

Shoot' your family under the Christmas tree

Did "red eyes" come out in last year's photos? How about those blank spots on your negative that should have been great grandmother? We have all had a treasured photograph not turn out as well as we wished it would. I remember "cutting heads off" and forgetting to remove the lens cap on several occasions. I've heard it said that one learns through their mistakes, which is probably true, but I would still rather have Aunt Jane's eyes blue instead of red and Uncle John's face clear, not blurred.

One of the most overlooked problems that is experienced is the neglect to learn how to hold the camera and the proper way in which to release the shutter. If either one of these are done improperly, the result is a blurry photograph caused by camera movement.

The best way to "hold" a camera is on a tripod which has not been touched for five minutes (to allow it to become steady). This is fine, if you have the time and the tripod.

For most shots, this is unnecessary because the average camera shutter speed of 1/60 of a second is fast enough to compensate for normal body movement, if the camera is held properly.

Several techniques are used to make yourself into a human tripod. For a horizontal shot use your right hand to operate shutter and to hold camera. Lay the camera upon your left hand and use fingers to operate focusing ring and aperture settings. Vertical shots require the same use for the right hand while the left hand supports and grips the side of the camera which is down.

It is not necessary to push, click or punch the shutter release button. It is designed so that a light squeeze will activate the shutter. If not done gently, camera movement will result. Also, after releasing the shutter, do not remove the camera from your eye immediately. Leave it up a moment longer to be sure the shutter has had a chance to close completely.

Now, about that black or dark picture. First, was the lens cap on (sound silly, go look through anyone's photos)? Or did the flash not fire? On those cameras with a separate view-finder, leaving the lens cap on is extremely easy, so always check by inspecting the front of the camera first thing.

As for flashes, regularly check the batteries. Wipe them off and if there is any leakage throw them away immediately as the acid in them is a good way to

ruin a camera quickly. Make sure all contact points are clean and replace the batteries. This should be done with all camera batteries.

Don't throw away used flashbulbs, flashcubes or flip flashes. In bad lighting conditions, they come in handy. Place the flash in the holder for a slower shutter speed. On Kodak 204 Instamatics, the speed changes from 1/60 to 1/40 sec. which allows more time for the light to strike the film.

Red eyes are a problem that only happen with the use of flashes and of those, flashes that are right on the camera along the same angle as the camera lens. The angle of the flash and lens is so close that the film picks up the reflection of the light on the back of the eye, thus red eyes.

Some simple things can be done to avoid this. Change location of the flash in relation to camera by (if possible) removing it from the camera and holding it higher, and pointing it downward toward subject or simply do not have the person looking directly into the camera. Many pocket and instant cameras now sell flash extenders just for this purpose.

Quality is not the only part of photography. Composition (the placement of objects or subject in a picture) is also an important

part. I prefer the candid shot, catching the subject in a normal manner. Subjects which look directly into the camera are not normal. Most people shy away from cameras.

A picture with a person looking straight into the camera will look straight out of the picture and the eyes will seem to follow you around a room.

You can develop an essay around an event through pictures. Christmas is just one of several which are possibilities. You may want to start with shots of gift buying weeks before Christmas.

For more even lighting, place a handkerchief over the flash (only while close up, flashes are good for four to nine feet, two more feet would over-expose the film).

The best way to make sure that the film will turn out is to read the camera's manual. Then take one or two rolls of film in different kinds of light. Have them processed in time to see what looks best. Most of all, become familiar with your camera.

Many other ideas abound—putting house lights up, decorating the tree, hanging stockings, carving the ham or turkey. The fun part is trying to see new ways to photograph the same event. Ever thought of taking one through the tree's rain of someone?

With any individual shot, get close, about two feet for head shots with a fixed lens. Be careful, if your camera has a separate view finder and lens, the angle is enough to cut heads off at times.

