

## Geoff Reed

Hi, I'm Geoff Reed, a longtime friend and photographic colleague of Laird.

The other morning, I dedicated a long hike in the Phoenix Mountain Preserve to thinking about Laird, and what he meant to me. The setting was appropriate: warm, dry, and calm—a lot like Laird!

Our friend Pat, who is here today, has referred to Laird as a wonderful gentleman, and that sums him up well—outwardly reserved, he was always warm and friendly toward the many people he connected with in the creative networking groups he cultivated—such as the American Society of Media Photographers, when at the Tuesday morning Meet and Greet, Laird took on the role of Chief Donut Provider. At those meetings, he enjoyed welcoming and encouraging aspiring young photographers.

Laird had a dry sense of humor: quick on the uptake, he would keep a straight face all the while enjoying wordplay and innuendo.

Laird had a calming effect: he spoke softly and knowledgeably, and he loved researching and experimenting with photographic techniques. He could always be counted on to offer a helping hand.

Although he enthusiastically helped me on a number of photoshoots, Laird preferred to work solo on his own photographic assignments. He was confident in his abilities and enjoyed the challenge of solving his own projects, which he viewed as puzzles. "I'm more interested in a simple approach," he would say, "than working with a production team."

Because he insisted on going above-and-beyond in his work, Laird would sometimes need a little help—such as when he ascended 25 feet in a cherry-picker to photograph a large group at an old-folks home, and he needed me on the ground to gently nudge a few of the subjects awake.

Laird did not always follow the rules: on another occasion, he assigned me to operate a smoke machine at a veteran's memorial in order to create just the right mood—even though we did not have authorization. "Better to ask for forgiveness than for permission," Laird said.

Laird's grandfather was a skilled industrial engineer who built beautifully complex scale-model trains. This had a powerful influence on Laird, who loved to photograph

industrial subject matter and machinery. He embraced the idea of being a photographer for small businesses, and answered the phone: “Laird Brown, Small Business Photography.” This meant that he drew the line at certain assignments, and he made this clear when networking: “No weddings, no babies, no pregnant ladies,” was his mantra. Everyone would always laugh.

Although extremely talented and creative in his own right, Laird was very humble about his own considerable accomplishments. He felt more at home providing photographic solutions to his small business clients than tooting his own horn. For example, it was only in passing that he revealed that fresh out of college he had interned at National Geographic—the magazine that every photographer aspires to!—and had a photo published by them: an amazing multiple exposure of a solar eclipse in Moose River, Ontario, Canada.

Naturally, I was excited to learn about Laird’s involvement with National Geographic ... but he downplayed it, saying it had happened a long time ago.

To return to my musings about Laird, during my long hike in the Phoenix Mountain Preserve: On that day, my thoughts turned, as you might expect, to my own mortality. I wondered, what would I, much like Laird, hope to leave behind after the challenges and pleasures and friends and loves—of a life well-lived? And the answer is: a legacy of making beautiful photographs, having a positive influence on people, and making the world a better place in ways big and small.

Laird accomplished all this in his life.

There’s something else he accomplished that he didn’t even know about for over 40 years.

To explain, I have to go back to 1962. In Laird’s Junior year of college, as editor of the yearbook, he created a unique 100-page pull-out section in the style of Life Magazine. Laird never showed it to me, but Kathy recently shared that pull-out section with me, and it is truly an impressive piece of photo-journalism!

Unbeknown to Laird, also in 1962, a 17-year-old high school photographer happened to come across that 100-page pull-out section in the style of Life Magazine. This supplement inspired that young person in a most significant way and set in motion the more than three-decade career of one of National Geographic’s preeminent photographers, Sam Abell.

Although I have not had the privilege of meeting him, I now have the honor to introduce to you that same photographer, on whom Laird had such a positive influence: Sam Abell.

**Kathy's Later Addendum to Geoff's Remembrance:**

I will never forget the day I showed *The Student* to Geoff, who had come over to help me find some photos in Laird's Photoshop computer files. Geoff teaches photography at the college level, plus he teaches photo workshops in Europe during the summers, and has a truly skilled and discerning eye. He slowly turned the pages, letting the images sink in—*these had been done by a college Junior!* He got about halfway through and I finally said, "Pretty remarkable for 1962, right?" He slowly tore himself away from the images and looked up with a rather stunned look on his face and said, "Kathy, you don't get it. These are brave, fresh, vibrant images. They're remarkable *now*." Of course, I was incredibly pleased and impressed. Then I read to Geoff the Remembrance that Sam Abell had recently sent me, and he was beyond astonished: his hero, Sam Abell, singing Laird's praises! He could hardly get over it.