countries, that the odds are about 50:50 that you would have noticed the gorilla. You can try this yourself by going to [this website](#). And be sure to watch the second video (The Monkey Business Illusion) and see how well you do in that task.



*Indianapolis Art Center*

Our attention is indeed limited so how likely is it you would have seen this small dead blossom if you were thinking about what's for lunch? I am not going to criticize anyone for being inattentive – I do a very good job at that myself, just ask my wife. I am saying that there is an amazingly surprising and beautiful world out there, just waiting to be seen and perhaps photographed. Other activities such as looking at big shiny objects or attending to our own thoughts get in the way.

So what do we do if we want to see more of the world? One approach is to simply stand still and look around. Give yourself some time, you may not see anything interesting right away. But give it some time.



*Squirrel!*

## *Stillness*



*Great Blue Heron, Bartlett, Illinois*

I was lucky to see the heron at all. The marsh was beyond quiet, it was still. It was not asleep, it was still, watchful. Nothing moved.

If we could speed up our perception and look more closely at the intervals between what we think of as events, perhaps we could experience stillness there. Possibly a “flavored” stillness which in some way reflects the most recent events. But we are usually thinking about something in the past or anticipating something else in the future. Appreciation of stillness means living in the Now.

Claude Debussy is credited with saying that “Music is the silence between the notes.” Now that might also be “flavored” stillness, stillness in and of music.

I moved on. We later walked back the same way and the heron was gone. The surface of the water was ruffling in the breeze. Being present made all the difference.

## Wonder

"A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength."

*Rachel Carson (2011-04-19). The Sense of Wonder (Kindle Locations 84-88). Open Road Media. Kindle Edition.*



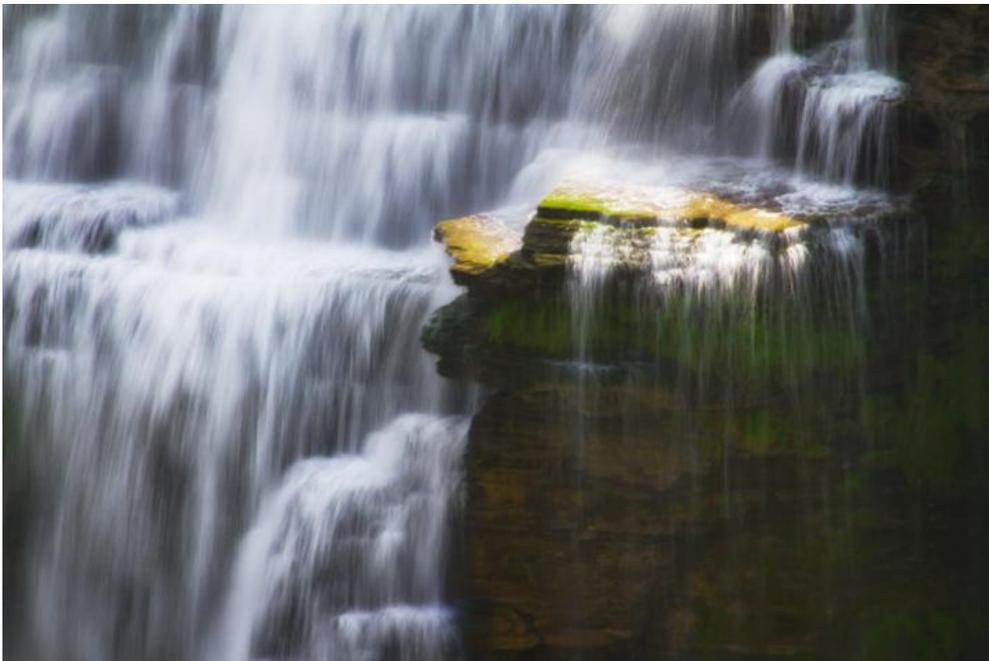
*Autumn flowers, T. C. Steele State Historic Site, Nashville, Indiana*

A couple of years ago I was emailing back and forth with a friend. I was intrigued by a photograph she had done and asked how she got it. She was busy doing other things and wasn't paying attention to what she was typing and she wrote that she

was 'wondering' around and saw the image. That word 'wondering' captured a great deal for me. It was a typo but when I pointed it out to her and how good a choice of words it was, she agreed and now she goes wondering too. Or maybe we've been wondering all along and didn't know it.

