

A Song for the Asking
The Electronic Newsletter of
EarthSong Photography
and
EarthSong Photography Workshops: Walking in Beauty

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Hello to All:

The Journey from Timbuktu to Time: From Nothing to...

In 1972, portions from some of the works of **Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.** were adapted into a Public Television special presentation (NET Playhouse Special) entitled *Between Time and Timbuktu, or Prometheus-5: A Space Fantasy*. Vonnegut was primarily a consultant for the production, and when it came out in book form, his principal role was to write the Introduction. Even being a Vonnegut fan as I am, it is not one of his more memorable works; however I was struck immediately by the title and wanted to learn its significance, if any, if I could. I started with my trusty *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, and it led me to one of the universe's great truths: Between "time" and "Timbuktu" there is nothing, which is to say that these words sit next to each other in the dictionary and there is nothing between them. Nothing, or, if you wish to look at nothing's other side, "everything:" typical Vonnegut slight-of-hand, a riddle wrapped in an enigma: all and nothing-at-all.



Through a Glass and Reflective

And it made me think about journeys: my journey, your journey, everyone's journey. Journeys are just the same: they are nothing or everything, and which of those a journey becomes is generally up to the traveler. My own journey from the small city adventures

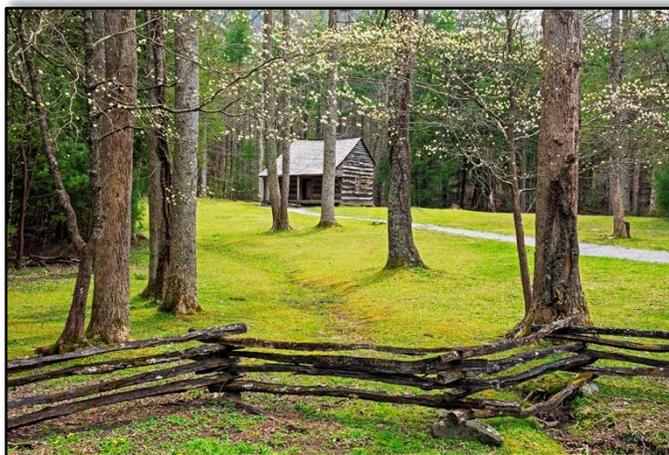
of Middle Georgia to a law school education to the wonders of being a nature photographic artist has filled me with more than enough stories to last several lifetimes, and I am eternally grateful for all that I have seen and learned along the way – the painful as well as the pleasurable. However, I cannot even begin to fathom the incredible journey of **Masahara Izuka**.



Inside-out

was moved to the newly renamed city of Tokyo. Prince **Mutsuhito**, in succeeding to the throne of his father, Emperor **Kōmei**, gave to the times the name they still bear – Meiji – “Enlightened Rule.”

Of Masahara’s parents, we know next to nothing; and of his youth; it is the same. He once told a newspaper reporter that he had been born in Osaka and that he had studied mining engineering at Meiji University in Tokyo; but when these statements were “fact-checked” after his death, it was learned that no such student was shown at any of the institutions Masahara had mentioned; and, indeed, Meiji had never offered any classes fitting the description of “mining engineering.” But then, again, Masahara Izuka often said, when asked about his past and his journey, “I came from nothing.”



L’arc des Cornouillers

So, who was this man who came from nothing, and why should we bother to recall his wanderings at all? Why does the lump of profundity and melancholia begin to well up in my chest, and why is there this glistening of moisture in the corner of my eyes when I consider what we can say and do know of his life among these mountains that are so special to me? Perhaps it is because I know-well how special they were to him, and in the merry twinkle of his own cheerful visage, I see reflected my own shortcomings as a steward of them, the seemingly

impossible standard of caretaker he has left for me to ponder and uphold. The challenges may have seemed different then, and yet, possibly, they are very much the same.

Written records are often no more reliable, nor accurate, than verbal accounts, especially when they are not verifiable by other comparative means; and many of the records we are left with concerning Masahara's early life and initial years in this country are somewhat sketchy and suspect. His own accounts varied with the passage of time and the telling, and whether this is sourced in some intent on his part or merely in lapses of memory, no one can say. Ultimately they are germane, perhaps, only to those with a penchant for keeping records.

By most accounts, Masahara arrived in this country at the age of twenty-four in 1905 by way of San Francisco. The details of how he spent the next decade are more than murky; they are nigh non-existent. It has been suggested that he ranged far and wide across the United States, possibly spending time in Colorado continuing his putative interests in mining engineering; but it is known that on January 18, 1915, he left San Francisco on a train bound for the Crescent City of New Orleans,



The Bluebell Children



Tumble Down

beginning, as he wrote in his journal, an adventure.

Much of what we know of any of this comes from the mind-bending and hair-pulling research of **Paul Bonesteel** and his crew in producing the excellent 2003 documentary film on the life of Masahara Izuka, using the name Izuka would later adopt, *The Mystery of George Masa*.

