



A **WINDOW** OR A LENS?

David Schultz's

The sun was rising over the rough-cut peaks in Wrangell-St. Elias

Photography

National Park, Alaska, as David Schultz brought the crimson sky and

Lets The

jagged mountain silhouette into focus on his 35mm camera. With a

Fresh Air In

click, the moment became a still life. It wasn't until Schultz climbed

back into his pick-up truck and switched on the radio that he heard

a plane had slammed into the first World Trade Center tower.

"September 11, 2001" hangs in Schultz's Park City gallery, among other photographed moments in nature that offer viewers a visual oasis of beauty and serenity. Schultz's photos remind people that they've been holding their breath, and it's time to exhale.

Sometimes they offer more. One day in his gallery, Schultz noticed an elderly woman quietly weeping in front of an image of a yellow rose bush, tangled and wild in the slats of a weathered fence. For her, the image brought back memories of growing up in Oklahoma's Dust Bowl, where each family member took a clipping of a yellow rose bush in their yard, before moving West and dispersing. "I gave it to her," says a soft-spoken Schultz. "When one of my images has that

much meaning for someone, I just assume give it to them."

"He finds poetry in nature," says Angelique Glass, who first bought Schultz's work five years ago, while skiing in Park City; she now owns six of his photographs for her Washington D.C.-based office and home. "It's like coming across a retreat in the middle of a work day. Seeing these images helps me slow down my pace in a go, go, go environment."

The memories instilled in each photograph are especially important to Schultz, who at the age of 13 was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes, and has since lived with the reality that he may go blind one day. This prospect was the catalyst for his career. Despite being counseled against solo pursuits

By Peta Owens-Liston



BROKEN TOOTH



DEVILS CASTLE



BISON CROSSING

and careers that relied on sight, Schultz instead decided not to waste any time, and set out to see all he could see. Soon after high school graduation, he took his first solo road trip. The plan was to drive to Florida and then back to Bay City, Michigan; but somewhere on the return route, Schultz veered West, turning his two-week road trip into a two-month, 6,000-mile journey. His eyes feasted. Wanderlust blossomed. Several road trips later, Schultz met a photographer and learned that it was possible to both travel and make a living taking photos. He returned home, and began teaching himself photography.

For Schultz, each image is a memory — a visual record of what he has seen. Always traveling solo (with the exception of his black lab Koda), he absorbs the details of his surroundings, while waiting and watching for the right light and moment to photograph. He easily recalls the details of the day, and the minutes, leading up to a particular shot: the frigid morning air, the honking of geese overhead, the smell of damp leaves, the silence of falling snow, the clearing of a storm, a stream crossing by a family of buffalo.

“If I lose my sight, all someone will have to do is say something about one of my photos, and the memory and all the details of that photo will come back to me — I will be able to see it in my mind,” says Schultz, who at 47 seems accepting that blindness is a possibility.

Following the Light, West

Another road trip dramatically changed the direction of Schultz’s life. As a commercial photographer based in Dallas in 1987, he had just finished an assignment in Heber and was drinking a beer with a local, who inquired whether he had ever seen Southern Utah. Schultz’s head shake prompted an immediate departure on a 36-hour whirlwind tour of Utah’s red rock country. A month later, he closed his Dallas studio and moved to Utah, eventually making a name for himself as a nature photographer. “As a nature photographer, you can’t find a better area with the diversity in geography that Utah has — and you can’t beat the access to it,” says Schultz, whose 5-year-old gallery is filled with pristine

shots of Utah, some not even a mile from his home in Heber.

Despite the access to beauty (via backpacking and road trips), luck, skill, and tenaciousness must all come into play. Often, Schultz has only a split second to catch the sweet light and rich color that has become a hallmark of his photos, yet it may take him weeks and dozens of rolls of film to glimpse the image. “Sometimes you return year after year to get the right photo,” says Schultz, a self-admitted perfectionist. “And sometimes it is just one shot.” His photo pursuits have led him through the West and Northwest, Canada, South America and Alaska.

“Reflections of the Great One,” was one such hard-earned image. After four rain- and snow-soaked days in Denali National Park, Schultz’s permit expired, requiring him to ride the bus in and out of the park daily, taking up to four hours each way. Finally, one day, the clouds broke and the sun came out, just as the last bus of the day was about to leave. Schultz opted to miss it and spend the night in the Park (despite no sleeping bag or tent, and limited food), in order to take advantage of a clear view of Mt. McKinley. That night, Schultz used his hand warmers to keep warm — placing one on his head and one on his chest — and resorted to stealing a bag of M&Ms from one of the campground food storage bins. “I feel kind of bad about that,” says Schultz, sincerely. Yet, the sugar intake helped keep his diabetes in check.

Schultz isn’t always camped beneath a star-studded sky. During peak tourist season, he spends up to 80 hours a week in West Light Images, the gallery he designed on Main Street. The space is a fitting home for his images, and himself, with a scattering of vintage cameras, old black and white family photos, a blazing fire, fountains, instrumental music and a deep leather couch. But it is the photographs that mesmerize. All offer a view most will never see or feel in person.

Even Schultz craves what they offer. “What I do is often a lonely endeavor, yet when I’m here in the gallery, I look at these images and crave the solitude out there.” ❁

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