Creating Great Portraits

By Ginia Apostolacus

VA Photography

“Photography takes an instant out of time, altering life by holding it still.”

Dorothea Lange

A little about me

Inspiring Portrait Photographers

- Annie Leibovitz - Rolling Stone, Vanity Fair
- Steve McCurry - National Geographic, “Afghan Girl”, photojournalist
- Dorothea Lange - Photojournalist during the Depression
- Diane Arbus - Known for authentic realism in portraiture
- Richard Avedon - Famous Fashion photographer
- Irving Penn - Fashion and portrait photographer

Agenda

- My Equipment

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- Camera Settings

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- Focus: Eyes, Eyes, Eyes

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- Post Processing- K.I.S.S.

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- Posing and Composition
- Framing
- Focus: Eyes, Eyes, Eyes
- Post Processing- K.I.S.S.
- The Perfect Portrait

My Equipment

Nikon D750

Lens options:

- 85mm (prime) FAVORITE
- 50mm (prime)
- 24-120mm (zoom)

Nikon Speedlight D700
(on and off camera)

Umbrella

Reflectors

Diffusers

Camera Settings

Camera set in Manual Mode

- ISO: 200-400 (but I will push ISO to achieve best lighting balance)
- Aperture: Open aperture: f4.5-f1.8 for bokeh background
- Shutter Speed: adjust accordingly (fast enough to keep images sharp)
- Average White Balance
- Single point focus

Light Sources

I usually shoot Portraits in Natural light:

- Golden Hours/Back light
- Overcast days
- Shade/indirect sunlight

Speed light:

- Control light
- Vary light from soft, diffused light to dramatic, harsh light
- Can help overcome dramatic shadows

“A portrait is not made in the camera but on either side of it.”