Upon arrival in New Orleans, Izuka sought employment through an agency, but his journal entry indicates disappointment in the outcome. What it also reveals is that over the ensuing several weeks he was engaged in a meticulous accounting of his income and expenses and that this was perhaps connected to the writing of a number of detailed reports, which were sent to persons unknown. The exact time and day of the sending is recorded, but as to the contents, there is silence.

In late-February, following the sending of the ninth report, all reference to them ceases and what follows is a gap of four months without journal entry; but on July 10, following a lead given him by the employment agency, Masahara found himself

on another train, this time heading northeast into the French Broad Country of Asheville, North Carolina. This instigation would put him in front of **Fred L. Seely**,



Ben Morton's View

who in July 1915 was exactly two years into his role as manager of the recently completed Grove Park Inn, for which he had also served as designer and which was hailed as being the largest hotel in the world.

When ground had been broken on July 9, 1912, Seely had promised that the inn would be completed in less than a year; and he proved prophetic when it opened on July 12, 1913. Yet in spite of Fred Seely's obvious talent, his relationship with his father-in-law, **Edwin W. Grove**, the inn's founder and namesake, never existed on compatible terms and only became

worse over time. Fortunately, the opposite would prove to be true of Seely's relationship with Masahara Izuka.

Seely hired the young Japanese immigrant on the spot and thus began an association that would serve both men well, in spite of some slightly racist, behind-the-back, albeit short-lived, maneuverings by Seely as their connection lengthened.

Initially Izuka was trained for work in the inn's laundry; however, within a very few months he had advanced to the valet desk, where he was widely exposed to the well-heeled and well-known patrons, who had begun to flock to the inn as Asheville rose through its Guided Age of the late-1800s and first decades of the Twentieth Century.

At Grove Park Inn, Masahara initiated, possibly, the most far-reaching change, as concerns his own person. He dropped the "hara" from his family name, and placed "George" in front of the remainder to create the cognomen by which he will always be remembered by us in this



The Flow of Roaring Fork Sandstone

country, **George Masa**. Perhaps this was to fit in more easily with the new lifestyle he was creating and the unstated expectations of those with whom he found himself in constant contact. As it was, he was quickly and easily becoming a member, even if only in a serving capacity, of that group of the inn's guests who came seeking outdoor adventure and escape to the natural world of the mountains.

Being the consummate promoter who understood the value of interesting pictures to

the inn's business, Seely loaned Masa his camera to photograph the important guests and their activities. Many of these can still be found today as adornments on the inn's walls.



A Flat Stretch

the Colorado gold fields were rapidly playing out, and by July he had contacted Seely about returning to the inn to work, provided the latter would advance him some of his wages.

Late summer found Masa back at the Grove Park, but this time as head porter. He also became involved in Seely's recent acquisition, Biltmore Industries, as a woodcarver; however, there are no known examples of his work extant.

By the fall of 1917 he had moved out of the inn and into the home of **Oscar Creasman**, an employee highly regarded by the owners of the Biltmore Estate, the **Vanderbilt** family. His fascination with, and attraction for, photography continued to bloom. It would ultimately, in early-1918, lead to his complete break with the Grove Park Inn

In October, Masa took a position with **Herbert Pelton**, a local commercial photographer, and was quickly absorbed as a partner. Their association, known as The Photo-Craft, located in downtown Asheville, was relatively short-lived and dissolved in the late-fall of 1919.

So proficient did George soon become in all aspects of the photographic process that it led to a second, if only part-time, job of developing film and making prints for Grove Park's and another hotel's guests. His skill and talent as a developer, a printer, and an artist suggested far greater training and understanding than his known background would have indicated; but regardless of his education, his native curiosity and intelligence could certainly account for a great deal of it; and his letters and other writings speak to an ambitious drive within him to get ahead even at the same time displaying a humility and deference that would characterize his entire life.

In May, 1917, for the second time in as many years, George made plans to leave Asheville in search of that "something" to fill his ambition; and this time he actually left, traveling to central Colorado, around Colorado Springs, in search of gold. His ambitions, however, were quickly squelched, for



Finer than Cut Crystal

Now Masa was in business on his own as Plateau Studios; and even though, as the Golden Years wore on, there were at least a dozen other photography studios in town, George Masa's talent set him completely apart from the rest, so that by the mid-1920s



Rock, Water, Life

not only was his commercial work of recognizable superior quality, but he had also amassed a substantial portfolio of images which he offered as prints and postcards for the burgeoning tourist industry.

As the decade wore on, his motivation to uncover new and more fetching locations led him farther and farther afield, bringing him into contact with the soul of the Southern Appalachians and making icons of his work – and more: bringing him face to face with the pulsing heart of the land itself, the Great Smoky Mountains. What he

saw before his eyes captivated him, so that in 1925, having grown weary with commercial work, Masa sold Plateau Studios to a former assistant, **Ewart M. Ball**. Ball Photo, is still in business as I write.

