



Chapter 1

JOIN THE REVOLUTION!





1-1



1-2

It is a revolution! In 2004, more than a half-million digital cameras were sold. A little photo storage service called Flickr took the online world by storm and signed up more than a half-million subscribers in its first year in business. Oh, it's very exciting. It's every good television channel, every good movie, every good book of pictures, and every good magazine all rolled into one. "It" is called photo blogging, and I believe it is not only one of the most compelling forms of human communication to come along in ages, but one of the most important.

From photography that could properly be considered art to snapshots of the puppy's first bath or the morning dew on your wife's favorite tea rose, the world of photo blogging has it all (Figure 1-1). Sharing your photos is just plain fun, and millions of people across the globe are starting to realize that they don't have to be artists or poets, writers or journalists to be able to speak the universal language of photography.

In fact, you don't even have to be an avid photographer.

Do you own a camera? Have access to a computer and an Internet connection? Then you have what it takes to be a photo blogger, and by the time you close this book, you will know how to make your own photo blog, how to upload pictures to it, and how to make the really cool shots that attract viewers and keep them coming back again and again. If you already have some photography experience, you can join the hundreds of award-winning, photo-blogging photographers and artists out there, some of whom got their big breaks through their photo blogs. Many use their blogs to advance their art careers and showcase their professional work. Some photographers, such as Sam Javanrouh of Daily Dose of Imagery, are asked to show their photography in galleries and at art shows and regularly sell prints from their blogs (Figure 1-2).

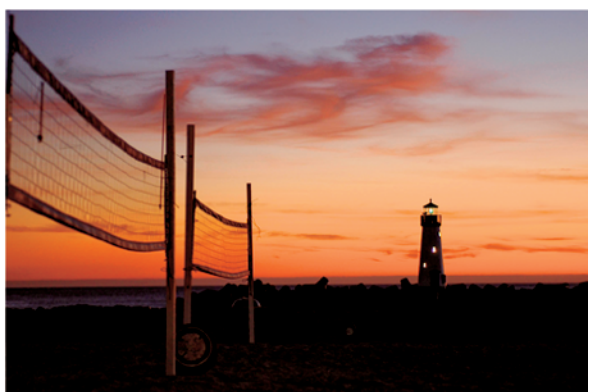
On the surface, the photo blog appears to be the upstart child of the Web log, but in terms of hierarchical human response, the photo blog could be rightfully considered the parent. Our visual senses are developed well before our speech



capability, and spoken language is a construct that is not universal in delivery or comprehension. In other words, we don't all speak the same one.

Pictures, on the other hand, are the common ground with which every one of us, from Baja to Vancouver, can identify. A "red boat" might be any number of things in any number of languages, but "red" and

"boat" are universal ideas, and a photograph of a red boat requires no translation or even context for it to be appreciated for precisely what it is. Similarly, the word "California" conjures up a certain sort of mental image which may or may not be the same as the 6 photographs tagged with the word "California" in Figure 1-3, which I located in just a few seconds with a simple search.



1-3



There is a universal language and a means with which to speak it, a method with which to disseminate it. The universal language is photography, and the means to speak it is the photo blog. The Internet spreads these modern, personal anthologies, and people around the world are sharing wordless stories and textless information. You can see for yourself through the eyes of

everyday people what it's like in Capri this time of year (Figure 1-4) or whether the wildflowers are blooming in Greece (Figure 1-5). It is nothing short of a communications revolution. And people are joining in droves, anxious to share, to see, to be part of the community ... part of the revolution.



1-4



1-5

WHAT'S A BLOG?

On January 3, 1995, Carolyn Burke, a woman who was involved with Project Gutenberg (distributing the literary classics as electronic texts) started a personal website. On it she wrote about her daily life. Her observations and her ruminations made for interesting reading, and she gathered an audience. Soon others became enamored of the concept, and personal websites called online journals began popping up all over the Internet.

The members of the population that wanted to publish and talk and share information but did not want to share their personal, intimate lives started a similar revolution, and the Web log was born. Quickly thereafter, these pages, usually full of links and narrative and often specializing in a topic like politics or technology, came to be called blogs, and they started springing up all over the Internet. In 1997, for example, Dave Winer started Scripting News. One of the longest-running blogs on the Internet, it is still published today in a format very similar to the original.

WHAT'S A PHOTO BLOG?