– Edward Steichen

Late Afternoon Back Light

1/100 f5.6 iso250
Flash: Yes
Lens: 18.0-105.0 mm

Kate

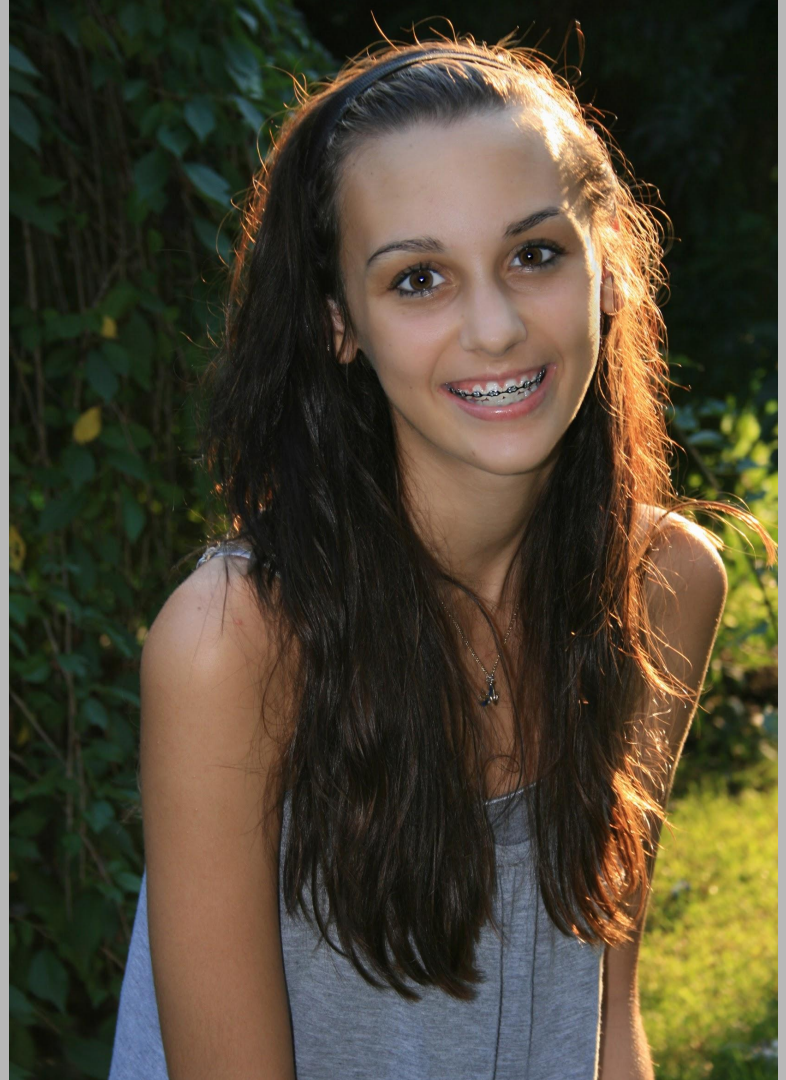
Late Afternoon Back Light

1/100 f5.6 iso400
Flash: Yes
