

PRO-CORNER: Greg Raymond

J. Gregory Raymond bought his first camera, a Nikon FE 35mm some camera 26 years ago, hoping to send photos back home to friends and family that chronicled both his overseas teaching job and his subsequent travels. His overseas work and his "Polynesian lifestyle" never did come full circle Raymond never put his camera down completely and began shooting locally. Over a short period of time - coupled by countless errors, novice stumbling and uncertainty, Raymond taught himself the finer nuances of working camera and how to print photos. Greg went to work professionally with Gannett Newspapers in White Plains, NY and stayed as a staff photographer for 6 years. Raymond has been in business for some 20 years and his images have graced dozens of newspapers, magazines, annual reports, and sports leagues and books. He lives in Stamford, CT with his wife Priscilla, son Sam, 16, and daughter Jennifer, 14. His dog, Oliver, likes him too.

PBase Magazine: Can you tell us how you became interested in photography?

I actually became interested in photography a lot sooner than I knew. For years when I was in college, I was an English major with the thought of going into teaching and writing. Unknown to me I had a real interest in photography, as I would spend hours in the library going through old LIFE magazines during their hey days of the 30s and 40s. It wasn't until I was going to go into the peace corps, when I actually picked up a camera (through a present my parents had given me), figuring that once I was overseas I would send them pictures. About a month before I was set to travel, I was told that because I had asthma as a kid, I couldn't go. Lo and behold - I went into teaching and writing for a few years. I got into the field professionally after a number of people told me that my "pictures were unbelievable, I should look into it." I never really thought about it until I figured, "Why not?!" I started with a local paper and quickly moved on to a Gannett Suburban Newspapers in White Plains where I was a staff photographer and was there for six years.

PBM: Besides photography, do you take interest in any other forms of art?

Photography is my major form of expression, although as I said, I have written many articles before and I was a writer before I was a photographer. So I've done a mix of both.

PBM: Your profile client list is very impressive. Which was your first paid job in photography?

My first paid job was actually with a newspaper and one of the first things I did as a writer (when I was doing more written work and prose), was to go back to my old kindergarten school and spend

an entire day there with my old teacher and just find out how things have changed twenty years later. I stayed with the class for the entire day and documented what they did. That was really my first "gig" as a photographer and writer, but it was more prose as opposed to purely photography.

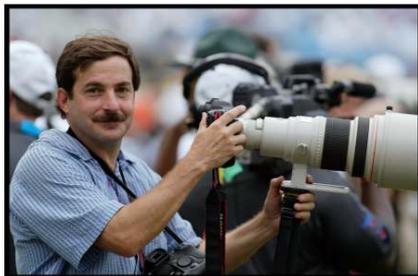


Insane clown posse bride

PBM: Can you tell us who you are currently working for and for which clients?

I'm working on a mix of things right now as I always have been since leaving the newspaper business. I still do work for the larger newspapers (the LA Times, the Gannett corporation, the New York Times), but most of my work these days is a mix between corporations, advertising, professional sports, some PR work, some weddings and similar. Really nothing different than what I did during my newspaper days, except that now I am my own boss and working longer hours.

But it's a great job!



PROFILE

NAME: J. GREGORY RAYMOND

WEBSITE: [HTTP://WWW.JGREGORYRAYMOND.COM/](http://www.jgregoryraymond.com/)

FROM: CONNECTICUT, USA

PHOTOGRAPHY STYLE: PHOTOJOURNALISM

YEARS AS PHOTOGRAPHER: 20+

EQUIPMENT: CANON EOS 1D MARK II ,CANON 20D ,CANON EOS 1D'S ;

ROLLIOFLEX 2 1/4; LENSES 16-35MM 2.8 L; 28-70MM 2.8 L; 70-200MM 2.8 IS L

;300MM 2.8 L USM ; 400MM 2.8 L SERIES II USM; AND MORE....

HIGHLIGHTS:

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If you really want to go into this field and learn hands on, from the street level, there is no better way than learning right next to a pro. You can certainly learn in the classroom, but it's a question living it and learning it vs. reading about it in a class."