In the late 1990s, digital cameras became affordable and widely available, and we started seeing photographs popping up here and there, both in online journals and on blogs. At first they were small, grainy snapshots of family outings on online journal pages. Others were more journalistic in nature, such as those that bloggers tended to use to illustrate their written points — taken with single- and then dual-megapixel cameras. As the journal writers had done, and then the pundits, so did the photographers: They built their own better mousetrap, and the result is the photo blog.

Dedicated to photography for the love of photography, some of these sites can be, quite literally, mind blowing. In 2004, the staff at Forbes magazine got together to pick the best of the blogs; for the first time since its inception, the photo blog was recognized by the

mainstream press as not only a bona fide category of personal publishing but one in which talented people were participating (see Figure 1-6). Shortly thereafter, the venerable Shutterbug magazine published an article (“Blog, Blog, Blog, Blog, Photoblog — How Photographers Are Making the Internet Work for Them,” January 2005) that paid homage to the photo bloggers and their contribution to the craft of photography. As I said to a newspaper reporter who interviewed me shortly after my site was named by Forbes on that first list, “These are not your grandmother’s photo albums.” And although this is true, they can certainly contain some of your grandmother’s photographs, as Carl Johnson, one of my favorite posters to Flickr, proves time and time again with scanned photographs that he adds regularly to a set he calls “Family Heirlooms” (see Figure 1-7).

There are many ways to define a photo blog. I found no less than 10 definitions while researching, but there seem to be only two common threads woven throughout:

- > The main content is photographs.
- > Entries can be navigated one after the other, in chronological order (a “log”).

There are no rules of content or even quality and, indeed, searching around the Internet will yield hundreds of examples of sites that meet each of the criteria here but have little else in common, such as brownglasses.com (see Figure 1-8) and exposur3.com (see Figure 1-9), both of which are highly respected and well-visited photo blogs. In Chapter 2 you can explore the many different types and styles of blogs that exist or that could be made, but to be a “proper” photo blog, all a site needs is photography as its primary content.

ARE MY PHOTOGRAPHS GOOD ENOUGH?

I get a lot of email through my site, and over the years I have amassed quite a collection of words and thoughts on the topic of photo quality. Though it’s very hard to

Forbes.com < previous | slower | stop | faster | next >

Best Photo Blogs

#1 A Day in the Life of a Photographer
www.a-day-in-the-life-of-a-photographer.com

Presentation: A
Quality: A
Relevance: A
Reputation: A
Overall: A

This is perhaps the most common type of photo blog on the Web, thanks to its unique focus on the everyday life of a photographer. From around the world take everyday life each day for: Brooklyn, N.Y., laments, "Africa." He does have met Bank, "communist lunacy" Wal-Mart gun display in AI shots," he says. "I think it's the mundane aspects of every

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Best Photo Blogs

#3 Ten Years of My Life
www.tenyearsmylife.com

Presentation: A
Quality: A
Relevance: A
Reputation: A
Overall: A

Site proprietor Matt Haughey's Ten Years of My Life in October becoming a bit of a blur. "I'm going faster," he says, "so I wanted a whirlwind is no wonder. He's a San Francisco-based Pyra Labs that is the popular tool used to create now owned by Google. Haughey's massive, 5-year-old public blog every day with shots that thought-provoking, in addition to regularly.

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Best Photo Blogs

#5 Quarlo
www.quarlo.com

Presentation: A
Quality: A
Relevance: A
Reputation: A
Overall: A

Quarlo is one of the few photo blogs out there featuring pictures shot on film. Photographer Todd Gross doesn't update his site daily, but what he lacks in frequency he makes up for with striking images and bold colors. Gross was using a digital camera when he began blogging in March 2001, but he switched to film soon thereafter. "I think you can be more creative with film," he says. "With film, you can get a different look by using different film brands, different speeds and different processing techniques. For me, that keeps it entertaining."

Jamieson decided to start documenting her life as HIV-positive in 1991. She says, she tends to notice the very, very small things, like a broken egg or the way spilled piece of glass. "When someone tells you that you have a disease that may kill you, you tend to look at things differently," she says. "I've noticed that people have responded to the notion that I'm showing them things that they don't notice on an everyday basis."

