

Environmental Portrait Photography Tips and Techniques

Jud Dagnall

What is the goal?

- present someone the most flattering way
- capture the personality, style and importance of a person
- capture the relationship and dynamics between people and things
- record details of a person, place or thing for history

Art vs. Documentation

- Artistic photographs often eliminate all but the most essential
 - Narrow DOF
 - Tight cropping
 - Elimination/blurring of irrelevant backgrounds



Documentary Photos

- historians want as much detail as is available
- Often, we don't know what WILL be of interest
- Wide DOF
- Background detail is not irrelevant
- What would I give for a photo of the first time I met with my wife?



Photos are about relationships

- Light and darkness
- Line and curve
- Negative and positive space
- Subject and background
- Subject and viewer

Psychology of the eyes

- Why would you have a subject looking directly into the camera?
- Why would you have a subject looking away from the camera?



JUD  DAGNALL
P H O T O G R A P H Y

Psychology of the eyes

Subject looking into the camera

- Viewer (you) communicates and interacts with the subject



Psychology of the eyes

Subject looking away

- The viewer puts him/herself into the scene, becoming the subject

Relationships via camera position

- Shooting from a low angle (photographer and viewer looking up) makes the subject more imposing and powerful



Relationships via camera position

Shooting from a higher angle makes the subject more approachable. I rarely do this with men.



Radical Angles

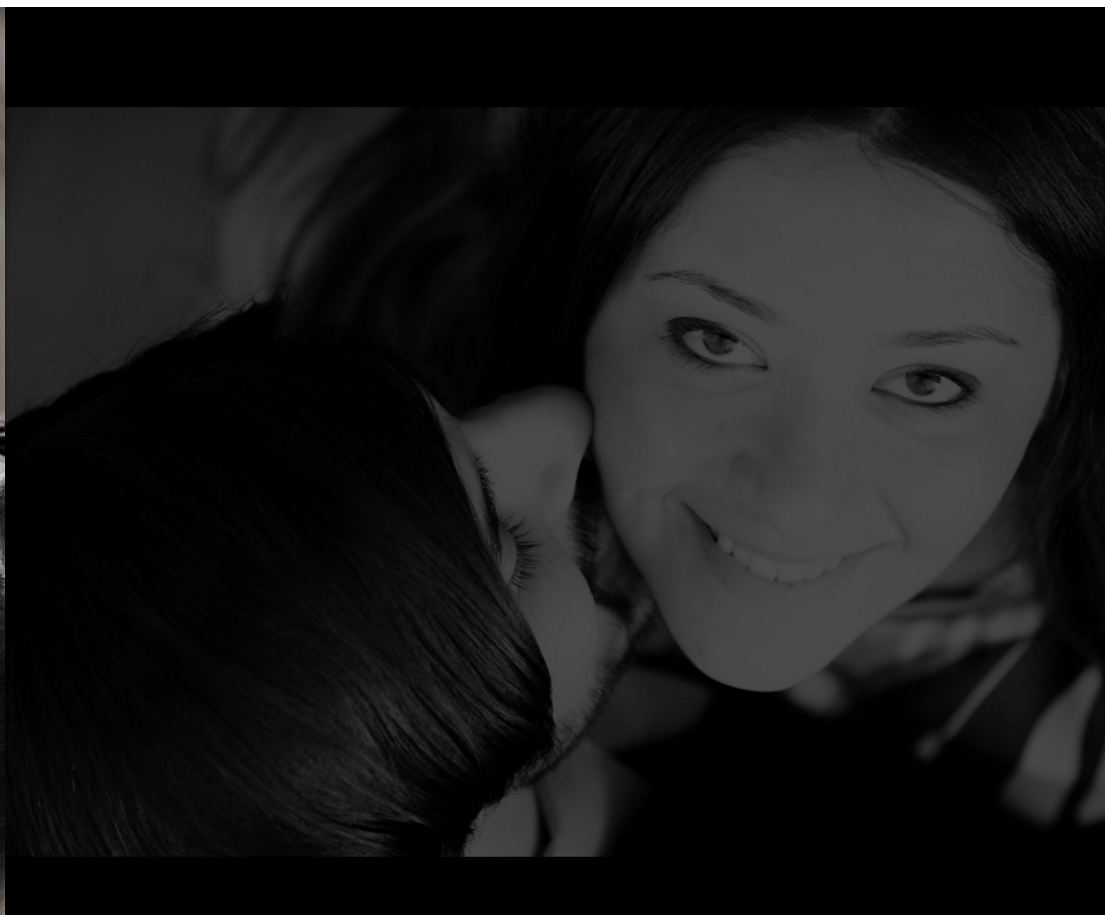
- Use extreme camera angles to add interest and variety
- Shoot from ground level looking up