Much of that year was absorbed in a portfolio project Masa had undertaken for **Frank Cook**, a businessman from Highlands, North Carolina, who wished to promote the beauty of that part of the mountains.

What stands out for me from this is the amazement Cook expressed at the time Masa used in setting up images and then waiting for the conditions to be as perfect as he could anticipate before releasing the shutter. This utter devotion to the creative process is a characteristic that all who knew George would express about him time and again. Although it is commonly stated with an obvious twinge of frustration, which is the usual reaction of non-photographers who spend very much time in nature with those of us who are.



To Thrive in a Mountain World

Several years ago I was conducting a workshop for The Bascom :: A Center for the Visual Arts in Highlands and was stopped in my steps when I entered the main exhibit space to discover an array of Masa's images that had originally been part of his work for Cook. It served as a wonderful visual reminder of the far-flung, prolific travels of a dynamic artistic talent in search of perfection in a land he was fast-coming to deeply

love, regardless of whether he was photographing a single flower, a mountain range, a palatial home, or a simple cabin.

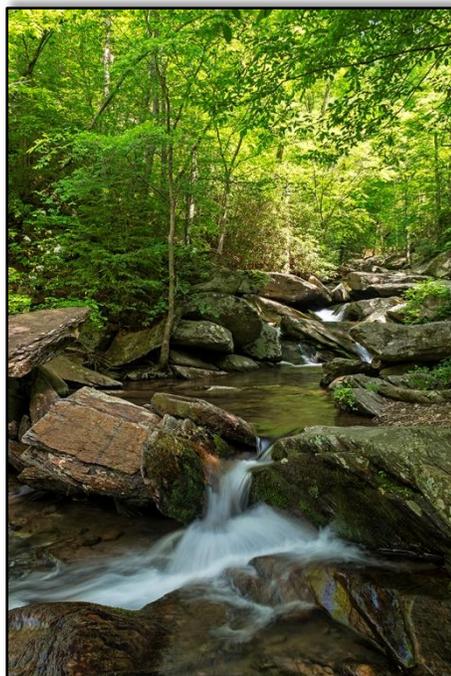
All of this effort led to greater and greater lengths of time in the mountains, with less and less time devoted to maintaining his business. In 1923, he had become a charter member of the Carolina Mountain Club, always eager to take to the trails whenever the opportunity presented itself and always in search of new beauty to express for himself, for his studio, and for his customers far and wide.

As his library of images grew, it seems inevitable that he would begin to receive requests from local and regional writers for images of the area to accompany their work; and although it does not appear to have been recorded exactly when the meeting occurred, it is known that sometime before 1929 Masa had come to know and work with one of the most esteemed chroniclers of the Southern Mountains, **Horace Kephart**, the celebrated author of *Our Southern Highlanders* and *Camping and Woodcraft*, an outdoor work of nearly biblical stature. Both works are still in print.

It has been suggested that Jonesborough banker, **Paul Fink**, an ardent advocate for a local national park, was the common link between Masa and Kephart. However it occurred, it was a connection that deepened into a friendship that, for Masa anyway, was an emotional bond almost beyond measure, in spite of the fifteen years difference in their ages.

The idea for a large Southern national park had been floated for some time without much of a serious forward effort, and there were other areas in the region whose worthiness had been promoted, as well. As early as 1925, Kephart had begun advocating for the establishment of a national park in North Carolina and Tennessee, and Masa's love for these mountains and his extensive travels within them made collaboration with Kephart along these lines a natural outcome.

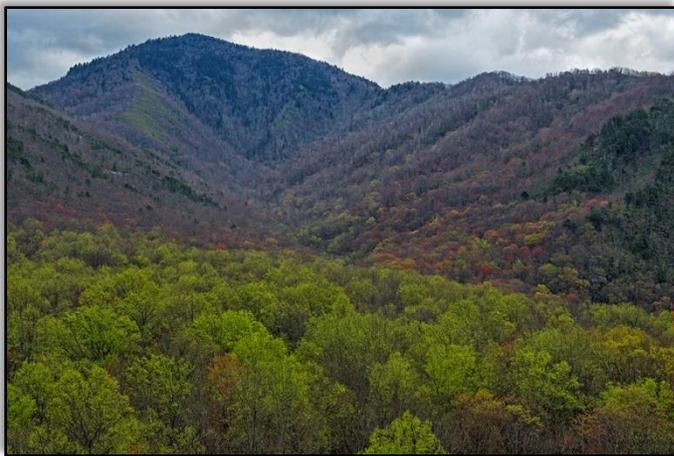
The prime antagonists of their efforts were the industrial logging companies that were stripping the mountainsides of their timber, virgin or otherwise, at almost incomprehensible speeds. The logging companies, Little River Lumber Company, Champion Fibre, William Ritter Lumber Company, and a substantial list of others, displayed some of the finest examples of human greed these mountains had ever seen. Colonel **Wilson B. Townsend**, owner of Little River Lumber, knowing that a national park was not feasible unless it included his 86,000 acres, spreading north and west from the base of Clingman's Dome in Tennessee, negotiated with Tennessee's then-Governor Austin Peay in 1924 for the transfer of 76,500 acres of those lands, provided Little River Lumber be allowed to continue to log them for an additional fifteen (15) years. By 1939, Little River had sawn 560,000,000 board feet of lumber in what had become Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The plan of the lumbermen was simple: buy at rock bottom, strip the timber, sell the remains, and move on. Not a bad gig if you can