Lens: 18.0-105.0mm

Samantha

Late Afternoon Back Light

1/200 f5.6 iso1250
Flash: Yes



Anne

Dramatic Light

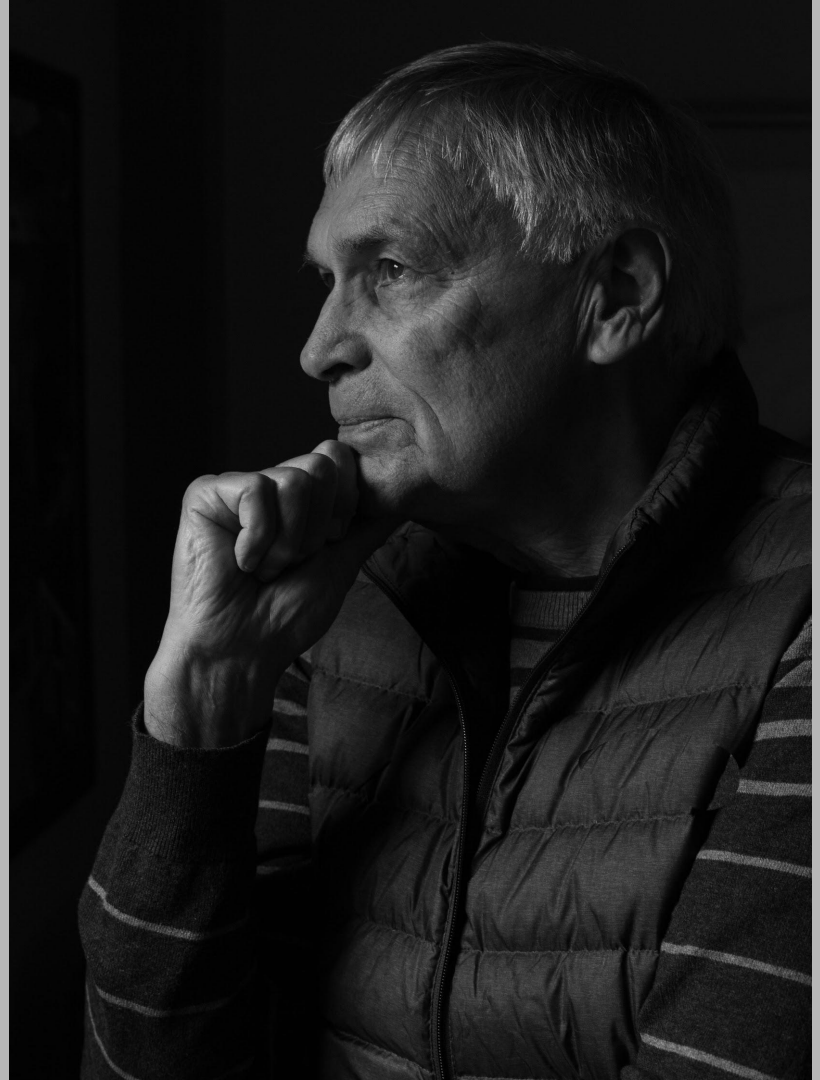
1/640 f2.2 iso800
Flash No
Lens: Zeiss 50mm 1.4