Radical Angles

- Use extreme camera angles to add interest and variety
- Shoot from high above looking down





Perspective and size

- Objects (body parts and people) closer to the camera appear bigger
- Use this intentionally, avoid it accidentally
- “Hide” larger people behind smaller people
- Move larger body parts away from the camera to slim your subjects

A child's perspective

- I often photograph children from low angles
- Adults don't typically see children that way
- Psychological role reversal is interesting to me
- Children live in a larger world, but still feel full-sized



Changing perspective for depth

- Use foreground and background elements
- Get low, or go to the side







Expression over Perfection

- Sometimes, just take the shot! It's about the moment.



Seeing the light



Characteristics of light

- Intensity
- Direction
- Size/shape/hardness

What is “good” light?

- Really only one requirement:
- DIRECTION
- Soft directional light is “easy” and flattering
- Hard directional light is dramatic
- Flat light hides shape



Where do I find soft light?

- Bounced or indirect light is often soft
 - Sides of buildings
 - Open sky between trees
 - Large windows without direct sun



Where do I find soft light?

- Transition zones
 - Doorways, overhangs, trees
 - Move your subject forward and backward





Where do I find dramatic light

- Hard light is often dramatic
 - The sun is usually a hard light source
- The edge of a light is often dramatic
 - Turn subjects into, in front of the light
- Transition zones are also dramatic
 - Doorways and hallways

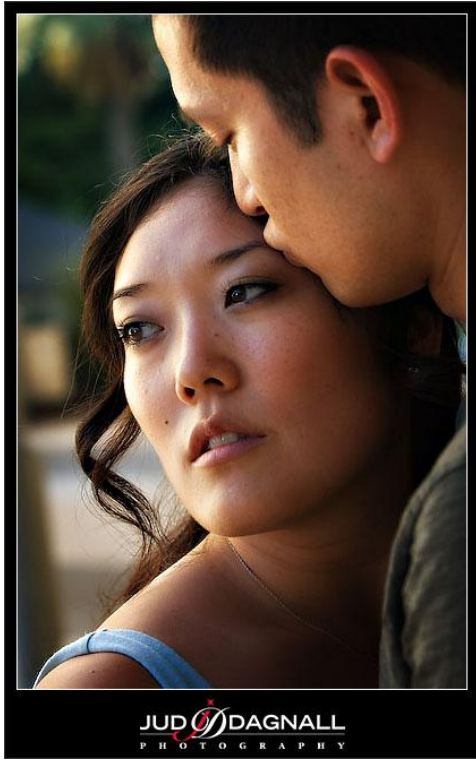




Using the edge of the light

- Rim light is probably my favorite
- Skim light across your subject for shape
- Turn your subjects, getting the light behind them
- Create beams of light by closing curtains and doors









Using hard light

- Direct sun is always hard light
- Put the sun behind and above your subjects
- Avoid flare by hiding your lens in the shade
- Expose for the face, let the hair go out or use fill flash
- Look for natural fill/reflections