Blinded buffalo

PBM: What is your trick to getting these clients and continue getting repeat business ?

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PBM: How important is word of mouth (referrals) in your business ?

Most of my clients are by word of mouth. I never really advertise per se other than banging on doors or occasionally picking up the phone and cold calling. And I never really send out mailers. I tried to take a country doctor approach. That is, I'd rather stay smaller, be entirely hands on, and take complete care of my existing set of clients.

I certainly can go bigger and can take on other apprentices, etcetera, but it is something I always wanted to do: serve my clients needs better and fuller rather than spread myself too thin.

PBM: Bruno Tomasi said that "People like Greg are hard to find." What do you think is your best characteristic as a photographer?



Dominican boy

I think the best characteristic that I have, or any photographer could have, is to always have your eyes wide open. The beauty of this business is there is a certain serendipity factor of not knowing what exactly is going to happen. It's often those happy little instances where all of a sudden everything comes together. That's what I am looking for. A lot of times it happens by just keeping your eyes open and being available to look for other things above and beyond the pre conceived notions you may have had prior to going into a shoot.

PBM: Your photography ranges from special events to portraits to photojournalism to sports – really everything. What is your advice to amateur photographers on the merits of focussing only on one field vs. a varied interest ?

Oh sure, they could focus on one field and concentrate on that fully too. I've just always felt that my real interests are varied and as such I'd like to maintain the same variety and the same ability to go in different directions, be it editorial, advertising, or corporate work.



Man's best friend

I think as a photographer, you have to be a jack of all trades to some degree, not only with being able to change and interact well with your clients, be it corporate people or celebrities, sports figures, but you have to be able to mesh with them and be able to go in different directions. Because often it's not going to go as smoothly as you would like to, nor should it unless you want complete control over the shoot from beginning to end.

I like to keep an open mind so if some little happy accident happens, fine, we shoot it. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. That's the beauty of the business that we are in. It can be an open canvas. Basically every day, something new is going to pop up and every day you have the opportunity to go in different directions and approach photography in different ways.

And sometimes it doesn't work out.

PBM: Has there ever been a time when you were on the job and made a horrible mistake?

Oh, you mean like putting E-6 (slide film chemistry) in C-41 (color negative chemistry)?!* I guess!

Yes, that has happened before, suddenly realizing before you go into a photo shoot that the focusing screen that you put in your F3 was just a little hair off and that the entire wedding you shot was out of focus. And you didn't notice this until you got the developed film back. Yes, that has happened and thankfully only once in my life. It's an eye opener and goes to show you that errors can happen in the best and the worst of circumstances.

* In the older processing days, a Wing Lynch machine took care of all the color films that photojournalists shot that particular day. Ever so often, a staff photographer would forget to change the chemistry in the Wing Lynch, so it didn't match the film type he/she was using and the results were cross processed – film that looked like it had been "polarized." It was not much use, very funky, a black and white print which needed a lot of handiwork and was the best result of this chemical and human mess.



Rainy day Volkswagon

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PBM: So then what did you do in that one instance?

Luckily enough, I had a backup camera, so the entire shoot wasn't ruined. It was certainly compromised a lot greater than I would have liked. The fact that I had a second camera body and could at least salvage half of it left me with at least a few donuts in the box! I had something to give to the client other than my cheapest excuse that I felt terrible. And I did.



Restaurant of no return

PBM: You have shot celebrities like Gene Wilder as well as regular non-celebrity events such as weddings. What are the advantages and disadvantages of both?

When it comes to photographing celebrities or everyday people or people on the street, the main thing is to put the people completely at ease. I'm of the opinion that the best pictures are probably the ones that are not forced - they're very natural, they're very relaxed, nothing contrived about them.

That's probably why I am more of a photojournalist than a portrait specialist. I think it is the photographer's job to put their client at ease and create an environment where it is a give and take. Because ultimately, the people on the other end of my lens are just as important, if not more so, because they are giving their time, their expressions, as well as allowing me to direct them.

