

Seeing the Light- Liza Case talks with Memphis photographer Jack Kenner

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Liza Case talks with Memphis photographer Jack Kenner

To call Jack Kenner a “pet photographer” would be like calling Jerry Seinfeld a sitcom actor—it’s true, but there is a lot more to the story.

The Memphis native majored in film production in college and then studied photography at the Brooks Institute in Santa Barbara. He worked as a commercial photographer in New York and Miami and also worked with legendary SFX guru Pete Turner on many projects. All along though, he was shooting animals.

“I just like animals more,” says Jack. “I mean to shoot them. I just always wanted to take pictures of animals.”

He shot the eyes of the caged animals in the formerly oppressive Memphis Zoo. His pictures were made into a calendar that helped to finance the zoo’s reinvention into what it is today: a world-class naturalistic sanctuary to more than 3,600 animals. He remains active in his support for the zoo and teaches photo workshops there.

He traveled all over the world taking pictures of endangered species. “I worked for various governments, taking pictures of the endangered species in their country: in Africa, Portugal, New Zealand.”

All of these projects brought him much attention and acclaim and Jack draws the conclusion: “As an artist, you have to show what you love. I loved animals, so I took pictures of animals. If you keep doing what you love, success will come to you.”

His foray into pet photography coincided with his transition from shooting film to digital photography. “I had a dark room all my life and I was resistant to making the change to digital,” says Jack. One day, he woke up with laryngitis. When his voice didn’t come back immediately, he wasn’t able to work because he couldn’t communicate with his human subjects. “I decided to take the time to learn digital photography.” He invested in new equipment and then started shooting his own dogs. “I couldn’t use words to talk to them so I had to learn to communicate with them via energy.”

Eventually his voice returned, but the digital camera and pet portraits stayed; “I learned that I love working with dogs.”

Kenner’s pet portraits aren’t your average “doggy shots.” He says he tries to “capture the art and spirit of the dog.” In too many cases he says, the dogs he meets are neurotic. “We humans have tried to make dogs into babies. Dogs want to be dogs. It’s wonderful when I meet a dog that’s a dog.”

He has photographed many celebrity pets including Steven Segal’s Great Dane Bukka, and Cybil Shepherd’s German Shepherds, Kim and Bella.

He has also photographed working therapy dogs. “I think everyone should go on a trip to a hospital with a therapy dog. It’s amazing what dogs can get us to do: kids that don’t like to read will read to a dog, men who need to walk for physical therapy will walk with a dog.”

He has produced two books of his dog photographs, *Dogs I Have Nosed* and *Dogs I Have Nosed II*. “Animals and dogs do more for us than we realize—from pets, to therapy and rescue. These books are an attempt to bring the art of the dog out into the open and the stories of how they change our everyday lives.” He says he hopes the books will bring awareness of the many roles animals play for us. And mostly he says, he hopes more animals can be saved.

Jack Kenner’s Five Tips for Photographing Your Dog

Go for a Walk

“Exercise him first. Go for a walk and be dominant in the walk, but most importantly, walk together.”

Be Quiet and Observe

“When you get home, release him and then be quiet and watch him. Let him find himself in the space.”

Get on His Level

“ Don’t shoot him from above, get down on the ground and then you will find your shot.”

Know Your Equipment

“Buying a digital camera does not make you a photographer. Take some time to learn your camera. Try to see the light, learn how to see the light.”

Be Patient

“This may take some time. Be prepared to wait until the moment arrives and be ready to capture it when it does.

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—Liza Case

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