That sense of wonder means participating in the world through fresh senses - seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling - senses that are open to what is more than what is expected, in our case here, using eyes that don't have strong expectations about what will be seen or not seen. As Rachel Carson suggests, that freshness we had as children is hard to maintain as we grow up.

I described wonder earlier as encountering miracles. Sometimes those miracles speak loudly, sometimes softly.



*Middle Falls, Letchworth State Park, New York*

Subjects for the camera talk to me. Not in so many words, but they do seem to communicate about how desirable they would be for image making. On some days, some subjects, miracles, are pretty insistent in commanding attention. It is as if they are yelling "HEY!" Other days are at the opposite end of the scale, then subjects whisper. That is not to say they are intrinsically less interesting, they are just more subtle.

I could as easily have stepped on these leaves as notice them. But once noticed they spoke quietly.



*Leaves*

Minor White said it well:

"When you approach something to photograph it, first be still with yourself until the object of your attention affirms your presence. Then don't leave until you have captured its essence."

We can stop at just about any arbitrary point on a hike, sit down and look around. If we're patient and open to the moment, we'll likely see something that is worth photographing. Something that perhaps thousands of hikers have passed and not even seen. Then there are those times when you're walking along, again open to the moment and something "catches your eye". You are being beckoned into wonder. Here's an example.

*Ah ha!*

It was a March day, rather chilly and overcast. I was walking down the driveway to get the mail. I looked at a flower bed that I had seen thousands of times. There were daffodils and other flowers but for some reason the chionodoxa (in the red circle) commanded attention. I got the mail and went back to the house to get my camera, a ground sheet and my tripod. I brought that stuff out and set it up so I could get down on the ground and focus on the chionodoxa. What attracted me to that "insignificant" little flower, which, in the presence of the larger and more obvious flowers would normally go unnoticed is outside my understanding.



*Chionodoxa and other flowers*

I got a few shots and went back in the house. I pulled the chionodoxa and a bit of myrtle leaf out of the busy background and replaced that background with black. This is what I got.



*Chionodoxa and myrtle*

Why this flower and none of the others? I don't know but I'm glad I was beckoned to it. And I hope this gift of wonder never withers.

## Connection

"When you work as a photographer, particularly with nature, you are part of a collaboration. There is a symbiotic relationship going on. You are photographing wondrous things and if you have a relationship with those wondrous things, then they tend to open up more and what a photographer creates, in fact the photographer is not creating. The photographer and the subject matter are creating it together."

[Michael Kenna](#)



Winter weeds

Every once in a while, while looking through the viewfinder of a camera, there is a sense of making a genuine connection with the subject. A sense that I have been permitted to experience something well beyond what I would ordinarily, and that experience in some indefinable way is a result of a relationship between the subject and me - more of an "I-Thou" than an "I-It" relationship, more of a deeply personal relationship than something like a casual nod to someone you see in the elevator from time to time.

The quote from Michael Kenna and the one earlier from Minor White describe some deep and beyond-words experience, a spiritual experience. Do they sound that way to you? Are these spiritual experiences? The answer for me is yes. There has been intimate and beneficial contact between the photographer and the subject. Something holy is at work here. Everyone has their own sense of the spiritual and spirituality. For me it is staying awake, being open to wonder, remaining open to God, sensing connections with God and God's creation. Spirituality is about staying awake to the world as a manifestation of God and awakening creativity in its presence. Where does photography fit into this? Well, isn't the central requirement of photography to stay awake to the world?



*Sanderling, Sanibel Island, Florida*

Spirituality centers on our relationship with God. How do we talk to God? We talk to God through prayer and here is a major hang up for me. I don't pray well, so how is communicating with God going to work if there is a bad connection at my end?