Carol

Dramatic Light

1/60 f5.6 iso1250
Flash No
Lens: Zeiss --50 mm 1.4

Andy



Cloudy Days

1/100 f4.5 iso100
Flash No
Len:24.0-120.0 mm f/4.0

1/800 f7.1 iso400
Flash No
Lens: Zeiss 50mm 1.4

Eric & Lauren

Burke & Kelli

Diffused Light

1/100 f5.6 iso250
Flash No
Lens: 8.0-105.0 mm f/3.5-5.6

Ted

Diffused Light

1/80 f3.2 iso800
Flash No
Lens: Zeiss 50 mm 1.4

Jaclyn

Diffused Sunlight

1/250 f2.8 iso400
Flash No
Lens: 85 mm f/1.8

1/160 f2.2 iso400
Flash No
Lens: Zeiss 50 mm 1.4

Emily

Diana

Controlled Light Stobes

1/125 f2.5 iso400
Strobes
Lens: EF-55-250mm f/4-5.6

1/125 f8 iso200
Strobes
Lens: EF-55-250mm f/4-5.6

Angel

Joan

Challenging Light

1/400 f11 iso400
Flash No
Lens: 18.0-105.0 mm
f/3.5-5.6

1/125 f18 iso500
Flash Yes
Lens: 18.0-105.0 mm
f/3.5-5.6

Steve, Deneen & Mandy

Eric

Location & Clothing

Favorable Locations

- County Parks (Springton Manor, Hibernia Park, Hopewell Furnace)
- Public Lands (Stroud Preserve, Cheslen Preserve)
- Town Parks (Everhart Park, West Chester; Kerr Park, Downingtown)
- People's homes

Clothing

- Solids or subtle patterns work best
- Avoid distracting patterns, bright white and garish colors

County Parks (Springton Manor)

1/640 f7.1 iso400
Flash Yes
Lens: 18.0-105.0 mm f/3.5-5.6

Zach

1/160 f7.1 iso400
Flash Yes
Lens: 18.0-105.0 mm f/3.5-5.6

Emily & Andy

County Parks (Hibernia Park)

1/160 f6.3 iso400
Flash No
Lens: 85 mm f/1.8

Charlie & Gina

Universities

1/640 f2.8 iso400
Flash No
Lens: 85 mm f/1.8

Emily

Covered Bridges

1/160 f10 iso800
Flash Yes
Lens: 18.0-105.0 mm f/3.5-5.6

Lauren

Whatever you can find!

1/80 f5 iso400
Flash: Yes
Lens: 55-250mm f/4-5.6

Anne

“When I say I want to photograph someone, what it really means is that I’d like to know them. Anyone I know I photograph.”

— Annie Leibovitz

Connecting with your model/Capturing Emotion

I always try to get to know my subject before I look through the viewfinder.
Ask about:

- Hobbies
- Job
- Vacations/travel
- Family

Build a rapport so you can talk about things that make them feel comfortable.
Props help to connect the subject.

Cars

1/320 f13 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: 85 mm f1.8

Charlie & Gina

Talent or hobby

1/320 f12.5 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: 85 mm f1.8

Zach

Pets

1/160 f8 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: 55-250mm f/4-5.6

Hannah

Seasonal items

1/160 f4 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: 55-250mm f/4-5.6

Lucas

Professional items

1/160 f2.5 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: 85.0 mm f/1.8

Ray

Adoration

1/200 f6.3 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: Zeiss 50 mm 1.4

