

Retirement allows passion for photography to fly high

By [Denny Herzog](#)

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Retirement, the all-knowing “they” say, is when one turns in alarm clocks for no clocks, dress shirts for polo shirts, dress slacks for jeans, wingtips for sneakers, and vocation for avocation. In my case, it meant trading photojournalism for recreational photography.

Many, many years ago, I was an avid photographer. Then came the child-rearing years and most of my images amounted to nothing more than standing various family members in front of various sights on vacation and pushing the button. Or daughter playing volleyball, daughter playing tennis, daughter opening Christmas presents, daughter going to prom, etc. etc. etc. No image I make will ever be more valuable or better than any of those.

A few years ago, though, we became empty-nesters and the nature of my picture-taking changed. It once again became a semi-serious pastime. Until retirement, when, with time no longer an obstacle to anything, it became a passion.

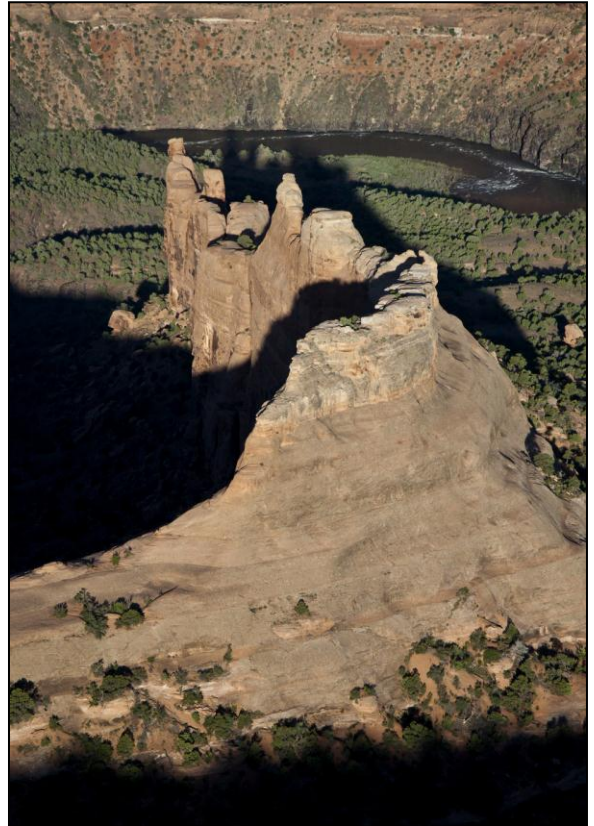
In this community, one can't be serious about photography for long without running into Steve Traudt, a photographer and teacher who, if not a master of the universe, is certainly a master of Photoshop and various other digital photography tools and the occasional bad pun.

When Steve is not making photographs or teaching photography, he is dreaming up new ways to do both.

This year his Big Idea was an aerial photography session. He enlisted the help of Deanna Strand, a pilot extraordinaire with an airplane seemingly built for shooting pictures from the sky. Deanna operates Canyon Air Tours, an arm of Gateway Canyons Resort. Her office is a luxurious, eight-passenger Cessna Caravan, a high-wing airplane with plush leather seats and large windows. For Deanna, Steve, me and five other photographers, it was our platform one morning last week from which to view the changing color of the landscape between, more or less, here and Durango. If you're familiar with Colorado, you know that chunk of real estate is blessed with some of the most stunning mountain scenery in the world.

Deanna put her three decades of mountain flying to good use.

Seeing the Rocky Mountains from 30,000 feet in a commercial airliner is one thing. Hugging the ridgelines and tundra of the San Juan Mountains from 500 feet is another. Having the ability to ask the pilot to raise the wing, say, to get a better shot seldom works on Delta or United. But on Canyon Air Tours, ask for the wing to go up and the wing goes up. Miss something and want to go back and get a second chance at that shot of the new “powdered sugar snow,” as the pilot referred to it, on Mount Wilson? No problem. We'll do another pass.



Her knowledge isn't confined to how to fly an airplane or knowing how to read the air currents in the Rocky Mountains. Those are useful skills when flying a bunch of photographers who want to get as close the ground as possible, where they can practice the first and second rules of photography: Get close and get closer. But, ever wonder why that stand of aspen has turned pink instead of the more customary gold? "It's the iron-oxide in the soil," our pilot tells us. All the more reason to take some more pictures of the pink aspen.

Meanwhile, headsets chatter with suggestions from the master teacher. "Keep your compositions loose. Crop and rotate later." "Check the ISO. Keep it high." "Shutter speed rules." "Just react. Don't over-think it."

Two and half hours after our early morning departure we were back at Grand Junction Regional Airport. I'm not sure about my fellow passengers, but I had taken more than 600 images. I suspect they did likewise. Thank heavens for the world of digital photography, where, unlike film, images are free.

The conversation quickly moved from the experience of the morning to where to go next time. The mountains in winter? Lake Powell and Monument Valley?

Where to go on the next aerial photo excursion remained undecided. But the fact that there will be a next time is without doubt.

It's what retirement is all about, isn't it?

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