

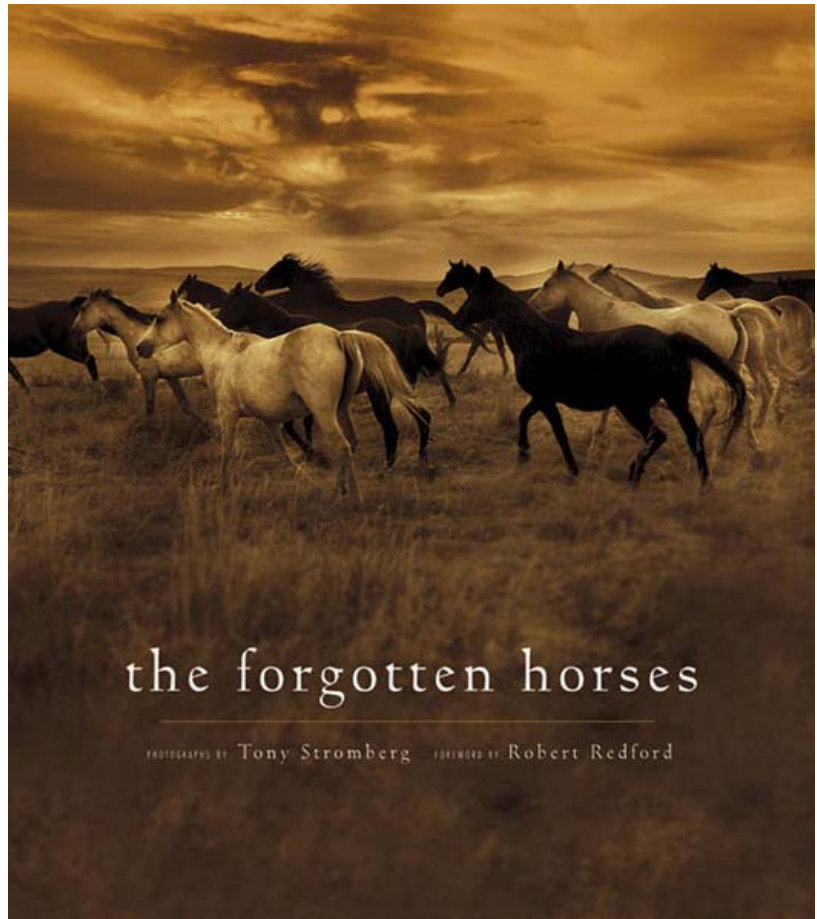
Photographing Wild Horses

Photographs and statement by
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I get asked frequently “*what kind of equipment do you use*”, and it is a question I always cringe at. I honestly do not believe it is the equipment that is primarily responsible for taking a good photo. Not that it doesn’t help, it is just not the *primary* ingredient. Time and time again, I have seen participants arrive for a photography workshop with the most state-of-the-art DSLR (I often drool over the equipment they bring) —and then proceed to ask me if I could tell them how to operate their camera. —I am, after all, the “expert”. Oftentimes they will want an explanation of the difference between a shutter speed and an f-stop as well, which is akin to a novice rider going out and buying the fastest Arabian he can find and then jumping into the saddle.

What I have learned after 25 years of photography, and particularly what I have learned after 10 years of shooting horses, especially the wild variety, is this: The main ingredient in a great photograph is your *relationship* with your subject. Period. Remarkably simple, but something that can take a lifetime to really figure out. And this does not only apply to horses, it applies to people as well... and dogs, and cats, and wild animals, and corporate CEO’s, and just about anything else that lives and breathes.

I learned all of this the hard way, of course. The first time I went out to shoot wild horses in the scorching Nevada desert, I tried using all of my “professional tricks” to get a good shot, which means I tried very hard to “direct” things. Lesson number one: you cannot make anything happen with a wild horse. Not ever. This first time out, I spent hours (days, actually) literally “chasing” horses, thinking (naively) that I would eventually catch up with them. I did not, but I did get 3 flat tires driving back from that trip.... perhaps just to amplify the fact that I was so off the mark.





The same sort of thing happened when I started riding horses. I soon found out that you cannot *make* a horse do what you want... you have to *ask* them. This was quite a concept for me after so many years of “making” a photograph. To further the educational process, I thought “what if I *asked* the horses to participate with me in a photo shoot, like a sort of “dance” with a wild counterpart?”



From that point on, I started to cultivate this concept, and it actually *worked*.

And it has continued to work ever since. Now, when I go out to shoot wild horses on their turf (a figure of speech, since there is usually nothing but rock and dust), I take a different approach. I act like I am an invited guest in a foreign land, and I try to do my best to act according to their code of ethics. I sit and I wait, without expectation... without *wanting*. If I do see horses, and they see me, I go the other direction.



I arouse their curiosity, and they arouse mine. The dance has begun. And once they begin to realize I am not a threat, but possibly one of them, I begin to move around as part of the larger family. I try to be playful, and I always try to “ask” for what I am looking for, usually in visual language because that seems to work best with horses. And I *slow down*. You cannot get a good shot of a wild horse if you are in a hurry.

I realized, after working (playing) with horses for 7 or 8 years, that my work was a sort of “homage” to them, a visual tribute to the many “life lessons” I had learned from them over that span of time. My time photographing horses, particularly in the wild, had become my private time, my sanctuary, my church. It was a time when all of the “push” of my normal work could be put on the shelf, and I could live in “present time”, a place where past and future do not exist... a place where it is quiet enough for souls to listen and speak to each other. This was a place where I did not have to worry about marketing, advertising, networking, or promotion, returning phone calls, balancing the budget, or coordinating with suppliers and labs. It was a time and place when things felt truly natural, in-balance, and “right”.

It should then come as no surprise that when the idea of a book first started to germinate, I did not have to “sell” this growing new body of work in the same way I had grown accustomed to. In fact, it was remarkably effortless. The publisher contacted *me*, which is something almost unheard of in today’s publishing world. And ever since, the doors seem to keep opening. When I started putting together my second book entitled “The Forgotten Horses”, it was clear that the book needed to be produced... not *by* me, but *through* me. I felt I had become the voice of the horse, and through the practice of listening, was allowing their spirit to express itself through my photography. It is truly a co-creative process, not something I could ever think of doing alone. The *book itself* was a reflection of what I had learned from the wild horses.



“The Forgotten Horses” was a deeply nourishing project. It gave me the opportunity to take my 25 years of photographic experience, and focus it on a very worthwhile cause. Portraying the beauty of horses that have been either abandoned or practically forgotten in our country has given me a sense of purpose far greater than photographing merchandise for a catalog. It gave my life *meaning*, and has taught me volumes about the interconnected nature of the world we live in. And the fact that I don’t have to “try” so hard anymore is a testament to the fact that I am finally heading down the right road, although it may be a rocky one at times.

And for those that *really* need to know, I work primarily with a Nikon D2H or a D200. Probably 80% of my work is shot with a Nikon 80-200 F2.8 zoom, a Nikon VR 80-400, or a Nikon 200-400 F4.0 zoom (a recent purchase, and the first “real” lens I have owned).

—And I rarely use a tripod.