On the Way to Ocoee

get it; and for those Appalachian mountaineers living in the coves and hollows of these venerable hills, who for generations had lived by hardscrabble subsistence, it was an opportunity for hard cash such as they had never seen.

In 1903-04, the earliest of the lumber companies had established their footholds in the Eagle Creek and Hazel Creek watersheds on the North Carolina side of the Smokies, exactly in the area where Kephart had first settled when he came east from St. Louis, looking for a life that would allow him to fight his personal demons on favorable ground. So Masa and Kephart had a ringside seat as the destruction began in earnest, and from their words that have been left for us, it is abundantly evident that their hearts were breaking at the sight. Together, picture and word, they became almost perpetual comrades, often taking long, multi-



Wooly-Bully

day hikes into the mountains, recording, as they went, both impressions and imagery during the day and reflecting on ideas for action at night over contemplative firelight.

Masa regularly had on these treks not only his heavy camera gear, but he also brought an apparatus he had fashioned from the front wheel and handlebars of a bicycle, and outfitted with an odometer that allowed him to obtain accurate measurements of distances. Even when his camera was not along, the measuring device was a constant companion, and, along with his trademark khakis and red bandana, made him a recognizable figure wherever he was encountered.

In 1925, Congress passed the Swanson-McKellar Act, which authorized the Department of the Interior to determine the boundaries of a national park that would be situated along the North Carolina-Tennessee border. By this time, Kephart had, for a while, been engaged in a letter-writing campaign, urging federal and North Carolina officials to get behind the idea of such a resource. **Arno B. Cammerer**, the Park Service's deputy director, was one of those influenced by the letters; and he had joined in the idea of the Smokies site. By 1926, efforts were solidly underway to acquire the 185,000 acres that were the minimum required for a federal park of this kind.

What made the Smokies park almost completely unique in the way it was formed was that it was cobbled together from a relatively large number of privately held parcels, even discounting the large holdings of the lumbermen; and these parcels had to be acquired by purchase or eminent domain by the states and then "donated" to the federal government.

A great many people know the front page accounts of how the \$10 million required by the Park Service for land acquisition was raised by the states of North Carolina and Tennessee. Well-known are the stories of the pennies and nickels given by school children and of the church collection plates earmarked for park funds. Known, too, is the wonderful generosity shown by individuals and businesses all across Carolina and

Tennessee, the African-American community, and the last-minute act of the Asheville Chamber of Commerce in garnering the final \$35, 000 needed to meet North Carolina's obligation.

What is perhaps less known is the unbelievable philanthropy of **John D. Rockefeller, Jr.** who gave the remaining \$5 million needed to meet the total monetary goal. This donation was made in the name of his mother, **Laura Spelman Rockefeller**. It came as the result of back-channel efforts by Cammerer, who, in 1928, in making his best case for support to John D., had used photographic images of the area supplied by the unsung Japanese immigrant, Masahara Izuka. It is not beyond question that the final sum needed to establish the most visited national park in our country was gained through the beauty shared with one of the country's wealthiest men by a man from another country who always said he came from nothing.



Waves upon Waves of Mountains

It would be nice if our story could end there, but, unfortunately, it cannot. In the fall of 1930, Masa had escorted a group of National Park officials on an inspection tour of the proposed Smokies park. This was barely a year after the crash of the stock market in October, 1929.

Always strapped financially, Masa wrote to a friend in 1931, "I had attack terrible soar (sore) throat went hospital and laid up nearly six weeks – when I able to work Bank busted I saw quite excitements down town. I haven't any business past year not only me, all over the States as you know." This amounted to rank understatement, for the truth of the matter was that whatever savings he did have had been lost in the crash, and he was essentially without funds.

