

Photography in the Valley

A periodical for and about members of the
Shenandoah Photographic Society

Volume 1, Issue 3

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Photography and Adventure --

The Wandering Wilsons

This issue brings us the story of Ryan and Kristin Wilson, two names well known to members of the Society for their outstanding photography. Kristin deploys a similar level of writing to bring us the story of their great leap into the life of photography.

Solution in search of a problem?

This is the third issue of a rather irregularly spaced newsletter intended to inform and celebrate members of the Shenandoah Photographic Society. The issue is given over to the leap of artistic and professional faith taken by the Wilsons. Read on for an inspiring story.

The third issue is also a good time to ask a question: Is a long-form, written newsletter a solution in search of a problem?

The Shenandoah Photographic Society is, after, very well fixed for communication without it. The society has an excellent process for bringing expertise and information to members via live Zoom talks. And if you missed one of those, the society has its own Youtube channel, for goodness sake.

The society has a monthly competition that is well managed and rewarding. The results are announced at the monthly Zoom meetings. Those monthly meetings offer opportunities for discussion and sharing of techniques. It's true that Zoom lacks the social elements found in physical meetings, but it also lacks communicable disease. Other activities might replace the social aspect.

So, what are your thoughts about a newsletter? Could it serve other purposes and focus on other content or quietly pass?

Drop me a line at the email address at right if you have a thought.

Vernon Guidry

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Adventure Begins When Plans End

Meet The Wandering Wilsons!

By Kristin Wilson

We are Ryan and Kristin (and Joanie Stubbs the Adventure Dog), and we are The Wandering Wilsons. We are nature photographers, which means we spend a lot of time in the wild, and we strategically photograph our world - from landscapes, to flora and fauna, to weather and the cosmos. Ryan's photography niche is lighting and unique perspectives, and he is a mycophile (a lover of mushrooms). I gravitate toward macro-photography, especially flowers and patterns, but I am really just always seeking something new and interesting.

We are also rockhounds, and adventure seekers. We live a life of exploration, art, and creativity. We thrive on challenge, change, and pushing the boundaries of reality. In 2021, we sold (almost) everything, moved into an RV, and left our beloved Appalachia to head west. And I would love to say that we just up and decided it would be fun to become full time travelers, but our story is actually one of opportunity and persistence, and above all else, adaptability.



Strike Valley, Utah

The Catalytic Moment

Let's start from the beginning: In 2018, we took a trip to Utah, and the land spoke to us in deep and profound ways. Utah's drastically varying landscapes are, quite simply, somewhere between stunning and surreal; and the rocks tell beautiful, ancient stories of creation, devastation, rebirth, and water. The vastness of both time

and space radically overhauled our basic sense of who and what we are, and what it is that we value. On a clear fall day, we stood atop a geologic anomaly (a monocline) enjoying the miles of unobstructed views and solitude, and the earth demanded us to contemplate our smallness. In that one shared moment, we knew we had to live here.

A Changing Reality



Shenandoah

When we returned home to Appalachia, we started on our 5-year plan to move to Utah. Ryan went all-in pursuing photography. He created a business (onlyChange Photography) and developed a portfolio, he upgraded to the full-frame Nikon D850 (so I got a new hand-me-down Nikon D7200), he learned and experimented with new photography techniques (especially light painting), and he started winning placements in local exhibits and galleries. I also amped up my photography game, as I learned how to use the features that came with my “new” camera, and my wonderful husband got me/us a 105mm macro lens (Sigma 105mm f/2.8 EX DG HSM). We went to Shenandoah National Park at least once a week to explore and take pictures (I’m talking sunrise to sunset, and sometimes even all night), we learned Photoshop, and we started booking legit Art Shows.

Fast-forward to early 2020, and COVID quickly changed everything. Although the COVID pandemic was certainly devastating, we found numerous unforeseen opportunities in its aftermath. The first one being a stimulus check, with which Ryan was able to purchase a new photography tool - drone. The drone opened a new door for us; Ryan could now capture exquisitely unique perspectives of the landscape, regardless of the terrain or physical accessibility. Our second big opportunity came with the employment regulations included in the COVID relief bill, which allowed certain workers to take a protected leave of absence, and also receive unemployment benefits.



