

David Mayes

A conversation with *KANSAS!*
photographers about their lives in photography

I'm a native Kansan and the luckiest guy on the planet. I'm married to an amazing woman, and we have two great kids. Because of their support, I'm a freelance commercial photographer and get to do work I love on my own terms. I grew up in Abilene (go Cowboys!) and went to school at K-State. I worked in the newspaper business for about 15 years and then had the good fortune to serve as the university photographer for my alma mater. I left to hang out my own shingle in 2015. I prefer to be outside whenever possible. I'm an OK cook (the main reason my wife has kept me around) and try (occasionally successfully) not to take myself too seriously.

Where are you from? Where do you live now? How many years have you been in Kansas?

I grew up in Abilene. I live in Manhattan now. I came here to go to school in the late 1980s. I left for about a year after graduating to work but came back. I've lived in Kansas for 46 years.

What was the moment you wanted to be a photographer? How old were you at the time?

I think it was when I was in high school. I worked on the yearbook and newspaper. I had several offers to play football at smaller four-year schools and junior colleges but chose to go to K-State, which had a great reputation for turning out good photographers. I've never regretted that choice.

What was your first camera? What did you like about it?

My parents had a Kodak 110 instamatic when I was little. I liked it because it was the only camera I had access to.

If you had to describe your photographic style in terms of a family tree, who is your "mother," your "father," and your "brother" or "sister"?

There were many great mentors at K-State, but I would say the one person who inspired me most in my formative college years was Jeff Tuttle—a great Kansas photographer. My mother would be Cheryl May (she was the head of media relations

at K-State at the time). She hired me as the university photographer at K-State and gave me a great gift: self-confidence. Brothers and sisters are too many to mention, but I would single out Rod Mikinski. I learned a lot from him when I worked with him at the *Manhattan Mercury*.

What are some uncommon objects that you like to photograph?

I like to photograph bikes. I love everything about them. I love to ride them. I love to work on them. Unfortunately, it's kind of tough to carry a bunch of camera gear on a road bike, so I usually use the cell phone. I heard once that the best camera in the world is the one you have with you. So true.

What's the hardest thing to photograph badly? To photograph well?

I can't speak for anyone else, but I find food difficult to screw up. People can definitely be a challenge.

If you had to describe your photography in terms of a color wheel, where would you fall on it?

Somewhere in the orange/red area. Love shooting at sunrise and sunset.

Tell us about the shot that got away.

Well, it hasn't gotten away completely. There's a power plant in Kansas I want to photograph at night during the middle of winter. It's still there. I just haven't gotten to it yet.

Tell us about your best chance photo taken in Kansas. Where was it? How did it come about?

I'm not very good at being complimentary to my own work, but there is one picture that sticks in my mind. I was driving some back roads in western Kansas last year near Scott City and noticed a hawk flying along carrying a packrat it had just caught. I was lucky enough to get a few pictures before it was gone. I love the color (sunset again ...) and the grace of the hawk in flight and the circle of life.

Draw a map of Kansas and pinpoint on it three locations that have significance for you or your career.

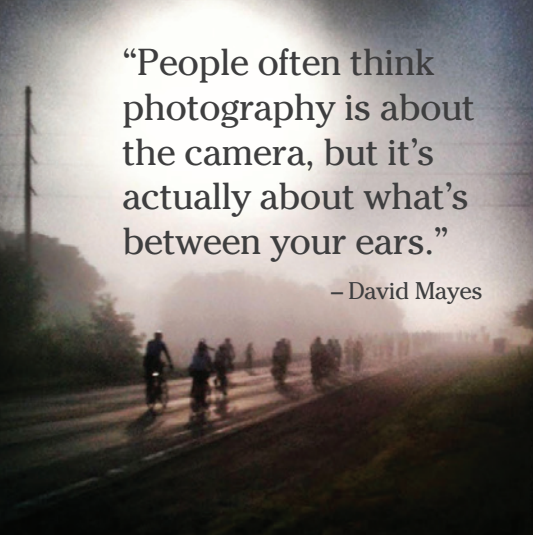
Abilene. It's where I grew up and started playing with a camera.