Earlier that year, with the preparations for the new park moving ahead, Arno Cammerer had appointed Masa; Kephart; and **Verne Rhodes**, executive secretary of the North Carolina National Park Commission, as the "nomenclature committee" on the North Carolina side. The three were tasked with the responsibility of completing a map of the entire North Carolina portion. Their job was to see that all of the peaks, valleys, and rivers were correctly identified, reconciling any errors or other discrepancies. According to the insightful article written by **William A. Hart, Jr.** and found in *May We All Remember Well, Volume I, A Journal of the History & Cultures of Western North Carolina*, Masa's work far exceeded any expectations; and to have been named to the committee was expectation enough. Hart writes, "Masa was the first person to systematically measure many of the trails and to chart the terrain of the Great Smokies. He knew the names of mountains and streams, trails, elevations, topography, and distances."

The counterpart committee on the Tennessee side had two individuals whom Masa knew well and respected highly, Paul Fink and Jim Thompson, a very esteemed

photographer from Knoxville. In correspondence with him, they both stated they “wished we had someone like you” on their side.

With the Great Depression deepening by the day, the photography business slowed to a trickle, as the Gilded Age in Asheville desiccated to a chalky ocher. Masa’s talent alone, in the absence of a keen business acumen, was not enough to generate a steady stream of revenue, and his great work on behalf of the mountains he loved did not come with an income. Imagine the emotional challenges with which he already struggled, and then add in the morning of April 3, 1931, when he picked up the Asheville *Citizen* to the above-the-fold headline, “Horace Kephart and **Fiswoode Tarleton** Killed.”

And just like that one of the greatest, deepest, and most creative friendships the mountains had ever known was ended. Kephart had died instantly around 11:00 p.m. in an auto accident on the highway between Cherokee and Bryson City. Masa was devastated. To a friend he wrote, “... indeed, I miss him so much, because he was my buddy...” When services were held on April 5, in the overflowing auditorium of the Swain County High School in Bryson City, Masa was among the first to arrive and the last to leave. He served as a pallbearer.

As was his nature to do, he immediately began to pick up the pieces as best he could. Not only did he double down on the work with the Smokies nomenclature committee, on December 10, 1931, George was elected to the council of the Carolina Mountain Club (recently the Carolina Appalachian Trail Club) to fill the unexpired term of his deceased friend. By April, 1933, he was chairman of its Hiking Committee. In a letter he had written: “...I have confidence that if I pull through this time I will be on my feet within a few months...and I carry on what Mr. Kephart left on me...”

Two years to the day from Kephart’s death, on April 2, 1933, Masa was among a group of at least 100 people who gathered for a memorial service on top of Mount Kephart to honor the man who had meant so much to them. Among those present were Paul Fink, Jim Thompson, and **Harvey Broome**, a Knoxville attorney and founding member of the Wilderness Society, today one of our country’s most effective conservation organizations. The place where they had gathered along the Smokies crest ridge stood at 6,215’, the seventh highest peak in Tennessee. It had been named to honor Kephart’s contributions to the creation of the park two months before his untimely demise. I have hiked across the shoulder of Mount Kephart many times, going east out of Newfound Gap to places like the Boulevard, the Jump-off, Ice Water Springs, and Charlie’s Bunion. It is a beautiful, serene, and sacred location.

In characteristic manner, following the memorial service, Masa drove to Gatlinburg to attend a meeting of the “nomenclatures.”



White Oak Flats

Among the several other ventures in which George was engaged at this time was the writing of a pocket-sized guide book to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park; and, indeed, it did happen that later in the year the *Guide to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (1933)* was released. It was a 142-page volume containing detailed trail descriptions and many photographs, most by Masa and credited to him. In 1935, a second edition would be issued with Masa's name cited but a single time in connection with photo credits.

Only days following the Kephart memorial service, Masa attended the April meeting



He Could Be Anywhere, Then

of the Carolina Mountain Club in Asheville. As was his custom, as chair of the Hiking Committee, he asked for recommendations for future hikes. Very shortly after the meeting he became ill; and following an illness of several weeks, friends arranged to place him in the county sanitarium. There, at noon on June 21, 1933, George Masa passed away, according to the medical reports from influenza and complications. His close friend and hiking companion, **Barbara Ambler Thorne**, daughter of **Dr. Chase**

Ambler, for whom Mount Ambler – just to the southwest of Mount Kephart – is named, reported that Masa had tuberculosis. He was 45.

On February 16, 1933, not quite four months before his death, Arno Cammerer, soon to become head of the National Park Service, had written Masa to say that he was feeling very certain that the creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park was “...too far along to end in anything but ultimate success...” This would have been all that Masa might have wished to hear personally; but what was perhaps even more appurtenant from the broader historical perspective was Cammerer's following comment that “In my opinion you are the best mountaineer on the North Carolina side...” Coming from the highest echelons of political power, from one with a full view of the subject matter, such a comment, even to one who claimed to originate from nothing, must surely have been received with a quiet smile of deep pleasure.