I think we will agree that prayer when we are fully present is a connection with God, the divine, the higher power or whatever you want to call it. I learned more about prayer when I read a book by Barbara Brown Taylor. Here's the context.

From the time I was small, I've had a problem with prayer. As long as I stick to standard prayers – the Lord's Prayer and some other memorized prayers- I am all right but as soon as I go off into prayers for specific people or situations I get stuck and my mind wanders. But that isn't quite true, my mind also wanders during the Lord's Prayer, any prayer or any other time for that matter.



*Rocks off the coast of Maine*

I got into a conversation about this with three of my friends, all of them solid church goers and dedicated contributors to the community. All four of us admitted to problems with prayer. All of us are men and one of us is a minister. Now that I think about it we never did pursue this problem very far, perhaps none of us knew quite what to do.

Some weeks later and in a different context the minister friend recommended Barbara Brown Taylor's "An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith." Ms. Taylor had been an Episcopal priest for several years before going into writing and teaching full time. She had been named by Baylor University as one of the 12 most effective preachers in the English speaking world. I had been prepared to take her seriously anyway but that pushed her book to the top of my reading list. The deeper I got into the book the more interesting it got. And then there was this:

"I would rather show someone my checkbook stubs than talk about my prayer life. I would rather confess that I am a rotten godmother, that I struggle with my weight, that I fear I am overly fond of Bombay Sapphire gin martinis than confess I am a prayer-weakling. To say I love God but I do not pray much is like saying I love life but I do not breathe much." (p 176)

Now she really had my attention. And to cap it off a few pages later she took her cue from Brother David Steindl-Rast, author of 'Gratefulness, The Heart Of Prayer', in suggesting that

"Prayer...is waking up to the presence of God no matter where I am or what I am doing." (p 178)

All right! Prayer isn't just a recitation of fixed passages or verbal requests for God's attention. I knew that all along but for a truly outstanding minister to admit she has trouble praying, as I suspect many of us do, was quite a revelation. But she went further than our little group of four men had gone by pointing out that just being aware of the presence of God no matter what we are doing is a form of prayer. That would include photography.



*Early morning, Muscatatuck National Wildlife Preserve, Indiana*

Photography is a raw point of contact between something within and a moment in the flow of life out in the world. That contact is brief, often in the range of 1/1000th to perhaps two seconds.

My personal definition of spirituality is a seeking of contact with God coupled with an awareness of God's hand in creation. Going out with a camera encourages me to look at the world while spirituality guides what I see.



Reddish egret

The spiritual framework is always present but something I see or hear is often useful for me to become aware of it. For example, going out early in the morning of a beautiful day might bring to mind the first verse of a hymn known to many:

"When morning gilds the skies my heart awaking cries:  
May Jesus Christ be praised!"



*Facing east near Swiftcurrent Lake, Glacier National Park*

Photography is particularly suited as a spiritual practice because, if we are to do it well, we need to be fully present. Being fully present means being alert to what is possible. For example the light was good for this spider web for only a few seconds.



*Leaves and spider web, Fort Harrison State Park, Indianapolis, Indiana*

I saw these dogs and geese discovering one another and there was time for just the one shot.



*Delaware Lake, Fort Harrison State Park, Indianapolis, Indiana*

One is not likely to hear the “still small voice” unless one is fully present.

I think it is no accident that light is a metaphor for God and God’s teaching (e.g. “It is you who light my lamp; the Lord, my God, lights up my darkness” Psalm 18:28) while it is often light that makes or breaks the image in photography. The two are connected for me. God’s presence is especially noticeable in the viewfinder when the light is good.

But photography also nourishes spirituality. It keeps me close to the world and the handiwork of God. And in some moments there is a connection with something much greater than me. Would that happen if I weren't out shooting?



*God beam*

### *A deep connection*

Four of us went down to Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge for a day of shooting one November morning. We were surprised to learn that most of the refuge was off limits to those without a hunting license. Hunting in a wildlife refuge? That was difficult to get my mind around but that is how it was. The rest of us had access to only 20% of the refuge but for our purposes it was the best part of the area. This included a flooded area that was well used by fishermen in their float tubes. I assume their waders are insulated.



*Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge, Indiana*

There was plenty of room there for photographers as well. The mist was most welcome. It set up the conditions for a scene that has been with me ever since. I can't describe the connection I had/have to that scene. It is just beyond words. It has the qualities - beauty, simplicity and mystery - that David Ward talks about in his book "Landscape Beyond: A Journey into Photography". For him these are the qualities that make for a great photograph. For me, it wasn't so much the photograph that resulted as it was the interaction I had with the scene itself. It was just "right". I don't know how I could have passed over this shot.

"No matter how slow the film, Spirit always stands still long enough for the photographer It has chosen."

*Minor White*



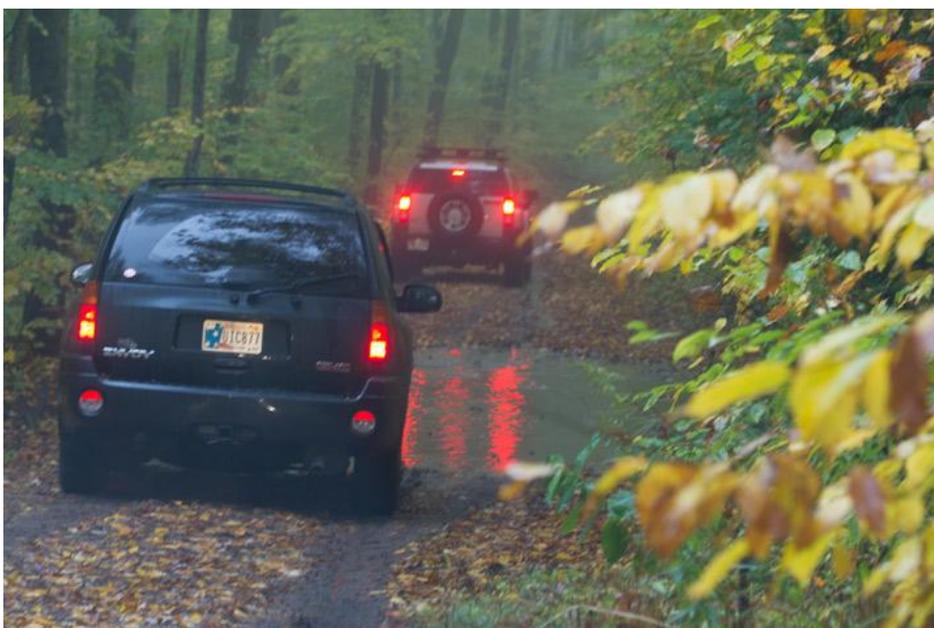
*Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge, Indiana*

## Gratitude

"...occasionally photographers discover tears in their eyes for the joy of seeing. I think it is because they have known a miracle. They've been given what they did not earn, and as is the way with unexpected gifts, the surprise carries an emotional blessing."

*Robert Adams 'Why people photograph', Aperture, NY, 1994, pp 15-16.*

Several mystics have said that gratitude is the root form of prayer. I think it is also a major factor in going out to shoot yet one more time. Many of my photography friends and I share the charge we get out of going out even if the weather is rotten. A number of us went to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan this past October for a tour led by Rod Planck, a great outdoor photographer who lives there. This was not a class, Rod would simply serve as a guide. "Bring rain gear" he said. The rain gear was needed, it rained a lot of the 24 hours we spent out in the landscape shooting or riding from one place to another. The shooting time was divided between Saturday and Sunday. We were busy. "The only reason we will stay inside is if there is a hurricane on Lake Superior" said Rod. No hurricane. Not that there ever was one.