Carol & Bill

Humor

1/50 f3.8 iso500
Flash: No
Lens: 55-250mm f/4-5.6

Eric & Lauren

Love

1/3200 f1.8 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: 85 mm f/1.8

Eric & Annparke

Affection

1/250 f11 iso800
Flash: Yes
Lens: 18.0-105.0 mm f/3.5-5.6

Eric, Peaches & Lauren

Joy

1/1000 f6.3 iso1250
Flash: Yes
Lens: 18.0-105.0 mm f/3.5-5.6

Paige

Elation

1/2500 f5 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: 18.0-105.0 mm f/3.5-5.6

Emily

Posing and Composition

Same rules of Composition apply

Get comfortable

Groups

Individuals

Multiple angles

Reposition as needed (Sitting, standing, on the floor, on a chair)

Groups

Neutral Background

1/200 f13 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: 24.0-120.0 mm f/4

SU Women

SU Women

Groups

Anchor

1/200 f16 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: 24.0-120.0 mm f/4

Groups

Create a Triangle

1/60 f3.8 iso400
Flash: Yes
Lens: 18.0-105.0 mm f/3.5-5.6

SU Women

Groups

Points of Interest

1/400 f8 iso100
Flash: No
Lens: 16.0-300.0 mm f/3.5-6.3

SU Women

Unusual Perspective

1/1600 f2 iso400
Flash: No
Lens:Zeiss 50mm 1.4

Jaclyn

Get Low

1/160 f4.5 iso800
Flash: No
Lens: Zeiss 50 mm 1.4

Tillie

Get high

1/1000 f12.2iso400
Flash: No
Lens: Zeiss 50 mm 1.4

Lindsay

1/2500 f1.6 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: Zeiss 50 mm 1.4

Kyle

Paige

Lens: 8.0-105.0 mm f/3.5-5.6

1/320 f8 iso1250
Flash: No

1/200 f14 iso1250
Flash: Yes

1/200 f5.6 iso1250
Flash: No

1/200 f5.6 iso1250
Flash: No

1/1000 f7.1 iso1250
Flash: Yes

1/250 f9 iso1250
Flash: Yes

Framing

Find a natural way to frame image

- Doorways
- Trees/Leaves
- Rocks
- Vignette

Trees

1/160 f3.2 iso400
Flash: Yes
Lens: 85 mm f/1.8

Hannah

Leaves

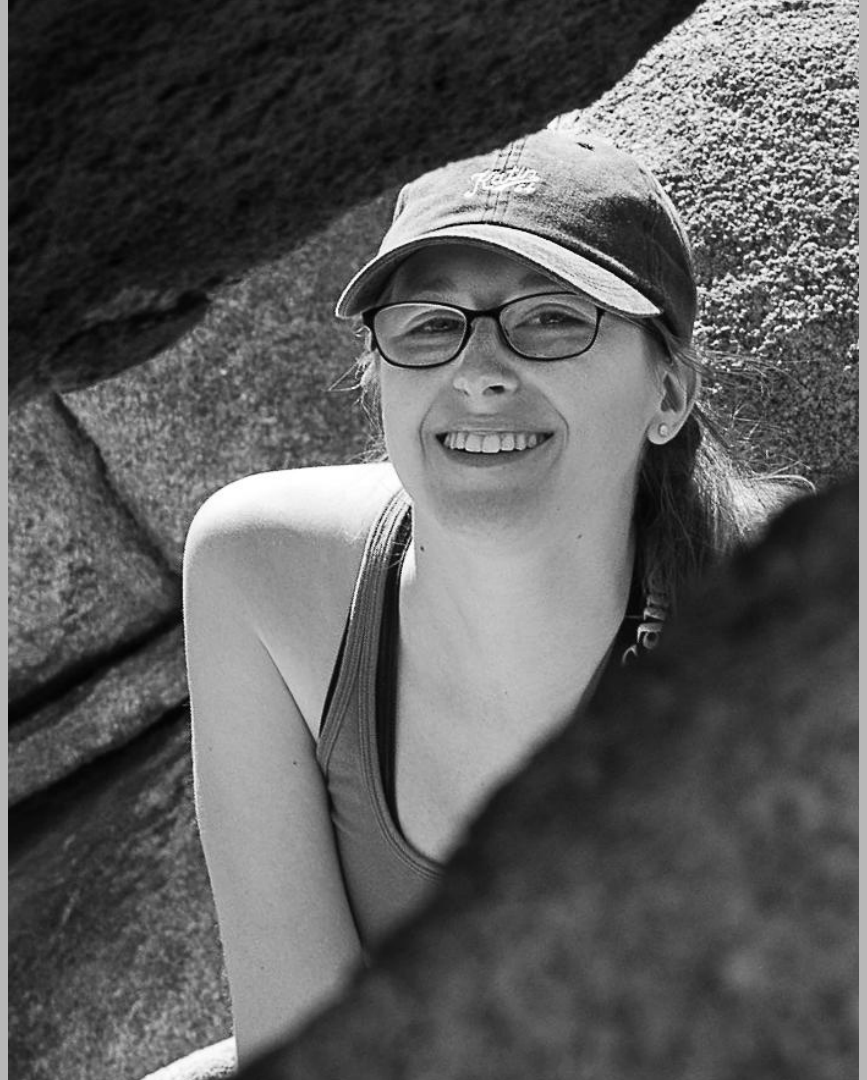
1/500 f8 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: 18.0-105.0 mm f/3.5-5.6