So it happened that on June 15, 1934, just slightly shy of a year since his death, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was formally established. Still, with all of the exigencies of the Depression bearing down on the country, it would be another six years, on September 2, 1940, in a celebrated ceremony at Newfound Gap, that President **Franklin D. Roosevelt** would formally dedicate those 522,427 acres for the “perpetual enjoyment of the people.”

It would be beyond gratifying to be able to say that in the wake of his passing there was found, or at least compiled, a repository of his work: negatives, transparencies, prints, filmstrips – all of the above; and that we have kept this work safeguarded with the passing of years, so that even now we can delight in the beauty that George Masa

shared with all of us. Sadly, this is not so. George Masa died without leaving a will and his life's work has been scattered like dandelion achenes in a strong wind. Some images were simply appropriated (read stolen) by other photographers as their own. Some were lawfully purchased and technically became the property of the new owner. **Elliot**

Lyman Fisher, an Asheville photographer, was ultimately able to purchase a collection of Masa's "mountain" pictures and unsold commercial negatives. When Fisher retired to Florida in 1968, he apparently took everything with him, and even Paul Bonesteel's determined attempts to uncover Masa in the land of orange blossoms have met with no positive results.

The Pack Memorial Library in Asheville has a modest collection of Masa's work, as does the Hunter Library at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, but it seems

that, for the most part, it is flung hither and yon. Paul Bonesteel estimates that as much as 25% of Masa's creative work is still unaccounted for. That's an awful lot of images.

Of nearly misfortune was the treatment of Masa's remains following his death. Much of this was due to the times themselves. Money was very hard to come by, and in spite of his wish to be buried next to the best friend he ever had in a spot overlooking the mountains, his friends were not able to raise enough funds to carry out this request. Instead, George was buried in an unmarked plot in Asheville's Riverside Cemetery, and this would be the case for five years until it was proposed by members of the Carolina Mountain Club that a committee be formed to look into placing a stone to mark the grave. It would be another nine years, World War II having intervened, before CMC was able to put together a sufficient sum to have such a memorial placed to mark the site.

Almost immediately in the wake of Masa's passing there was talk of naming after him some appropriate place somewhere in the mountains he had come to love to the depths of his soul; but nothing came from these proposals. However, the spritely man whose indefatigable energy was an inspiration to so many was not forgotten. On May 11, 1960 CMC passed a resolution to name a peak in the Great Smoky Mountains "Masa's Pinnacle...in commemoration of the stranger who stirred us to such depths of love for our wilderness." It was suggested that the location be somewhere near the Anakeesta outcropping along the Smokies' crest known as Charlie's Bunion.

Dr. Samuel Robinson was named chairman of the five-person committee. Robinson's approach to the project might be best described as dogged diplomatic determination. Within a year, after taking, as well as creating, every opportunity to advance their cause, it was announced on April 25, 1961, that Robinson had received word that the Board of Geographic Names had voted to name a peak for George Masa. To be sure, there had been resistance along the way, some even from sources that might not have been anticipated, but finally it was done.



When Graphics Matter

Masa Knob, a 5600' forested prominence on the Smokies' crest along the border between North Carolina and Tennessee, is reached along the Appalachian Trail by passing out of Newfound Gap and over Mount Ambler, climbing somewhat further, then, over the crest of Mount Kephart and dropping slightly down to the shoulder of Kephart on the east-northeastern slope of that mountain. From the crest of Kephart it is a leisurely 1.3 mile stroll with an elevation loss of about 600' to the lower rise of Masa Knob. From there, a good center fielder could almost throw a baseball and hit Charlie's Bunion. In the simple act of naming a mountain peak, George Masa and his friend Horace Kephart were brought together again for eternity.

Yet what is there, really, in a name? Once there was a young man who came to this land of mountains from a place he called "nothing." Perhaps he was thinking about "time" and "Timbuktu." Perhaps the small volumes of stories he brought with him when he arrived – stories of men who called themselves "samurai" and "ninja" – had taught him something about nothing, so that when he had lived in the land of mountains for a while, he learned what makes their beauty so special, and he found, looking within nothing, words in the form of things called pictures.

And with his words called pictures he shared a story from which we all can learn and use as a guide. Perhaps in his journey through the place called nothing to the mountains called the Great Smokies, Masahara Izuka found himself, which, in fact, is everything.

A Tip is Worth...?

Lenses Are Our Tools for Seeing: What's in a Piece of Glass?

The most dominant characteristic of the photographer since the 1880s has been his aggression.

Bill Jay

Come gather round people wherever you roam
And admit that the waters around you have grown
And accept it that soon you'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a changin'!

Bob Dylan

Imagine the awe: You are some distant ancestor and the intriguing piece of rock crystal you are holding in your hand has been conveniently shaped by the forces of nature so that when you bring it near your eye on one side and hold it close to some small object on the other, the object magically appears larger than it does to your unaided eyes. Your mind has just been opened to the amazing world of lenses, and for good or ill, your times will be forever changin'.