Photographer Sam Javanmeh finds interesting visual motifs in tableaux large and small around Toronto. He began posting photos to the Web just for his friends, but with the blogging communities Metafilter.com and Photoblogs.org now linked to Daily Dose, he claims 2,000 unique visitors per day. Javanmeh, who is the art director at the visual effects company Optix, which worked on all three of the *Lord of the Rings* films released by Time Warner subsidiary New Line Cinemas, also has an active forum discussing the various photography techniques he uses.

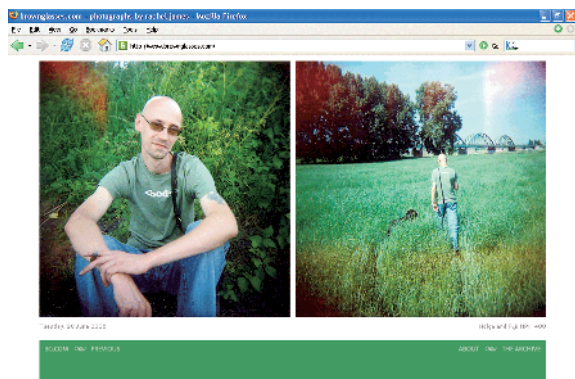
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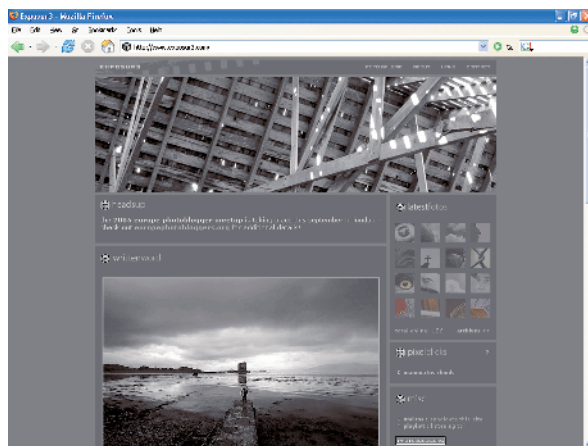


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encapsulate, I would say that the most often expressed notion is that the person's photographs are "not good enough" to publish on the Internet. Though it's equally hard to encapsulate my answers into a single one, I would say that my most common answer is that "of course they are good enough," but if you think they're not, I do not know of a better way to improve them.

I asked several of my friends who put photographs on the Internet to give me examples of their first pictures and the ones they're taking now. From a variety of time frames, months to years, Figure 1-10 shows a few of the examples they gave me and illustrates much better than I can tell you how much of an improvement shooting frequently and having a place to put your photographs can make in your finished results. And what determines "good" anyway? My first posted photograph was a grainy, softly focused set of three pears on a windowsill that I cannot include in this book because it is so tiny in resolution that you'd need a magnifying glass to see it!

It might not have been very good as photographs go, but I loved that picture, and I'd post it today if I could fit it in. It made me feel good to post it on my site, to have people see it, to share that moment with others — even if it was only, at that time, my mother and closest friend who were reading my fledgling blog. I am often accused of being hokey, and I suppose I

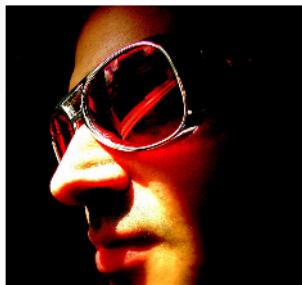


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am, but I honestly believe that storytelling is the most important thing we can do as human beings, and photography is, to my mind, simply a way to tell a story (or part of a story) visually.

I want everyone to have a camera and a photo blog because not only do I want to see all these amazing stories from around the world come to life in front of me, I want you to see them, too. How does your garden grow down there in Knoxville, and how many feet can fit onto a sidewalk in Brooklyn? Doesn't matter if the photograph is grainy, whether the camera is the latest in digital SLR (single lens reflex) technology, a point-and-shoot, or a cellular telephone — most viewers are after the story, not the technical specifications (Figure 1-11).

Are your photographs good enough? I can say, without even looking at them, "Of course they are, and if you think they aren't, I do not know of a better way to improve them." Photography is like virtually any other skill — the more you do it, the better you become. As people come to your blog and look at your images, you will be able to tell, from the number of people who view individual photos and the comments they leave, which images resonate with the viewing public. Whether it's another photographer commenting on a lighting technique or a viewer commenting on the overall appeal of the image, you will learn a great deal from being a part of the blogging community.



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Join the Revolution!

1-10



1-11

DESIGNER TIP

The best way to get comments is to make them on other blogs.

