

**JANUARY 2012**

**RUSSELLGRAVES.COM**

N E W S L E T T E R



# Staying the Course

**If it's not broke,  
fix it anyway.**

This January marks the sixth year that I've published this newsletter. In that time, it's incredible how much technology has changed. When I first introduced this format, it fit on one page and consisted of about 100 words and a couple of images. Now, this mini magazine is at least eight pages a month, is full of images, and goes out to thousands with just the click of a mouse.

I've been working hard to get a few new offerings out the door and hopefully, by the end of this month, I'll be launching a new blog that's informative and educational and borrows the work of other photographers as well as my contribution to hopefully entertain and inspire. So stay tuned for that.

I also have a number of new video projects in the cue. Some are for entertainment but I am currently working on techniques for filming myself and more and more you'll see educational and informational videos showing up on the site.

Of course, the purpose of russellgraves.com is to be a repository for still photos. As of this newsletter, there are over 21,000 Images on-line and searchable by keyword. The

site continues to grow and grow and I've added nearly 4,000 in the past year alone.

Of course there is also [picturepasture.com](http://picturepasture.com) - my site for all things agriculture and rural.

Add to all this the [Facebook](#) community which has doubled in the past year and the [Twitter](#) followers who have quadrupled in the past year.

Ultimately all of this is all about the pictures. Well composed, thoughtful images are still the main point of doing all of this and I hope you enjoy.



[russell@russellgraves.com](mailto:russell@russellgraves.com)



CHECK OUT [RUSSELLGRAVES.COM](http://RUSSELLGRAVES.COM)  
FOR A [NEW VIDEO](#)



## PHOTO TIP

One way to engage wildlife in the field is to use a call. Electronic or mouth blown calls mimic the sound of a wounded animal and if a predator is within earshot, they'll come to investigate. Just keep the sun at your back and the wind in your face and wait for the predators to appear.

Canon 1D Mark III camera, Canon Canon 500mm lens, 1/800 sec. @ f4,  
ISO 400



## Featured Column

### Texas Independence

I am a Texan.

From the time I was a small boy I can remember my parents hauling all over the state showing me culturally and historically important sites and teaching me how to be a Texan.

As I think back those are happy times.

Fast forward thirty years and now I am a dad myself, and like my mom and dad, I think it's important for me to share those same lessons with my kids and instill in them, the same pride of place which was taught to me three decades prior. Therefore, we hit the road often.

It wasn't long ago that I took my family on a big swing down the Texas Independence trail. Like many, we've been to the Alamo many times but this time, we decided to go to lesser known sites and envelope ourselves in a significance pieces of history that took place 175 years ago.

Our first stop was outside of Gonzalez at Cost, Texas. Cost is the site of the first shot of the Texas war for independence from Mexico and inspired the "Come and Take It" flag in which Texans rallied around after that fateful day in October of 1835.

From there we traveled to Washington on the Brazos near Brenham. Washington on the Brazos is the site where delegates from the fledgling country convened and signed the Texas Declaration of Independence on March 2, 1836.

The declaration,

authored by George Childress, was debated and signed in a little wooden shack just up the bank from the Brazos River. It is a place of quiet contemplation and I sense that my kids realize that as they run their hands across the stone marker and explore the empty space of the convention hall.

From a distance, La Porte, Texas looks like an industrial town full of refineries. However, as you get closer to the San Jacinto battleground you start to notice immense murals depicting the final battle in the war for Texas Independence painted on the side of the petroleum storage tanks.

Then you see it.

Pointing skyward 567 feet in the air and topped with a 220-ton Texas star, the San Jacinto Monument is a fitting tribute to the battle that took place on April 21, 1836. At the battle, Sam Houston led his band of Texas volunteers against a well armed and well organized Mexican Army under the leadership Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna.

In 18 minutes the battle was over and a nation was born.

***From the syndicated newspaper column, "Russell Graves Outdoors"***





**The Farm**  
**Combining**  
**passion with a**  
**lifestyle to**  
**provide America**  
**with safe food.**

America needs to maintain strong agrarian traditions.

Imagine importing most of our food in the same way we do our oil. It's not too pleasant a thought, is it?

Imagine despots and tyrants controlling a major portion of our food supply.

If you ate a good meal any anytime in your life, you can thank an American farmer. These stewards of the land work tirelessly while risking

fortunes and battling the elements to produce the food and fiber that America needs to maintain her strength.