PBM: What has been a photo shoot that has really stood out in your mind?

Probably the photo shoots that I enjoy the most are the ones that I learn from, that I can take something away from. That learning could come from going on an airlift with America Cares or working with kids with cancer or going into areas that most people don't see and I'm ignorant to before going in there myself.

So when you go into something like that you have to be sensitive to what you are looking at. You're seeing something that is very moving. You want to tell the story and have the pictures speak for themselves without you sounding off any kind of horn. When I get into such situations, I like to take a step back, use a longer lens, try not to use flash unless it is absolutely necessary, and blend in and become part of the story. The subjects are the story themselves so I don't want to interfere with

that. I want to chronicle what it is that I'm trying to capture.

PBM: That brings us to when you are shooting weddings and Bar/Bat Mitzvahs. What do you do to be unique and really make your photographs aesthetically pleasing as well as document the moment?

It's funny because I have been doing weddings and Bar Mitzvahs for many years now. Originally I used to cringe ever so slightly when doing it, but now I absolutely adore going to these events because it is such a celebration of life. It is such a special time in the bride's and groom's family. It's their day. Where relatives and cousins from all over come together.

And while the actual ceremony itself can vary from one to another, it's the celebration, the coming together, the dancing, the laughing, the uncertainty, the blood, sweat and tears that define the moment. I try to capture it in such a way that I am in the outside looking in, but on the inside looking out. That said, when they are doing a hora dance or other dances, I am usually in there with a 16 to 35 millimeter and have the action happen all around me.



Bridesmaid's dance

PBM: You have been in this business for more than twenty years. How have you seen it change?

The main changes that I see other than the obvious technological changes, is first and foremost because we are now digital. A lot of the news organizations, the magazines, even the advertising houses themselves, have lost their camaraderie around the light table where you would go into a paper or a magazine after a day's assignment and you would meet all the other photographers on deadline.

You would see their work, they would see yours, there would be an exchange of ideas and certainly a real learning process there. Because everybody is working from a laptop, or from home, or transmitting from Starbucks, you don't have that anymore. Everybody, it seems is working independently, so that sharing of ideas, the ability to see other people's work, to ask questions, is certainly not there anymore. From a standpoint of learning photography, from the darkroom basics to burning and dodging to color printing, that's

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PBM: Recently, there has been a lot of trouble with photojournalists using Photoshop. Do you use Photoshop? How do you use it?

I use Photoshop just to sharpen, crop, put the cut line on the images and to clean up the images, per se. If it is a little dark or the color is off, certainly I am going to adjust the color to enhance the image as much as possible, without changing the colors that were originally there to begin with.

I would be doing that anyway if I was printing color itself, or in the darkroom trying to make a print a little bit more "contrasty" or put more of an emphasis on the character and do the old *Missouri Burn* where you would burn the edges of a photo down to enhance the image in the center of the photo. Other than that, there's really not much more difference and if there is, where you are crossing the line or adding things to pictures or changing the integrity of the photo itself, yes, that is where ethics collide right there.



Strike zone, little league style

PBM: Finally, you have been doing this for so long, what still energizes you to get up and do your work?

To be honest with you, it is the uncertainty that each day brings. The beauty of my business, or any photography business, is that you never quite know what's out there and what you are going to do. That could be not knowing what assignments could come by or what the actual assignment is going to be. Sometimes you go in there with a preconceived notion that the assignment is going to be such-and-such and then through whatever changes of the environment or the people in the assignment not allowing you to do what you'd like to do, it changes into something else. You have to be adaptable for that.

The bottom line being: you have to bring something back which is complementary to the people who hire you. You have to bring something to the table, above and beyond what your editors or client wants there because that's what's going to keep the phone ringing and keep you in business in the long run.

PBM: Greg Raymond, thank you so much for your time.

Thank you!



Don't walk

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EXTRA:

Listen to the interview recording [here](#) !

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