Remember to look behind the subject. Is anything coming out of their head? Are glasses reflecting a light or will a flash cause glare on them? Sometimes changing the angle is all that is needed to correct the problem. The idea in the individual photograph is to capture the personality of the subject.

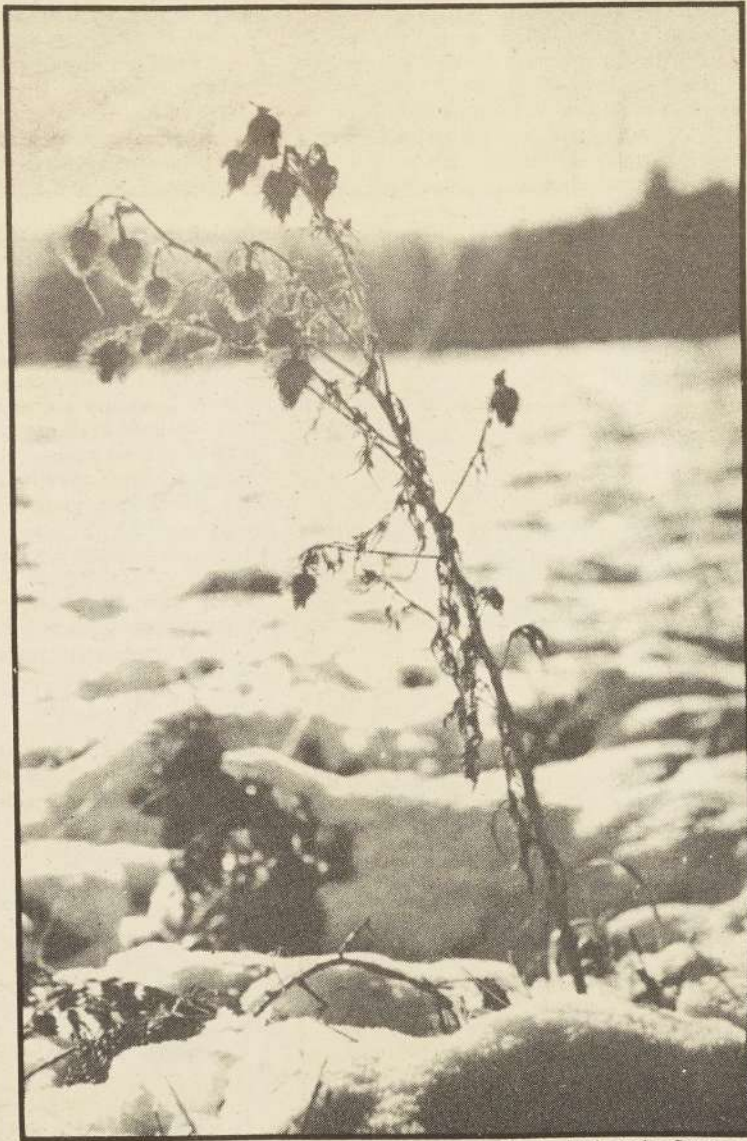
One way to avoid a dull family or group photograph is to break up straight lines. This can be done by staggering tall and short subjects, by using chairs or sitting on the floor.

The Christmas tree can improve a group shot by interrupting a straight line of heads. Try placing people around the tree, standing in back, sitting in front, creating a triangular composition.

The ladder used to place ornaments on tall trees should not be put away. Use it! With it, pictures of the group placing the star on the top of the tree, or putting up the mistletoe can be taken. Another nice shot might be of the youngest being lifted to place the angel on top the tree. A lot of of these shots can be rigged in front of drapes for a plain backdrop.

The best time to capture wide-eyed innocence is early Christmas morning, after Santa Claus has left. Children's faces always have a new surprise behind each and every smile. This is a time when lots of film should be on hand with flashes.

Get down low and shoot up at the child (yes, this means lying on the cold floor, but it will be worth it!)



Photos by Lorraine Stratton