Manhattan. I went to school at K-State, and that's really where I got my start at the *Collegian* newspaper and then later worked at the *Manhattan Mercury* and K-State.

Hutchinson. That was my first daily newspaper job out of college. I had worked briefly at a weekly paper in Lake Tahoe. It only took me three months to realize I belonged in Kansas. But I'm glad I tried it.

Who would you name as an "Honorary Kansan" for their photography? Why?

Michael Forsberg of Nebraska. He's a self-described conservation photographer. I never look at his photos without being absolutely stunned. **KM**



"People often think photography is about the camera, but it's actually about what's between your ears."

— David Mayes

Justin Lister

A conversation with *KANSAS!* photographers about their lives in photography

Justin Lister is an internationally published portrait photographer based in Kansas. He shoots weddings as well as commercial and editorial projects. Some of Lister's work can be found on page 40 as part of the Chisholm Trail feature.

Where are you from? Where do you live now? How many years have you been in Kansas?

I spent the first half of my life in Monterey, California, but I have lived in Kansas for 15 years.

What was the moment you wanted to become a photographer? How old were you at the time?

I always loved photography as a hobby, but after a major health crisis where I had to get a kidney transplant due to an undiagnosed genetic disorder, I decided life was too short to not pursue your dreams. That's when I got serious and started my business.

What was your first camera? What did you like about it?

Canon Rebel. I liked the autofocus and the cheap price.

If you had to describe your photographic style in terms of a family tree, who is your "mother," your "father," and your "brother" or "sister."

Mother Annie Leibovitz (Famous celebrity and fashion photog)

Father Erik Almas (Commercial photographer in San Francisco)

Brother Tom Hoops (Inspiring British photog and friend/teacher)

What is the hardest thing to photograph badly? To photograph well?

Kansas sunsets or sunrises are pretty amazing and difficult to photograph badly. Weddings are very challenging to photograph well because of time and location restraints, and of course the stress.

If you had to describe your photography in terms of a color wheel, where would you fall on it?

I would say the colors of dusk or dawn—blue, purple, dark green, grey.

Tell us about the shot that got away.

On a cliff in Ireland, some castle ruins with dramatic clouds as the backdrop. Sometimes you just have to leave the camera behind and experience a place like this rather than photograph it. This memory is reserved for just my wife and me.

What is your favorite Kansas landmark to photograph?

I would say any wheat field in central Kansas at sunrise and sunset is truly inspiring and the closest thing to the feeling I get near the ocean where I grew up in California.

Rank these Kansas icons in terms of your choice of photography subject:

Open skies (Kansas is unique in its wide open, unobstructed view of the sky)

Fields of sunflowers (iconic and beautiful)

Prairie flowers (I don't know their names but they are gorgeous)

Cottonwood trees (lone tree on a prairie is a great shot)

Buffalo herds (McPherson County has its fair share of buffalo to see)

The Kansas River (Pretty nice place especially by the governor's mansion grounds)

Tell us about your best chance photo taken in Kansas. Where was it? How did it come about?

Probably an engagement session I photographed in 2015. There were thick, dark clouds, which don't make for particularly romantic photos. Then the last 10 minutes of day, the sun was below the dark clouds, creating the most amazing light and mood. Orange backlit fields with an almost black sky and some stray raindrops made for a memorable session.

Draw a map of Kansas and pinpoint on it three locations that have significance for you or your career. What are they?

Topeka Interned for Nathan Ham Photography for a short period where he mentored me and encouraged my growth.

McPherson I met my wife when she was working as a pharmacist at Dillon's, and she eventually donated me my new kidney! Amazing woman, needless to say. Men's Bible study at Countryside Covenant Church changed my life, changed my perspective and gave to me a sense of community I haven't felt before.

Wichita I photograph many weddings every year and 90 percent are in the greater Wichita area. My clients and fellow wedding photographers are all an amazing group and have helped my career immensely.

Who would you name as an "Honorary Kansan" for their photography? Why?