Portraits while you travel

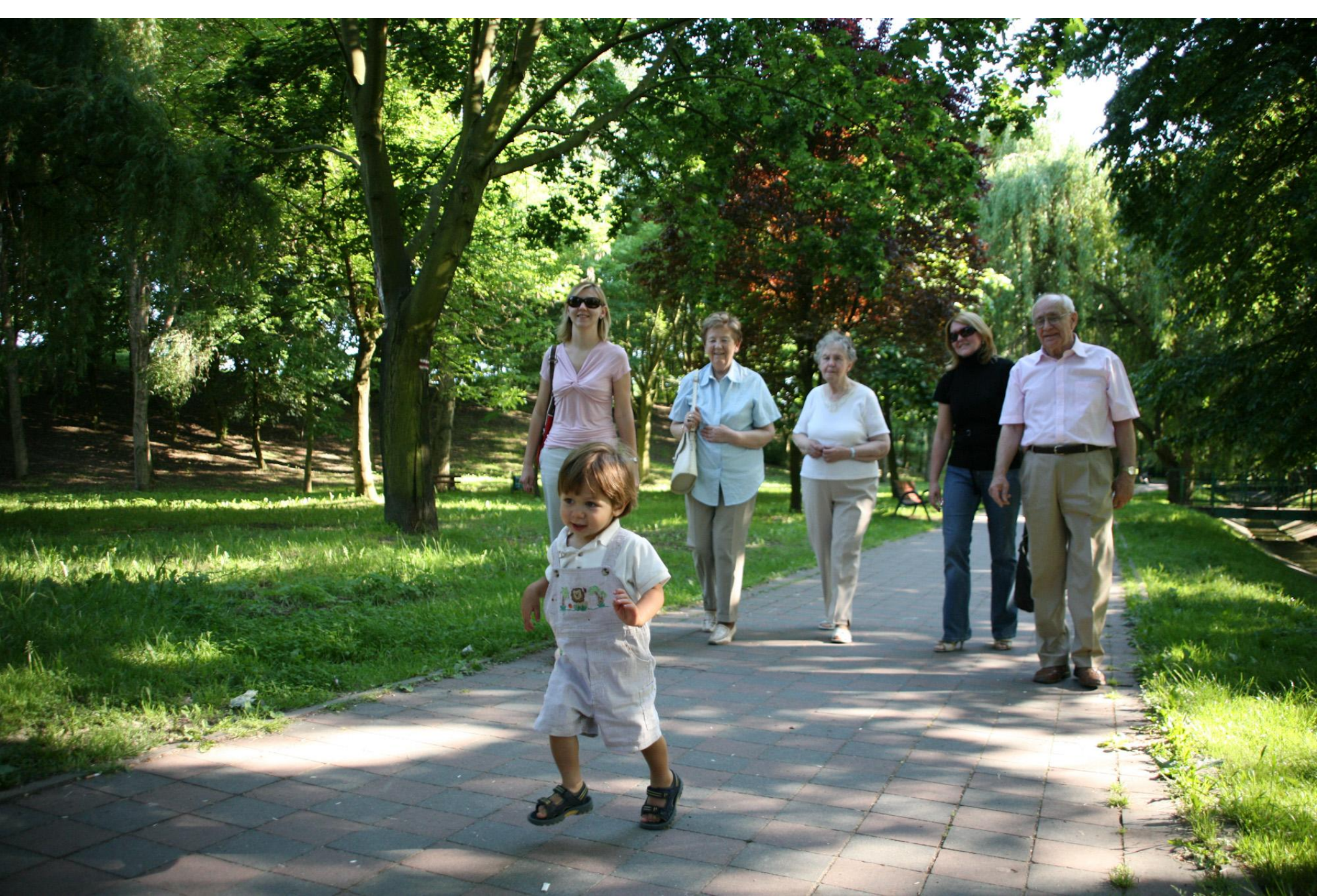
Travel Photo tips

- Pick a lens (or 2 at worst) and stick with it each day
- Gain familiarity with your tools
- Spend less time fiddling with your gear, more time seeing
- Get your family involved in the process



Travel Photo tips

- Shoot your family IN places
- Find them doing interesting things, include the context
- Use foreground, perspective and light to avoid snapshots
- Take “photo notes”, photograph signs, streetnames, towns and buildings



Travel Tips

- Watch for good light, then wait for (or encourage) people to do things in it.
- Become a student of light. Watch closely as the light changes.
- Look for transition zones. Anticipate them





After the shoot

Minimize Computer Time

- Edit IN, not OUT
 - This will reduce your editing time by 50%+

Use lightroom/aperture

- Choose a program build to handle many many images
- Do as much bulk processing as you can
- Use presets
 - Kevin Kubota for Lightroom has cut my processing
- Photoshop is a last resort
 - Use actions
 - Use automater

Archiving your photos

- Local, Online + hardcopy is ideal
- JPEG for archives
- Digital images last forever, but trivial to lose
- Read the DAM Book
- Smugmug and flickr, not facebook
- Smart ideas that weren't
 - Rsync-snapshot with symlinks

How to get better

- Become a student of light.
 - Observe it everywhere
- Study the works of better photographers
 - Be specific. Follow the blogs of photographers you like
- Critique your own work.
 - Choose between similar images
 - But don't spend too long. If they're really similar, pick one
- Emulate
 - Have a goal in mind. Did you achieve it?

How to get better

- Attend workshops
- Online resources
 - strobist.com
 - luminous-landscape.com
 - Wedding photography blogs
- Magazines are full of excellent photography
- Oh yeah. Practice.



My gear

The most important part of a camera is the 12 inches directly behind it (Ansel Adams)

- Canon 5d & Canon 30d bodies
- Lenses (in order of greatest use)
 - 50mm 1.8, 24-70 2.8L, 16-35 2.8L
 - 70-200 2.8L (much less)
- 580EX and 550 EX speedlights
- Radio Poppers (GREAT), Pocket Wizards



Thank you!



www.dagnallphoto.com

jud@dagnall.net