Sometime in the 1500's someone sought to improve the brightness and clarity of camerae obscurae, which had been around since ancient times, by enlarging the hole

opening and inserting a telescope lens, and cameras have never been the same. When we look through the revealing opening of the viewfinder, or peer at the LCD monitor of one of the new mirrorless cameras, we are seeing what the lens of the camera is “seeing,” and a world of creativity is within our grasp. So what will we shoot?



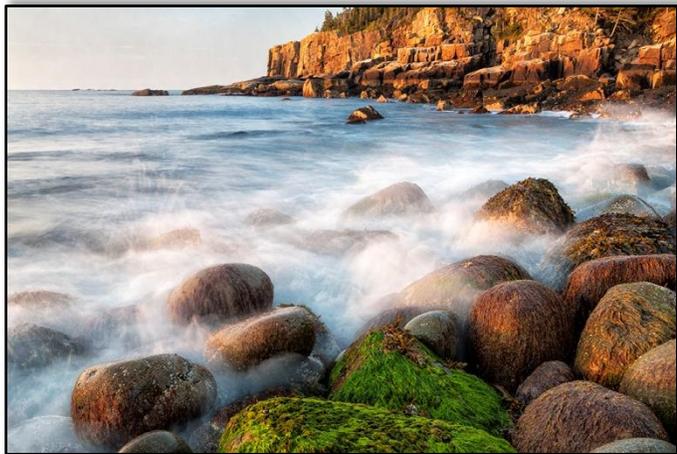
Three Leaves and a Bud

Many years ago one of my primary mentors, **Pat O’Hara**, instructed that he had chosen to change the language with which he described his own photographic journey. He was, he said, discontinuing his use of words like “shooting” and “aiming” and “taking” to describe what he was doing. Words like these, he said, seemed too aggressive to accurately communicate what he experienced as an artist. Since Pat had come to his artistry from a background as a professional forester, I was intrigued

and a little surprised. I had never considered myself as an aggressor as I looked through my viewfinder, yet I had long-used the same language to describe my actions and activities as a photographer. As I had already received and integrated Pat’s idea’s about the “quintessential image” to be found in every emotional response to the visual world, I took this in as a new “Aha” moment to consider and reflect upon as I went forward.

Over the next twenty years, or so, I applied what Pat had said, more or less, as my own creative journey unfolded; sometimes more, often less; but every time I used any of those terms in my photographic language, a small voice of reminder announced itself to my awareness, even as my awareness replied, “But I don’t feel aggressive, and besides, what other language is as descriptive?”

Over the past couple of years, this conflict of conscientiousness has intensified, and I have now understood that it has been in preparation for some new ideas that I have been considering and some new ways of thinking about this old internal dilemma. It’s somehow about coming to a deeper understanding of the “lenses” through which we see the world around us.



You Put De Lime in De Coconut

Whether we are comfortable admitting it, or not, ours is a culture of aggression and acquisition, and the language we use, even in our straightforward, everyday

communication, underscores this fact explicitly; it permeates our mundane activities; and it creeps into our worldview so that subtly it informs our linguistic behavior toward the world with which we interact. And as we begin to think and speak, so then we begin to act.

Please understand, I have been a hunter. I still believe in hunting, provided it's done in a thoughtful, even prayerful way, and every bit possible of the animal is put to some useful purpose.

In *Observations: Essays on Documentary Photography*, edited by **David Featherstone**, the late **Bill Jay**, one of the best photo historians of the modern era, offered that in its early years, between 1850-1880, the language of photography had a gentler tone, but that after 1880, with the advent and popularity of small, handheld cameras, the language and practice of camera-work began to shift to a much more aggressive posture as the surreptitious taking of images became the norm. There seems to have been created enough angst over the shift that one writer, in 1885, was moved to remark, "There is but one remedy for the amateur photographer. Put a brick through his camera whenever you suspect he has taken you unawares; and if there is any doubt, give the benefit of it to the brick, not to the camera."

In our public discourse on the matter we began to treat photographs as commodities, with no subject input; we began to use the camera as a way to avoid interaction with our subjects. Our images began to emphasize a quality of "otherness" in our subjects, and a hundred years later we were engaged in the same discourse, only with greater sophistication and intensity, having applied our not-inconsiderable imaginations to the topic.

Howard Zehr, in his wonderful, *The Little Book of Contemplative Photography*, points out that, "The photographer-as-aggressor, especially as sexual aggressor, became a kind of cultural icon with the 1960s movie, *Blow Up*. Especially significant is a scene in which the photographer, standing over a writhing model, photographs her in a way that can only be seen as a sexual act. The movie's photographer was imitated by many, and the movie helped to shape the self-image of many photographers – and of photography – since that time."