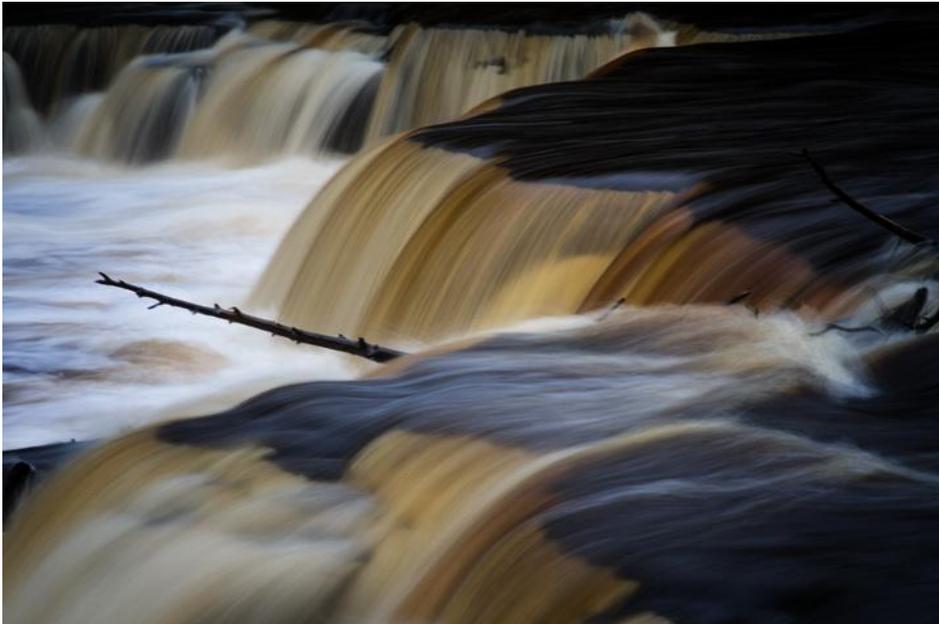


*In the Upper Peninsula, Michigan*

A lot of rain and no one complained. We were having too much fun. Each of us at one time or another was expressing gratitude for this opportunity and everyone I spoke to would go back under similar conditions. There were great photo opportunities.



*Reeds in the water, Upper Peninsula, Michigan*



*Tannin colored waters, Upper Peninsula, Michigan*



*Toward dusk on Sunday, Upper Peninsula, Michigan*

Were we grateful? Yes, we were grateful and while it wasn't openly discussed, there were hints that a lot of us felt there was something larger here than what appeared in the viewfinder.



*By the Tahquamenon River in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan*

*And another opportunity for gratitude*

As I've said, and as the image that begins this section demonstrates, we had a lot of rain on that trip. We arrived Friday evening and left Monday morning, a short period, and we would take what was given as far as the weather was concerned. But the sun did come out Sunday afternoon and we had the opportunity for sunset shots. As you would expect, at this point we were all very grateful. Here is one of those shots.



*Upper Peninsula, Michigan*

I'm ready to go back.

## Expression

Back in the days of film we exposed a roll, took it to the drugstore or sent it off to Kodak to be processed. If you had the money you might take the roll to professional printers. It was always urged in the photography magazines that you get to know the individual who would do the print so that person would know how you wanted it printed. Again, that was if you had the money. Today, with digital cameras and a wide range of photo editing software, we don't have to leave home to do more than we ever could have done in the old days.

This freedom presents the opportunity to do many things with the digital file of a photograph. I have always wanted a painterly effect. This better expresses what I saw and felt when the shutter clicked.



*Sandpiper, Sanibel Island, Florida*

This treatment better captures the atmosphere and mood of that time on the beach.



*Leaves and rocks, White River, Indianapolis, Indiana*

As does this black and white image of "just weeds".



*Unidentified plant*

Some work with fairly straight forward editing.



*Sheep, Conner Prairie, Indiana*

These are just a few examples of the way photos can be edited to bring them more in line with the subjective response of the photographer. If there is a connection between the photographer and subject, a dialog, the photographer must be able to express him/her self. We now have that opportunity.

### *It started with a smudge*

I had thought about getting a painterly effect with software for a long time but hadn't done much about it until looking at a photograph I had made of a decanter behind the glass in a cabinet. This decanter was in a church in Indianapolis. I liked the image of the decanter, but as happens so often, it was only when I was editing the image that I noticed the smudge in the lower left hand corner. Whoever had cleaned the glass had missed a spot on the second pass.