Scott Stebner. He currently lives in Kansas but has a similar path as me, growing up in California. His [photo] series and book on the modern day farmer and rancher are inspiring and relevant to our great state of Kansas. **KM**



PHOTOGRAPHS - Justin Lister

Deborah Walker

A conversation with *KANSAS!* photographers about their lives in photography



Although born in Los Angeles, California, Deborah Walker was raised in Sterling, Kansas. She has spent her adult life split between residing in Southern California and Kansas. She attended a year of intensive vocational training in photography at Kaw Area Vocational-Technical School in Topeka from 1983–84 and has spent years practicing her trade. Besides magazine work, she enjoys working in portraiture, event photography, wall art commissions, creating conceptual photos and CD covers. She is passionate about street photography, especially photographing displaced or oppressed subjects in a manner that uplifts and encourages. Her most recent exhibit was a well-received compilation of psychologically-themed self-portraits illustrating poems, which were displayed alongside one another, and is pursuing publication of the work.

Where do you live now? How many years have you been in Kansas?
I am currently living in Hutchinson, and have been since 2002, but I have lived my adult life back and forth between California and Kansas.

What was the moment you wanted to become a photographer? How old were you at the time?
Honestly, I was so young that I can't remember specifically. Probably 9 or 10. I first fell in love taking pictures at Girl Scout camp (Camp Turkey Creek in Coats, Kansas). By 5th grade I was taking my camera to school and getting shots of classmates. I lose myself in photography. Taking pictures is the only time I'm not self-monitoring and am fully focused outside of myself.

What was your first camera? What did you like about it?
I'm guessing it was the Kodak Instamatic x-15f... perfect for a kid, likely to drop or bang it... but my first SLR camera was the Canon AE-1 Program. I love that it served me flawlessly (with zero repairs) from the time I started vo-tech in 1983 until 2006 when I got my first DSLR.

What are some uncommon objects that you like to photograph?
I can't think of any uncommon objects... landscapes, storms, skies and parts of flowers, close up... none are that unusual. I do take self-portraits as a creative outlet and to illustrate poems I've written. They were on exhibit in 2016 and February through March of 2017 in an exhibit titled "Captive Butterfly: Psychological Defenses and Releasing the Lies That Bind." Due to the positive response, I'm looking into the possibility of publication. Also I like to photograph the homeless in a way that encourages them and gives them a vision for the future. In Hawaii I photographed a homeless woman named Chat as "The Angel of Kalama Park." She is like a mom to the other homeless, acts as a liaison between other homeless and law enforcement, and has made the park a safer place.

What is the hardest thing to photograph badly? To photograph well?
A sunset is hard to mess up! Low light, backlit objects or locations with mixed color temperature can be challenging. An uptight, camera-shy person can also be difficult! Must get them relaxed.

If you had to describe your photography in terms of a color wheel, where would you fall on it? Deep purple... the darker, high-contrast shots are usually my favorite. But I'm really all over the place...

What is your favorite Kansas landmark to photograph?
I need to get out and travel to some of the landmarks. I'd especially like to photograph Castle Rock Badlands. I love to photograph old barns—there's one I have in all four seasons. And I have photographed the Cosmosphere.

Draw a map of Kansas, and pinpoint on it three locations that have significance for you or your career. What are they?
Topeka! I received my photography certificate from Kaw Area Vo-Tech. Coats, Kansas at Turkey Creek Girl Scout Camp. It was there I fell in love with taking photographs. Hutchinson! It was photographing for *Hutchinson Magazine* that propelled me into my photography career.

Who would you name as an "Honorary Kansan" for their photography? Why?
Dave McKane of Dublin, Ireland... he loves Kansas and visits frequently offering photography workshops. Besides photographing "Ghost Houses of the Plains," he has captured many other aspects of our state when here.

Fill in the blanks:
A good photographer knows when to use the flash... and to never over-expose!
Three things I'll never tire of photographing are people, landscapes, and city life/urban areas.

The motto of a good Kansas photographer should always be Ad Astra Per wind/rain/hail/sleet/snow/ tornados & heat!!

If you can't photograph something nice, then by all means photograph it anyway! **KM**



PHOTOGRAPHS Deborah Walker