

“WHAT WAS YOUR MOST

CRINGE-



© Robert Caputo/Aurora/INStock.com

Whether improvising a shoot with missing equipment or neglecting to hire crowd control, every photographer has to go through a few major mishaps in order to avoid the next few. We asked ten pros to reveal their most painfully embarrassing and immeasurably valuable photography lessons. The one thing they all had in common: success always brings a few blunders; what really matters is how you survive them.

By Wendy Toth

WORTHY

PHOTOGRAPHY LESSON?”

Jqse Villa

www.josevillaphoto.com

Just a few months ago I was shooting a wedding at this amazing resort in Santa Barbara, and I somehow dropped my medium format camera on concrete, completely shattering it. Luckily my assistant brought her medium format as back-up, so I started using hers instead. But then my second camera, a 35mm, stopped working too. I was still trying to direct everyone and capture the right shots, but the entire day was really stressful. So not only am I buying an extra camera to keep with me, but I've learned that you have to be able to adapt very quickly on a shoot, because you're constantly under the gun.

Chad Robert Springer

www.whitedoorphoto.com

When I met with the editor of a magazine who had hired me to photograph an athlete, she showed me examples of what she *didn't* want. I liked the approach because I felt that my hands weren't as tied creatively. Before the shoot, she sent me a simple e-mail that said to remember the examples and to make the image "pop." I shot the athlete in a darkened gym and when I saw the film I was happy to see that there were several shots where the image totally "popped"—the athlete stood out, separated from a dark and moody background. After I submitted the images, the editor e-mailed me saying that she hated the pictures. Time was tight, and she used the images anyway, but now I know that when an editor says something as vague as "pop" it's important to get them to define his or her terms clearly before I start shooting.

Allison Earnest

www.allisonearnestphotography.com

I was doing a public affairs shoot for Boeing where they had me photograph a group of foreign dignitaries. They wanted some images in black and white and some in color, so I brought two

cameras, one loaded with each type of film. Later, I was horrified to find out that I had actually loaded both with black and white! I called Boeing right away, said there had been a "communication" error and requested that some candid shots be taken in color. Luckily, the dignitaries hadn't left the U.S. yet, and I was able to get the shots I needed. But the mishap reminded me always to double-check my film before a shoot.

Simone Bonde

www.simonebonde.com

A Chicago-based charity for the homeless hired me to do a promotional shoot with three White Sox players. I was given five minutes to shoot the players with a crowd of fans. Then, for the following five minutes, I was supposed to shoot the players by themselves. I made it clear to the crowd that they were to exit stage left as soon as their shoot was over, but when it came time for them to leave, they mobbed the players instead. I had to yell until everyone finally moved, and I was left with only three minutes to shoot the players. Now, any time I work with celebrities and the public, I hire security.

Patrick Ross

www.patrickrossphotography.com

At the first location of a five-week trip shooting landscapes, it was raining hard. I was using 4 x 5-inch Fuji Quickload film, which comes in light-tight, sealed pouches. I was also using a Kodak Readyload holder for the film, and although the holder seemed to be functioning, it wasn't as smooth as it might have been. When I got the film back I noticed that some shots weren't exposed, while others were fine. I assumed the rain must have gotten into the holder and messed up the film. If I were in that same situation today—if there was any sign of malfunction or hesitation—I would have an extra holder and would replace the equipment immediately. A backup Readyholder would've cost only \$100, a small amount in comparison to the cost of the trip!

Brian McCordwww.brianmccord.net

While working for a newspaper, I decided to do a photo essay on an upcoming tennis club tournament. I found a talented, super-fast player and started shooting his match. I got a great shot that made the player resemble a clown with the yellow ball frozen mid-air in front of his nose. After the tournament I attempted to converse with the player and get some information for cut-line info. As it turned out, he didn't speak English! Rather than leave empty-handed, I interviewed his opponent, but now I know to do more research on subjects before photographing them—it will help avoid some panic-stricken moments.

Dane Shitagiwww.daneshitagi.com

When I was working for a major lab in New York City we were doing a job for a large client. The shoot itself went well, but afterwards, the bike messenger mistakenly delivered the film to a modeling agency rather than to the lab. The agency, not knowing what it was, opened the box and the film was completely ruined. We had to re-do the entire shoot. I mostly use

lected to check it. Fortunately, as we had predicted, those shots turned out to be too wide for the layout. But the moral of the story is: always check that your equipment is working, regardless of how stressful the situation is.

Cheryl Gottschallwww.gottschallphotography.com

I was hired as a medical photographer at the Scheie Eye Institute in Philadelphia, and I had just started working with a new surgeon. During the first surgery, I was afraid to distract him, so I stayed in the back of the operating room and took shots when I could. When we finished, he said that his one problem with me was that I held back too much. "Because I can't photograph the surgery myself, you are my eyes," he said, explaining that I should just tell him and his staff to get out of the way when I saw a photo opportunity. We worked very closely after that. When I wanted to capture a shot, everyone would step away for a second and then proceed with the operation as if nothing had happened. The surgeon taught me to be more assertive, and now I incorporate that into my commercial and editorial photography. You always have to

"The bike messenger we hired mistakenly delivered the box of film to a modeling agency rather than to the lab. The agency, not knowing what it was, opened the box and the film was completely ruined. We had to re-do the entire shoot."

digital now, which avoids a problem like this, but I've also learned that when it comes deliveries, communication can be a big issue. Stick to messengers you can trust.

Michael Bennettwww.michaelbennett.net

I was in Northern California photographing a model in a landscape setting. Everything was set up. The art director liked the angle, composition and wardrobe; we were just waiting for the perfect light. As soon as it was time, I started shooting like mad. Then the client showed up, late I might add, looked at a Polaroid of the shot and said, "but I thought it would be wider." I heard mumbblings from the art director, and he reluctantly asked me to "go wider." We both knew the person would look tiny, but to appease the client, I threw on my 50mm lens and finished the shoot. After I ran the film I got a call from the lab telling me that six rolls were two stops over. The lens hadn't closed down when it was set and, in the chaos, I neg-

make sure you get the shot you want because you may not be able to get it again.

Joel Ballwww.joelball.net

I was doing an assignment for *National Geographic Kids* that involved four different day trips. I was shooting a young athlete—a double amputee. I got him in several different settings—surfing, running, swimming—and I had saved the final day for a formal portrait in the park where he runs with his dog. I had my heart set on this portrait. I thought, "They might use it for the cover." Then, while setting up the lights, my assistant and I realized we had left my softbox at home. My heart sank. We were able to rig something using white cards, but it wasn't ideal. The editors eventually went for the more candid shots, but it was my biggest lesson. Being on location can be unforgiving, so make absolutely sure you have all of your gear before you set out. 