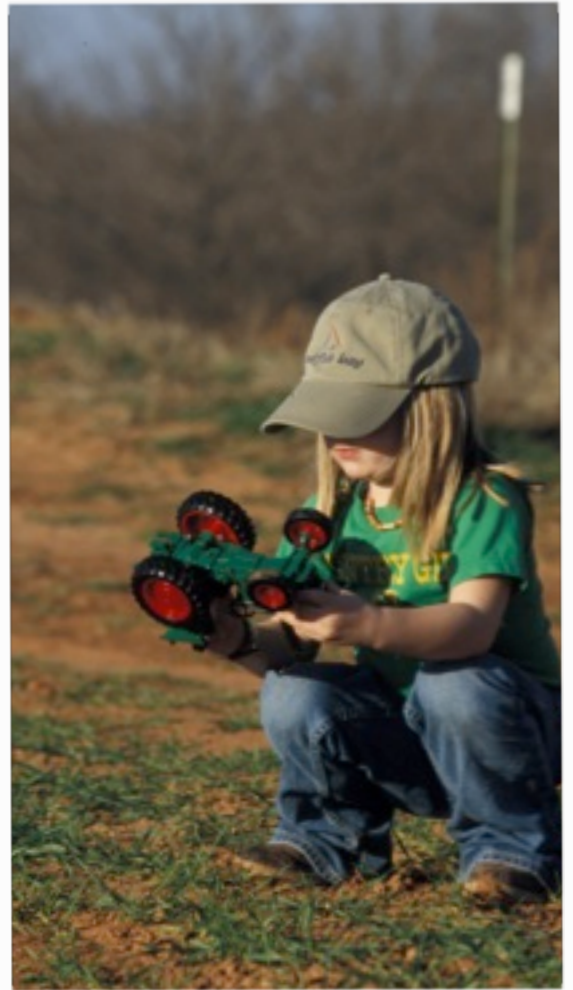
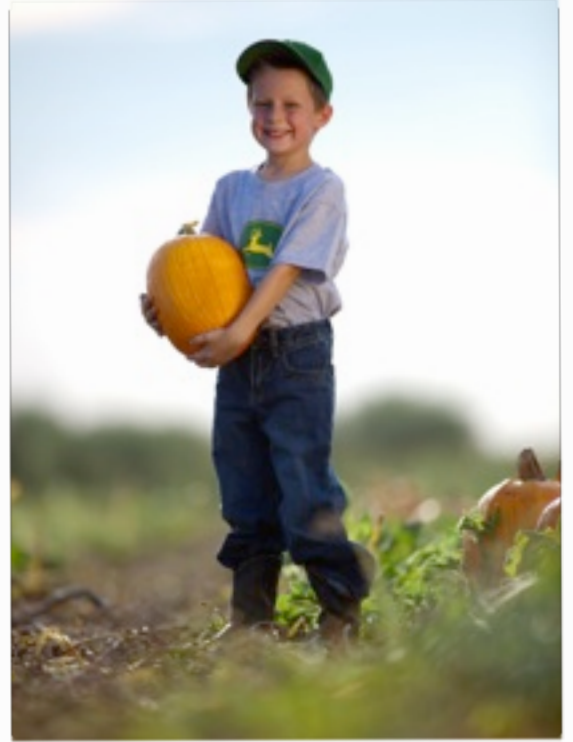
Farmers are the original environmentalist. They take of the land so that it takes care of them and their family. In turn they provide our country with a safe and reliable food supply.

For these reasons, America needs strong agrarian traditions.



THE SKINNY:  
VARIOUS  
CANON  
CAMERAS  
WITH A  
500MM LENS







## PHOTO INSTRUCTION



Shooting great photos, like anything else, takes a certain amount of skill as well as luck. Great equipment and sound fundamental techniques help improve your odds of getting memorable images, but aren't necessarily a panacea. Instead, in the photo game, you should be aware of nuances that help you elevate your skills to the next level.

When I first started taking pictures, getting great shots was about 900/0 luck and 10% skill. Now those numbers are reversed and my chances of getting great images each time I take a picture are almost 100%. Like any product you use and are happy with, the results you get from your camera should be predictable and consistent. Want to build consistency? Follow these tips:

### **#1 - Shoot in "Sweet light"**

When shooting outdoor photographs, relegate most of your photo shoots to the first and last couple of hours of the day. Pro photographers agree that early and late light is preferred if you have a choice as to when you'll shoot photographs.

