

Ann Hess

My name is Ann Hess, and I worked with Laird for over 12 years through Northland Pioneer College. I hired Laird to take photos for college publications and our website. I was very impressed the first time I worked with him, and the quality of his photographs was always top-notch. He would arrive in his Subaru, packed full of gear, and spend lots of time setting it up, ensuring he got everything set just right. I would tease him about the number of cases we would carry to the shoot location and how long it took him to get set up and ready to go. He was always VERY proud of his latest equipment purchase that allowed him to take the perfect shot of what I wanted. He had all the bells and whistles! And even though I would tease him about it, his images were always sharp, colorful, and beautifully done. He was great at understanding my vision and turning it into a great photo.

I remember when we first got together, he told me he had a photo published in *National Geographic* magazine! I know that kind of accomplishment is a once-in-a-lifetime achievement and that not just any photographer has that on their resume. It is very impressive, and you have to have the talent to back it up.

He was always willing to go the extra mile. I would dream up a photo idea, and he would work with me to help polish my concept and make it great. He was always thinking about what we were planning to photograph and would email me ideas beforehand to ensure we were on the same page. He would tease me about being very particular and knowing just what I wanted. I admit I was a picky client, but he never complained. He just considered what I asked and then figured out how to make it work, and we both had fun doing it.

Laird was very generous to the college and was always very interested in what we were doing. The nine NPC campuses are very spread out across northeastern Arizona and we had to take photos at many locations each day. Driving an hour to the next campus was just part of the job. He always took that in stride and would come up and get a hotel room and stay a couple of days. He loved to hike and ski and said it gave him a chance to do both. He even donated his time and talent each year to the college by taking photos of the bike riders in our Pedal the Petrified fundraising tour ride. The riders loved the images, and it forced him to hone his "taking photos quickly" skills. You can still see many of those photos on our Pedal the Petrified page on Facebook.

During the time we worked together, I started a college magazine. The cover photo was always the most critical shot, and I would work with Laird to plan what I wanted. His input was vital in attracting the reader's attention and getting them to open and read

the magazine. Those shoots were always the most fun because of the creative freedom, and Laird would work hard to make sure every detail was just right. He even brought his ancient Mac laptop so we could review the photos on-screen in real-time to ensure we both got what we wanted. It is not easy to get people to smile naturally in front of a camera, so I would be the distraction/entertainment while Laird would click away and make adjustments. He was always patient in taking just a few more shots to ensure I got the “look” I wanted. We made a great team, and I know he was very proud of those photos, and he should be; they were great. His photos were beautiful and made you want to learn more about the subject. He really cared about the end result, and it showed. I was lucky to be able to work with him and, through the years, get to know him and call him a friend.

I will miss him, and I will miss working with him. He loved photography and the creative process, and that made my ideas come to life. It is a gift when you get to work with someone who loves the creative process as you do. I will miss teasing him about how long it took him to set up all his many pieces of equipment to ensure he got the best shot—and he understood how it all worked together technically, which is no small feat. I will miss him telling me, “You are a client who knows what you want!” I will miss eating lunch with him, getting to know him as a person, and our mutual love of iced tea. But, most of all, I will miss the friend I made over the years who loved what he did and cared about the people he did it with. I am so glad I got the pleasure of working with him and, most of all, calling him a friend.