



My New Toy

It started out as a garden project. After many years, we still did not have a good idea of what the sun patterns were during the day. Our lot contains a few large oak trees and quite a few loblolly pines that provide a good deal of shade for the house, but they also make the search for the site of the perfect tomato garden very difficult. So the researcher in me was able to convince the gadgeteer in me to get a digital camera.

Although it was supposedly only intended to record sun patterns, I researched the camera on the Internet, looking at everything from submegapixel toys to the monster Nikons. I settled on a Kodak DC4800 because the price after a rebate was better than the competition and because it is possible to select one of three f -stops (2.8, 5.6, and 8) with a knob atop the camera. Now, please understand as much as I love optics, I am an amateur photographer, who does not salivate at the sight of a Canon Rebel or a Nikon. At heart, I am a graphic designer, who wants to capture images anyway he can.

When the camera arrived I immediately went about recording 11 different views of our yard (it's over an acre) each Saturday at 11 a.m., 2 p.m., and 5 p.m. Because the camera came with a 16 MB Compact Flash card and because I tended to take some shots of the current blooms, the record of each foray had to be off-loaded to the computer before the next set of shots because of insufficient memory. As the weeks progressed, this limitation began to irritate me, so I wandered back onto the Net to see what was available. In the end I found a 128 MB Flash card at a reasonable price.

It was a revelation. Having 128 MB memory in the camera is essentially equivalent to being given an endless supply of film. The camera can take more than 250 frames before you have to download the images to the computer. All of a sudden the camera was no longer a horticultural tool, but my graphic toy. At this point, I began to approach any shot like a fashion photographer, shooting the same scene at the three f -stops and several different angles. Although I now had an abundance of images, they were quickly sorted through and some gems were plucked from my graphic scavenging.

At this time, two events were put on our family calen-

dar. My eldest daughter and youngest son were getting married within two weeks of each other. And I had this long roll of electronic film. The first wedding took place in Atlanta on the Memorial Day weekend and I was ready for it. Altogether, I took 250 frames during the rehearsal, the wedding, the reception, and the post-reception gathering back at the house. Then there was the question: what to do with all this imagery?

For some time I have had a page on a Macintosh web site and posted some of our travel photos there for others in the family. Although I have access to Web sites that would permit me to load my own web pages and the software with which to create them, I have neither the time nor the inclination to do so. The Mac site provides a number of generic layouts, including one of a photo album. You just load the images onto the site and provide captions for the pictures. So, on the Sunday after the wedding and all day Memorial Day I cropped, rebalanced, brightened, and changed contrast on 50 images with Photoshop. (One drawback to the Kodak DC4800 is that its flash has no preflash feature, so I had a fair number of "red eyes" to fix.) The results can be seen at <http://homepage.mac.com/donoshea/>.

The second wedding was celebrated two weeks later in Pittsburgh. By now, I was a digital photography veteran. With the help of a new Titanium Powerbook I managed to take and off-load over 399 frames. Because the trip back to Atlanta included a little decompression time in the form of a drive along the Blue Ridge Parkway, I wasn't able to sort and crop the frames until later in the week. So it took a little longer to get the pictures on the Web. This time I managed to reduce the number of images to about 100. The results can also be seen on the same Web site.

My current project is to print copies of the images on the Web site for an album for each of the couples. Because the resolution for the Web pages is only 72 dpi, while high-quality prints require 1200 dpi, all of the cropping and contrast changes that I did for the Web projects must be done again. Is it worth it? Well, members of our families who could not be at the weddings have been able to see pictures of the events. When we had a reception in Atlanta for my son and his new wife a week after the wedding, I assembled a slide show that we showed on my wife's iMac during the festivities. Finally, I have been

able to rescue pictures that I took with the digital camera that would have been unusable had it been a film camera and I were dependent on the technology of strangers.

I certainly am enjoying the challenge and the opportunities that my new toy has presented me. There are some who bemoan the arrival of all the gadgets in this brave new digital world. But I'm not one of them. Although I have resisted the call of the pager and cell phone and I still haven't a DVD player, I am not a technosnob. For the present, I can lead my life without these devices. But my

recent excursions into digital photography are another matter. They have helped my wife and me to maintain contact with our extended family at a very special time. They have also enabled us to connect with the newly added members of our family. And most of this is related through these images, their capture, and their distribution to this wonderful field in which we work . . . and play.

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