Stauffers Marsh, WV

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With job security, a reliable income, social distance mandates, and no scheduling restrictions, we went into the woods. For 3 months, we wandered and explored and photographed many remote nature preserves and wilderness areas all over Appalachia country. It was our first taste of truly full time exploration and photography...and it tasted better than pumpkin cheesecake.



AT Vermont

After a fall (2020) trip to Maine, we achieved a prized goal: We officially completed at least a mile of the Appalachian Trail in every state that it runs through! So, for 2021, we made a New Year's resolution to start preparing our house to sell. We gave ourselves a realistic timeline to research where we wanted to land in Utah, and to complete the work we would need to do on our house. We also had a few art shows booked later in the year, and we wanted to really develop and test-market our 'Adventure, Art & Rocks' business plan in a familiar community, so we planned on listing our house for sale by April 2022.

It was March (2021), only 3 months into our 15-month plan, and we were in the early stages of studying Utah, when our third great opportunity waltzed in and danced all over that plan. We asked a realtor to tour our property, and help us prioritize projects in order to get our house ready to sell in a year. But after viewing our house and preparing a market analysis for us, she talked to us about the current state of the real estate market – houses were selling within days of listing, sellers were receiving multiple offers, and bidding wars were driving houses way over their listed prices. We were shocked by the actual value of our house, and we knew we had to take advantage of such an absurd sellers market. So we changed our plans, and our 5-year plan would be accomplished in 3.

Time Travel (Turning 2 Years Into 2 Months)

We spent all our free time studying Utah, and decided that we wanted to settle in Price. It is a small coal mining town in the middle of the state, near the Cleveland-Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry at the northern end of the San Rafael Swell, and the only place for over 50 miles with any substantial job opportunities. We knew we weren't ready to launch our own 'Adventure, Art, & Rock' shop, but we realized its potential success in Price, because the town is located within one of the major Grand Circle National Parks road trip routes.

We thought we could find a house to buy in Price contingent upon us selling ours, but the crazy housing market had taken over the entire country, even in the middle of nowhere, Utah. We tried to buy 4 different houses, all within 1-2 days of their listing, and every single offer we made was flat out rejected. As buyers, we felt helpless...but as sellers, we knew we had to make our move before it was too late. So we spent a month working non-stop on our house - repairing, painting, cleaning, packing, staging, and photographing it to sell. We were going to list it without any place for us to go. We were going to get a moving truck and drive to Utah from West Virginia, and figure it out somewhere along the way. Crazy? Probably.

Then we got an amazingly brilliant idea - let's live in an RV! If we sold everything, and didn't have a mortgage or utilities or any other major debts, we wouldn't have to immediately worry about jobs or income. We could explore and photograph all of Utah (and the country) with no pressure to settle until it felt absolutely perfect.

Meanwhile, our listing date arrived and our house was officially for sale. We received 10 (yes 10!) offers on our house in just 4 days. Every single one was over the asking price.

We packed our art gallery, framing and craft supplies, rock collections, and a few favorite pieces of furniture

into cubes that would be shipped and stored in Salt Lake City. Then, just 3 days before we had to be out of our sold house, we bought our motorhome, parked it in our front yard, and moved into our new house on wheels! And the best thing about a house with wheels is that home is wherever you park it.

We made it to Utah! We were so close to the perfect location when we chose Price....we have settled only 60 miles south of there, in Green River. We are nestled on the east side of the San Rafael Swell, in between 3 national parks (Arches, Canyonlands, and Capitol Reef), Goblin Valley State Park, and Lake Powell (Glen Canyon National Recreation Area). And this tiny tourist town has a rural economic development plan that specifically includes curated adventure and photography services.....

It's a work in progress, and we have a backlog of journals that we are still turning into blog posts, but it will soon be our life, our photo gallery, and our online store. In a few months, we hope to be able to share more about creating an adventure photography business and how drastically changing landscapes have influenced us as photographers.

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