What Zehr suggests is that our photographic language and the metaphors it uses have become, in the main, aggressive, predatory, and acquisitive. If you examine a comparative of the lenses, which is to say the language, of photographic jargon, you can more easily see what he means: images *taken* vs. images *received*; images as *trophies* vs. images as *gifts*; camera as *weapon* vs. camera as *receiver*; subject as *object* vs. subject as *collaborator*; obligation to "*my truth*" vs. recognition of the "*subject's truth*"; exclusive focus on *final product* vs. *process* important; photography as *aggression* vs.



Visions of Eliot

photography as *respect*; photography as *conquest* vs. photography as *contemplation*.

These comparative sets of lenses, through which our photography unfolds, speak to an attitude, the attitude that we as photographers, practicing the craft of creativity, carry into the process of our work. It's all about connections and the creative gifts that arise from our deepest connections with the subjects that are our expressions.

For me those connections, and therefore my creative outcomes, are enhanced exponentially by my seeing, not through the lens of conquest, but rather through the lens of contemplation.

EarthSong Workshops: How You See the Land Really Matters **Walking in Beauty**

Our art history is more than a record of the objects we call art. It is, in a very basic sense, a record of what we are and how we see; and its language, the visual products, and the words of criticism, contains significant clues about our biological heritage.

Steven J Meyers
On Seeing Nature

As I walk with Beauty
As I walk, as I walk
The universe is walking with me
In beauty it walks before me
In beauty it walks behind me
In beauty it walks below me
In beauty it walks above me
Beauty is on every side
As I walk I walk with beauty

Traditional Diné Prayer

It is nearly impossible for me to believe that the year is nearly half over. If we had concluded the final workshop and there were none left to come, it would have already been a wonderful year. I am truly grateful that so many folks have wanted to come be with us during our last year of doing EarthSong Photography Workshops on the road.

The first **Appalachian Barn event** in March-April started us off on a high note: a great group of participants, excellent weather, some exciting new structures to visit – all came together for a delightful and fun weekend of creativity and community.

The **Smokies Spring Workshop** in mid-April was a small but intense group, yet the mountains were at their vernal best. I could live forever in a Smokies spring: wildflowers, streams, and beautiful light. I think, perhaps, the participants who were with me would agree.

My **John C. Campbell Folk School class** in May was one of the very best I have had in seventeen years of teaching there. Some who have been with me previously and

some new faces, too – an excellent mix; and energetic and inquisitive group of fellow adventurers; a willingness to go the extra mile in search of beauty, even when we knew it was right at our feet.

And now the remainder of the schedule beckons:



June 15-21, 2016: Acadia NP-Mt. Desert Island
Spring Tour
Southwest Harbor, ME
\$1350; 8 Participants; Deposit: \$250
(3 spaces filled)



September 17-23, 2016: The Amazing Beauty of
the Rhode Island Coast
Narragansett, RI
\$1350; 8 Participants; Deposit: \$250
(4 spaces filled)



October 1-7, 2016: The Awesome Upper
Peninsula of Michigan Fall Tour
Hancock and Munising, MI
\$1350; 8 Participants; Deposit: \$250
(4 spaces filled)



October 10-16, 2016: The Incredible Diverse
Beauty of Cape Cod
North Truro, MA
\$1350; 8 Participants; Deposit \$250
(5 spaces filled)



October 29-November 4, 2016: The Canyon
Country of Southeast Utah Tour
Moab, Utah
\$1500; 7 Participants; Deposit: \$250
(6 spaces filled)

Full



July 23-29 The Great Llama Trek Adventure
Cortez, CO/San Juan and La Plata Mountains.
\$1900; 6 Participants; Deposit \$250
(0 spaces filled)

This workshop will be a weeklong event in the **San Juan and La Plata Mountains** of **southwestern Colorado** and will involve **llama trekking** provided by **San Juan Mountains Llama Trekking** and my dear friend Dr. Laura Higgins

There are also two weekend workshop adventures in addition to those shown above.



August 12-14; Wildflowers, Waterfalls, and Western North Carolina
Hendersonville and Transylvania County, NC
\$375; 8 Participants
(3 spaces filled)



November 17-20; Appalachian Barn Workshop Full-on-Fall
Asheville/Madison County, NC
\$450; 8 Participants
(4 spaces filled)

Come share any these extraordinary adventures with us. Call me at **(828) 788-0687**, or send me an email with your phone number to don@earthsonphotography.com.

Remember that for all of EarthSong's workshops, we arrange for the lodging (not included in tuition) and we scout the restaurant locations (meals not included), so that all you have to do is show up ready to create, learn, and have fun.

Until next time, may the Spirit of Light guide your shutter release.

This newsletter is being sent only to those people who have expressed an interest in receiving it. If you no longer wish to receive it, you can be removed from the mailing list by sending an email requesting removal to don@EarthSongPhotography.com.



Sunrise, Luftee Overlook, Great Smoky Mountains National Park