Paige

Rocks

1/250 f18 iso1250
Flash: No
Lens: 24.0-120.0 mm f/4.0

Breanna



Structures

1/160 f7.1 iso280
Flash: Yes
Lens: 24.0-120.0 mm f/4.0

Lauren & Eric

Focus:
Eyes, eyes, eyes

The most compelling images focus on the eyes.

Make sure that the eyes tack sharp.

Of course there are exceptions to this.

1/400 f1.8 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: 85 mm f/1.8

Hannah

1/100 f4.5 iso100
Flash: No
Lens: 24.0-120.0 mm f/4.0

Eric & Lauren

1/320 f3.5 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: Zeiss 50 mm 1.4

Chelsea

1/50 f11 iso400
Flash: Yes
Lens: 85 mm f/1.8

Kiernan

Post-Processing
K. I. S. S.

KEEP IT SIMPLE, STUPID!

Less is better.

- Adjust White balance
- Sharpen eyes
- Soften Skin (slightly, if needed)
- Reduced ruddy skin tones
- Whiten Teeth
- Remove blemishes (zits, cuts, bruises)

Convert to B&W!

1/160 f2.5 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: 85 mm f/1.8

Sharpen eyes
Soften Skin
Reduced ruddy skin tones

Ray

1/160 f5 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: 50 mm f/1.8

Adjust White Balance
Whiten Teeth
Sharpen Eyes

Bill

1/800 f3.5 iso800
Flash: No
Lens: Zeiss 50 mm 1.4

Remove Blemishes
Smooth Skin
Sharpen Eyes
Adjust exposure

Tillie

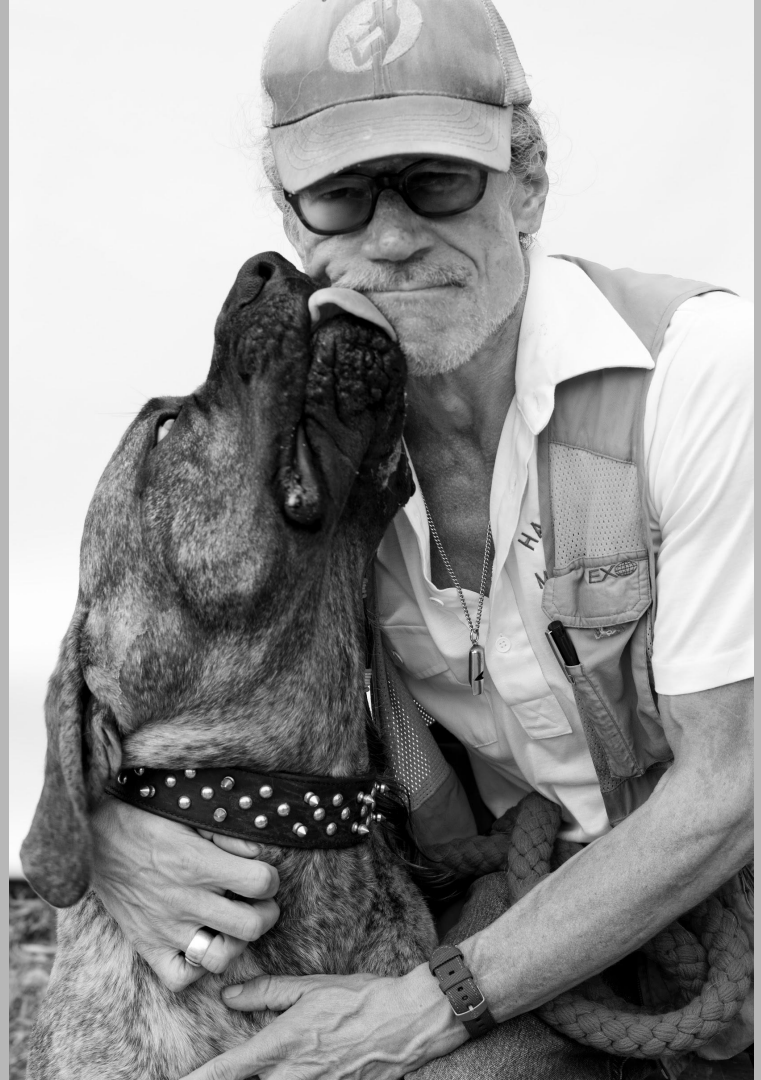
Convert to Black & White

The Final Portrait

The best portraits capture any or all of the following:

- Emotion or Personality
- A special moment
- Great Light
- Great Composition

1/200 f6.3 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: Zeiss 50mm f1.4