WHO KEEPS PHOTO BLOGS?

There is no short answer to this question, except for the obvious “everyone.” Lawyers, rodeo clowns, and radio announcers keep blogs, as do housewives and students and retired exotic dancers. But we must add to that grandmothers, shoe salespeople, acrobats, and volunteer firefighters. I’ve seen great photography from set designers, graphic artists, fast-food cooks, high school students, and

gym teachers. There are professional photographers and photojournalists and even celebrities who keep photo blogs and many who keep text-based blogs but who regularly post photographs. Recently Wil Wheaton of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* fame posted a photograph to his blog and assured us that the problem was “lighting” and not the need for a shave. The photography on photo blogs ranges from snapshots of Uncle Ben’s retirement party in Plum Coulee to the burlesque of New York. The real answer is “anyone” (Figure 1-12).



Truthfully, I love it all. On my daily list of sites that I visit there are those whose work hangs in galleries and who make their income from selling prints from their blogs and those who post pictures of their teenager's latest unsettling haircut and Fuzzy the cat's recent adventures with Rover the dog. Whether they are polished images from high-end prosumer cameras or snapshots taken with palm-sized digital point-and-shoot cameras, they all perform the same magic — they all tell different chapters of the same universal story.

WHO VISITS PHOTO BLOGS?

There are two basic groups of people that view photo blogs on the Internet. The first group consists of other photographers — those other people like you and me who have cameras and are interested in photography. These people tend to be interested in the technical aspects of the image — what exposure did you use, what camera are you

shooting with, how did you light it, is the grain visible, what did you do to it after you took it? They leave comments about the composition and ask questions about the lighting and sometimes even offer advice on how to improve the exposure or the richness of the color. If they like your work, they may add your blog to their list of links or mention you on one of their blog entries. In either case, a great number of your visitors can come to your photo blog through other photo bloggers who take a shine to your work.

A good example of this dynamic is an experience I had in early 2004. A widely read Hungarian blog called szanalmas took a liking to a particular picture of my daughter (see Figure 1-13) that I had posted to my blog and linked to it. By the end of that day I had more than 3,000 hits (a hit is when someone loads your page into his or her browser) from that link.

Many of those viewers come back time and time again and some have even become regular readers who visit each time I update.

The other way photographs are viewed is by those without cameras or an interest in photography, *per se*, but who are interested in the photographs. They want to see the pictures and the stories they tell. These people don't care what the ISO setting was or whether you manually focused it or whether your camera allows a bulb setting and has removable lenses. They care how the photograph makes them feel, how they connect with it visually. They will leave comments like "wow," "great shot," or "pretty colors" or tell you how or why it resonates with them. If they like your work, they tell their friends and contacts and your blog's name spreads in the best way that it can: personal recommendations.



1-13

WHAT CAN I DO WITH A PHOTO BLOG?

Whether you want to share images of your first child's first year with her grandparents in a far-off land or you want to sell framed prints of your photographic artwork and end up working for National Geographic, the photo blog is the right tool. It can be either a scrapbook or a portfolio, a fun place to create a personal archive, or a springboard for your artistic aspirations such as for Reid Stott of photodude.com, who runs a print gallery from his site (Figure 1-14).

A photo blog enables you to do many things:

- > Share your snapshots with family and friends
- > Showcase your artistic photography
- > Publish a regular e-zine of your club's or group's adventures
- > Display your professional photography and sell your work or your services
- > Create narrative to go with your pictures such as stories, poems, or even haiku
- > Explore and experiment with photography as a hobby, a craft, or a profession



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WHAT DO I NEED TO GET STARTED?