*Before Corel Painter Essentials treatment*

I worked at getting rid of the smudge with various tools Photoshop offered at the time but was not very successful. I wanted to keep the image but I also didn't want that smudge there. So instead of trying to get rid of it, I went the other way and asked what I could do to simply obscure it. I got the trial version of Corel Painter Essentials and used it to give the image a painterly look. That didn't get rid of the smudge but it did "camouflage" it. I bought the software and later purchased Corel Painter, Filter Forge and other software that produces a painterly appearance. I could now do what I had wanted to do for a long time.



*After Corel Painter Essentials treatment*

## Sharing

There are lots of ways of sharing photographs. Many years ago my grandmother carried a wallet with pictures of her 11 grandchildren tucked into fold-out plastic sleeves. It was a real art the way she would offer to show people those pictures and how often she showed all of them. I don't think she was standing on the recipient's foot or anything like that. She was just good at it.

Today we have many social media outlets for pictures. Facebook accumulates 350,000,000 per day as does Snapchat, an outlet I hadn't heard of until I wrote this section (and yes, you read those numbers correctly). Many of the pictures go unremarked on Facebook but many are responded to. I put many of my pictures on Facebook and it is nice to see that someone has "liked" them and even better if someone writes a note expressing appreciation for it. Best of all is when someone shows it to other people on Facebook. But there are other ways to share pictures and they can have considerable impact. Here's an example.

We were coming back from a trip and stopped in Berea, KY, a community strong in arts and crafts. We were wandering around a gift shop and since we were the only customers in the store, the clerk wasn't busy and there was an appealing dog there, I asked the clerk if she minded if I photographed the dog. She said sure, go ahead.



*Mr. Aris*

I offered to send her pictures via email but she said while her husband did email, she didn't. The way she said that suggested that she didn't want to ask her husband to bring the pictures up for her. I asked if I could send her prints and she gave me her address. I sent off a couple of 5 X 7s and forgot about it. Several weeks later I got a thank you note in which she said that she and her husband

were now divorced and that Mr. Aris, the dog, was one of her few friends. Who would have known?

I've occasionally done photographs of rescued dogs. We have two white German Shepherd dogs and most of the shooting I have done has been for Echo Dogs White Shepherd Rescue. This can make a real difference to a dog in a pound. Often if not adopted, they are put down. There's a lot of evidence that a good picture can mean a happy and long life for a dog.

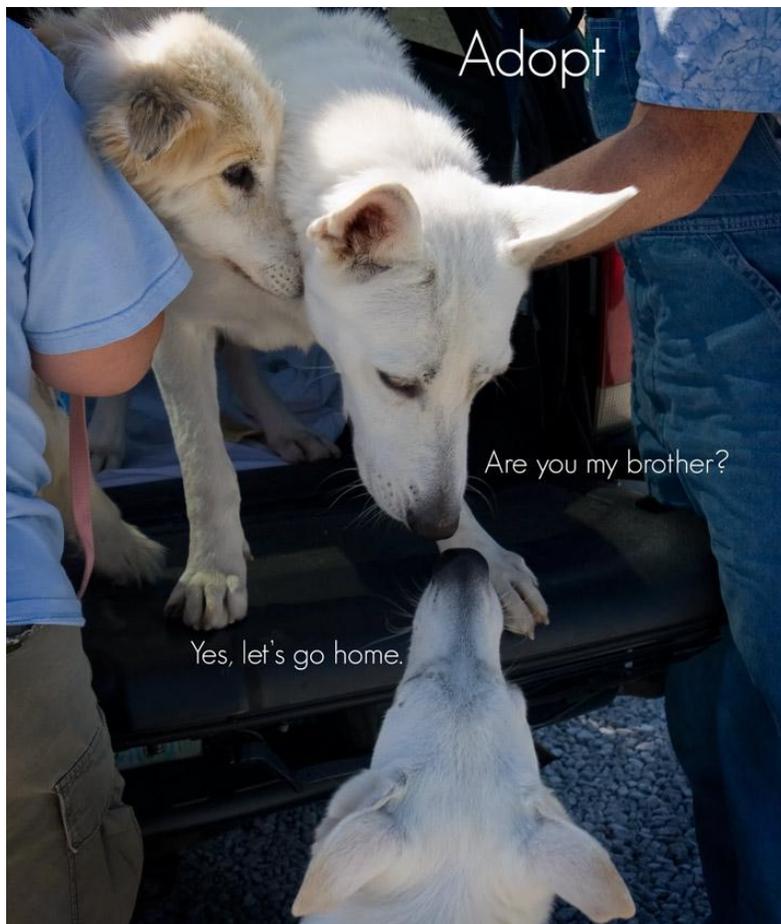
Here for example is Buck, a rescue that I helped with. The family who had him took good care of him but they were no longer able to afford him so Echo Dogs worked on finding him a home. It's important when shooting animals like this to think of doing a portrait - an image that meets the animal at eye level, definitely not looking down at it.