The low angle of the sun evenly illuminates your subject in golden light as opposed to the harsh, flat light of midday. If you must shoot at midday, use a flash.

## #2 - Plan Your Shots

If you are shooting pictures of a specific activity, such as fishing, make a plan of the kinds of images you want. Then, shoot for the plan.

I put a considerable amount of time into thinking about images I should take and sometimes even sketch them on paper to visualize what I want. If you plan your shoot, you'll be surprised at how thoroughly you'll document the event.

## #3 - Always Be Prepared

Whether I'm traveling down a dirt road or a state highway, I always have my

camera at my side, ready for action. I've taken scores of photos (many of which have made the covers of magazines) from the cab of my pickup.

## #4 - Shoot lots of Images

Shooting pictures is like shooting a basketball. To get better, you have to practice. With photography, practice means taking many pictures, evaluating your work, and shooting some more. With digital cameras, photo feedback is instant, which substantially decreases the learning curve. Pay attention to your mistakes. And furthermore, learn what you are doing right

and maximize your successes. By doing so, the quality of your work will increase.

Shooting a lot of pictures also ensures that you get the photo you're after. Suppose you take a shot of your buddy on the edge of a scenic canyon, and in the only photo you shoot, his eyes are closed.

You blew it. Had you have taken four or five of those shots, chances are at least one of them would have been good. And again, with digital, there's no film to waste, so why not take a few shots and choose the best one?



"SHOOTING PICTURES IS LIKE SHOOTING A BASKETBALL.  
TO GET BETTER, YOU HAVE TO PRACTICE..."



### **#5 - Study the Craft**

Although I guess some people may be naturally talented as photographers, most learn the old fashioned way: they pound away at it until they get good. Now, I'm not saying that you should quit your job and study photography full time. What I am saying is that you should read books, magazines, and Internet resources that deal with

photography equipment and technique. The more you know, the quicker you'll close the gap between good pictures that happen haphazardly and photos that are consistently good.

### **#6 - Study Other People's Work**

A sure-fire way to help define your own photographic style is to study the work of others. Musicians have other

musicians who've influenced their style of music, and photographers are no different. When I first started taking pictures, I studied all kinds of pictures to learn specific lighting and composition techniques. As I began to master the technical basics of photography, I started trying to develop an artistic vision by studying the work of prominent nature photographers. To this day, I

still look at what others are doing for inspiration and ideas that will help me define my own style.

### **#7 - Study Your Own Work**

The best troubleshooting procedure I know is to study my own work. When I take the time to look critically at my photographs, I can isolate mistakes I've made and take steps to correct them. Here's an example: A few years ago, I noticed a trend in my photos. Almost all the images I shot with a telephoto lens were a bit blurry. I knew the problem wasn't with the lenses as I had the best that the camera manufacturer offered. The problem had to be with me. So, I refined my technique by using a tripod with my big lenses. Now, virtually every image I shoot is tack sharp.

As you study your work, you may find common mistakes that you make again and again. Study the problem, check photographic resources like books or websites, and come up with a solution. You'll be glad you did.

### **#8 - Think Carefully and Shoot Deliberately**

I wish I had a chance to retake all the images I blew back when I thought the automatic setting on my camera was all I needed to take great photos. I can

trace back, nearly to the day, to when my photos started to improve - when I quit letting the camera do the thinking for me.

One prominent photographer I spoke with estimated that 80% of the exposure settings that today's modern cameras recommend are wrong. Eighty percent! That means if you let your camera do the thinking for you, 80% of your images could be better. Once I started setting my

camera manually, my photos instantly became better. Do yourself a favor. Learn how light and shadows affect your camera's meter and adjust accordingly.

### **#9 - Dress Seasonally**

When shooting wildlife pictures, it helps to remain out of sight as much as possible. Therefore, I have several sets of camouflage clothing patterns so I can dress according to the season. Throughout the year, as the seasons change,



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I try to match the color of the clothes I'm wearing as closely as I can to the terrain.

Some might argue that "camo is camo," but for a shot of a wild, trophy-class whitetail, I'm not willing to take a chance.

### **#10 - Be There**

When I talk to people about what it takes to shoot great photographs, I remind them that sometimes it takes getting up at 3:00 am and driving a hundred miles to be in place before the sun comes up. Half the battle of taking great photos is being there in the first place. Simply put, all the technical expertise and artistic vision in the world is no good in the digital nature photography arena if you stay in the house all the time.

**From my book [The Kodak Most Basic Book of Digital Nature Photography](#)**



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