

If These Months Could Talk

Adventures of a Calendar Photographer

By CLARKE C. JONES

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A Start in Scenic Checks

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Dyke, who had never taken pictures before, bought a 35 mm Nikon camera to take along on the trips so he could take his own photos. He observed the photographer on the project and thoroughly enjoyed taking pictures. By the end of the assignment, he was taking pictures for the company.

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In fact, the photography editors at the company told him he didn't have to sign his name to his pictures—they knew by looking at them that they were Dwight Dyke photos.

On the Road, with Camera

Within two years of the project, Dyke's life changed. "I found myself single and examining my life," he said. He got a pop-up camper, hitched it behind his jeep, and along with his newly acquired large-format camera equipment, went on the road for two years.

He lived for some time on the Navajo Indian Reservation at Canyon de Chelly in Arizona. He held an interest in the Anasazi Indian ruins and the ancient Indian artwork on the mountain walls and, in particular, a place called Mummy Cave.

"The only way to Mummy Cave was [by] four-wheeling in a river which was a little over a foot deep," said Dyke. "You needed an Indian guide to go with you, because he knew where the quicksand was and how to avoid it. My guide just happened to be the spiritual leader of the Navajo tribe and we had many interesting conversations on the day-long trek to and from the cave."

In many additional instances, Dyke's photographs came from remote locations. He had to physically carry his tripod and heavy equipment miles to his destination.

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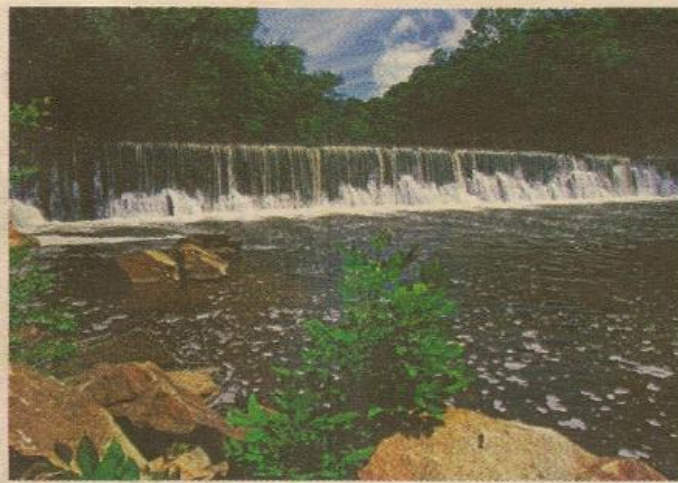
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In early April he would photograph plants and flowers in South Carolina and then in mid-April he would be in Texas photographing cacti that only bloom that time of year. During July, Dyke would be in Montana and then go to the Sawtooth Wilderness area near Redfish Lake and the small village of Stanley, Idaho, which is reported in some travel guides as having the most beautiful settings of any town in the United States.

In September, he was back East shooting the rocky coasts and lighthouses of Maine. Then he would jump over to Vermont in October to photograph the fall foliage. As the colors descended South, he followed them.



In his Goochland County studio, Dwight Dyke photographs animals that appear on calendars across the country. He also provides scenic images for calendar companies.

(Dwight Dyke photo: Frost. Animal and nature photos: Dyke)

Lessons to Bear in Mind

All of this sounds glamorous, but it was not without its dangers or valuable life lessons.

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Thinking they may be having engine trouble, he started to see if he could help them when he realized the people blocking his way were watching a bear graze beside their truck.

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From Virginia to Europe

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He contacted them and they were pleased with his work. He still produces images for them and loves working with the game biologists and the Virginia Game Commission.

Eventually, Dyke began to submit his work to calendar publications. Thinking he needed to expand the image inventory that he could provide his customers, he traveled to Europe and the Caribbean.

Exciting? Sure, but it was also an investment risk, in that he poured a great deal of money and time into the endeavor without being sure there was a market for his photos. At least, that's how some people might have seen it. Dyke just went for it, and was successful.

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Connecting with the Subject

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calendars and you will find his work. In 2007 his photography was the cover of the "Southern Nature" calendar and in 2008 it is on the cover of the "Country Churches" calendar.

Part of his success comes from the way he approaches his animal subjects. He wants to photograph animals in a natural setting. For instance, small dogs are photographed in his studio or indoors, while larger dogs are photographed outdoors.

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Dyke brings his own personality to a photo shoot as well. Michele Trogdon, who cuts Dyke's hair, said that she had asked him to take a photo of her female pit bull terrier, a rescued dog. But because of the dog's background and temperament, Trogdon was nervous about how the dog would react, and asked Dyke not to touch or look at the animal.

"Of course, this didn't make Dwight feel very comfortable," said Trogdon. "He asked me how he was to take my dog's picture without looking at it. I brought her to his studio and within moments my dog fell in love with him. When I saw the photos he had taken of her, they were so beautiful I almost cried."

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Art and Adaptation

Although Dyke has an innate gift for photography, the job is not without its challenges, even minus the rattlesnakes. Like all photographers, Dyke has seen enormous technological changes over the course of his career.

"I have always been drawn by the art of photography, not the technology," he said. "Everything I did photographically in the past came very naturally to me, but with advent of digital cameras, photographers have had to go from shooting film to PhotoShop 3 almost over night."

This has required an immediate and considerable investment in time and new equipment. Most publishers of photographs no longer accept photo slides and want digital images because it fits

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