*Buck*

The little girl in the home was very attached to Buck (who wouldn't be?). While she knew giving him up was necessary, she was very sad. This picture was taken when a friend, Joyce (president of Echo Dogs), was doing a home visit to determine what kind of home he should go to. I went along with a camera. We wanted to do something for the girl so we got Bolt, the star of the animated film of the same name, as a stuffed white German Shepherd for her. I think she appreciated the thought although this was not the real Buck. That still hurts both Joyce and me years later.

Where's Buck now? He lives on a farm with two boys and I think he's happy. Whether this picture had anything to do with his adoption, I don't know; it at least nudged potential adopters in the right direction.



*Our adoptee Tuck getting off the truck to meet our other dog Prince*

### *Sharing has consequences*

Some years ago we were on our way to our goddaughter's wedding in Brunswick Maine. Her parents, Jim and Mary Lee, had been friends of ours for many years. They had come from Tennessee originally and although they had lived in Maine for about 30 years at that point, their roots in Tennessee still ran deep. Along the way there my wife Ellie picked out a t-shirt for Mary Lee that said "GRITS Girls Raised In The South" on it. Mary Lee appreciated the gift.

Many years later we were together with Jim and Mary Lee and in the course of the visit Mary Lee asked if we had any good southern writers we would recommend for a women's book group. We thought of Bailey White. Mary Lee told us how this group, and some other activities, came to be. She was walking down the street in Brunswick wearing her GRITS t-shirt and a woman stopped her and asked where she got the shirt. The woman was also from the south. The conversation continued and they eventually parted. But the seed was planted and the result over time as more women joined them was the formation of a regular get together over lunch of women raised in the south, a book group and I don't know what else. Share something with someone and who knows what will happen?

## Postscript

This last section expresses gratitude for my mother. It was written on July 26, 2011.

I needed to go out and shoot this morning and I asked Mom if she wanted to join me. She was enthusiastic and ready to go. She was much lighter now and feeling much, much better. We went down to Fall Creek.



*Foxtails*

Mom was an observer rather than a participant today. She never had much luck with a camera and it was more enjoyable for her to just be out than it was to take pictures. I didn't argue because I remember the history of Mom's battles with the camera. Here is one example taken during World War II. This is my younger brother and me. Our Dad was off in the Pacific with the Navy and Mom wanted to send him a picture of his boys (Rob is on the right). We were decked out in our winter gear and facing the camera. Mom fidgeted with that infernal machine and after a few minutes Rob and I got more interested in what was behind us. Mom

meanwhile was either so intent on the mechanics of picture taking that she didn't notice which way we were facing or she just gave up.



*Barry and Rob*

Over the years her skill at cooking, raising two boys, participating in community life, playing the piano and many other things all improved but her picture taking didn't. So I was happy for her to just be along for the experience this morning. So was she.

We were out before it was too hot but I still needed a headband. Good thing to have in this weather. The water looked especially inviting.