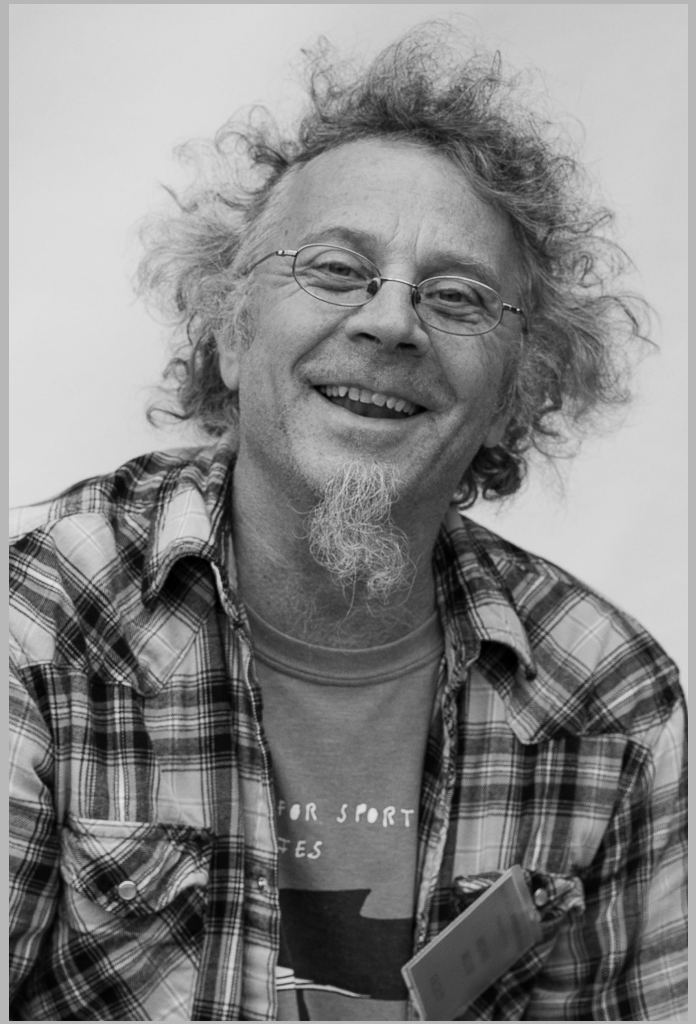


Nate & Odin

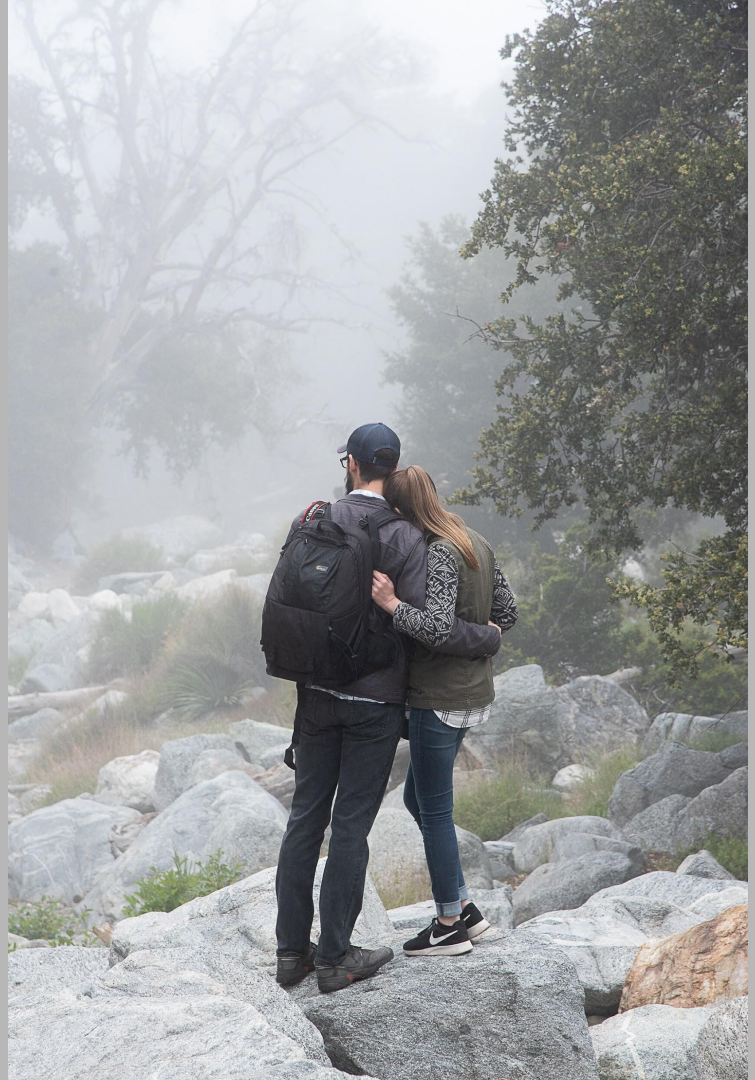
1/250 f9 iso400
Flash: Yes
Lens: 85 mm f1.8

Anne

1/320 f6.3 iso400
Flash: No
Lens: Zeiss 50mm f1.4



Michael



1/200 f9 iso1000
Flash: No
Lens: 24.0-120.0 mm
f/4.0

Ted & Bre

“There are always two people in every picture: the photographer and the viewer.”

“You don’t make a photograph just with a camera. You bring to the act of photography all the pictures you have seen, the books you have read, the music you have heard, the people you have loved.”

— Ansel Adams

VA Photography