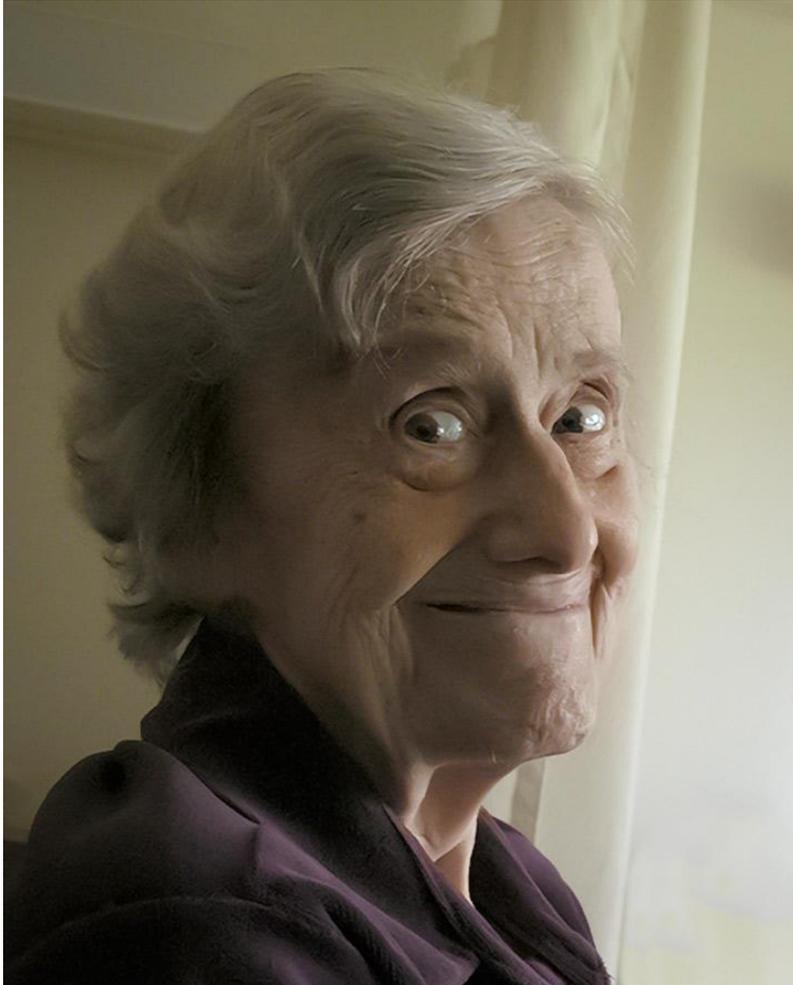
*Flowing flora*

I have to tell you that Mom died in body if not in spirit this morning at 3:00. She was 95 years old and her body had been shutting down over the last few weeks. She was not ambulatory for the last week or so. So last night her body finished its task and closed down. I was called at 3:15 and I went over. She was at peace. The last thing to go was her smile. This was her trademark. Before she was so ill I would take her for rides in a wheelchair around Westminster Village North where she lived. It is a sizable facility and there are lots of people. But just about everyone knew Clara Lively because as I wheeled her around she gave everyone a cheery wave and a "Hello, dear!" People would light up when they saw her coming. And the smile lasted to the end.



*Feather*

My way of coping includes going out to shoot. Before I set out this morning I thought I would love to have Mom go with me in spirit if by no other means. And I got the feeling that she would have loved to go too. So she was with me. Walking along Fall Creek we came to the I-465 bridge over the creek. It is a substantial bridge and large enough that the light under it is quite diffuse and often interesting. There was a strip of rocks which would guide rain water away from the base of the bridge and usually there were leaves and other random objects there and they can be interesting to photograph. I looked all along the strip of rocks and there was nothing else there but the feather above. Nothing particularly remarkable about a feather being there. Except that there was nothing else of interest. And Mom's nickname since she was small was Bird.



*Mom*

I think Mom and I will go shooting again. Maybe tomorrow.