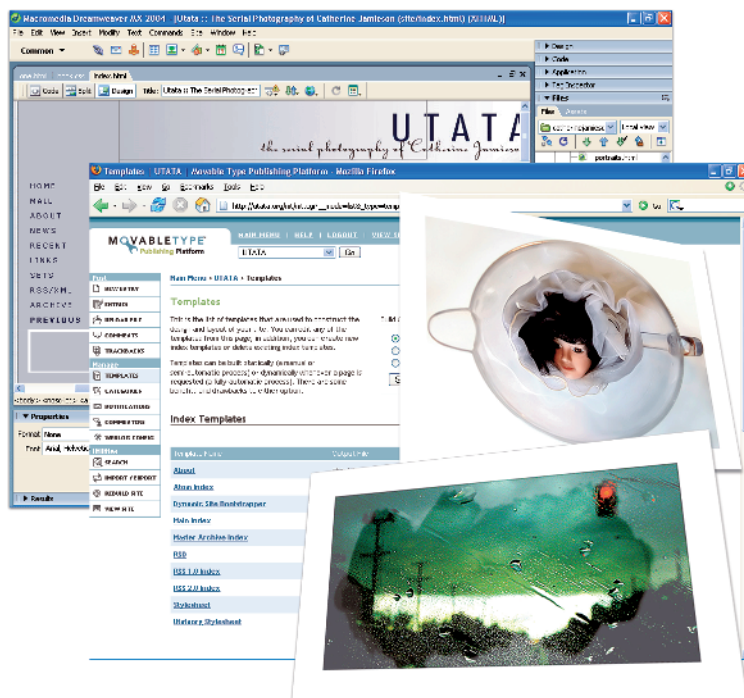
You probably already have everything you need to get started with your photoblog, but just in case, here's a basic checklist:

- > Camera and a basic understanding of how it operates (If you are using a digital camera, you're all set; if you use a film camera, you will also need a scanner.)
- > A computer and an Internet connection
- > Photo-editing software such as Adobe Photoshop, Paintshop Pro, The Gimp, or Picassa
- > A text editor such as Notepad, which comes with Windows; Textedit, which comes with MAC operating systems; or a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editor such as Dreamweaver MX or Front Page

WHAT DO I NEED TO LEARN?

You will be happy to know that if you know how to take photographs and load them onto your computer, if you know how to sign on to the Internet and collect your email, you are more than halfway to a photo blog of your own. The Internet is a very intuitive place, and if you can manage basic navigation, then use the information in this book and the tools from the companion website to build a photo blog. Whether you are a novice and have never published anything to the Internet before or whether you have been doing some other Web project for years and want to make a photo blog now, all the things you need to know are in this book.

There are three basic areas of a photo blog project that need to be solid in order to create a successful blog. You need a functional and attractive design, a reliable method to both publish and publicize your blog, and compelling photographs (Figure 1-15).



DESIGN

The design of a blog is simply the way it appears and functions. This book covers the following related areas:

- > How to choose the right style for your blog's theme and purpose
- > How to construct a well-designed, appealing blog by using an included template or by designing your own unique design based on the template
- > How to efficiently manage your content

PUBLISHING

Publishing refers to the manner in which you deliver your design to the public. This book covers the following related areas:

- > How to set up a home on the Internet, such as your own domain (like my eponymous site, www.catherinejamieson.com) or with a service such as Blogger where you will publish your photo blog

- > How to upload and maintain files on your own server or a photo storage service such as Flickr
- > How to publicize your blog so that people will know where to find it (and why they should go looking)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography, of course, refers to the actual work you put on your blog. This book covers the following related areas:

- > How to decide which of your photographs will appeal to viewers
- > How to use basic photography and digital darkroom techniques to improve existing photographs
- > Ideas and tips for creating new photographs that will attract and keep an audience (Figure 1-16)



FILM, DIGITAL, OR DIGITAL SLR

You can, of course, use your film photographs on a blog. Todd Gross of www.quar1o.com, a multi award winning blog, publishes nothing but film on his much-lauded and celebrated photo blog and Adam Sabola of www.sabola.com frequently posts cross processed slides from his film cameras (Figure 1-17). However, the easiest and quickest way to publish photography to the Internet is with a digital camera.

You don't need any particular sort of digital camera, and indeed, there is an amazingly wide variety of cameras used in photo blogging, from \$19.99 pencams (miniature cameras installed in the ends of actual working pens) to high-end professional camera setups that cost tens of thousands of dollars before a roll of film is bought. I'll tell you a thing I believe absolutely: The camera is irrelevant. A great photographer can make a pen-cam shot look like a Monet, and the worst photographer cannot pry a good shot from even a Hasselblad. Heather Champ, one of the photo-blogging community's most enduring, celebrated, and prolific publishers, sometimes

uses a camera she refers to as a "crapcam," and there are more than a few shots from it in my favorites folder (Figure 1-18).

Your camera needs are dependent upon what you want to do with the finished product. If you want to make prints to store in a photo album at home or to give away, you will need at least a 3-megapixel camera to produce an adequate 5 x 7 print. If you want to use your photographs only for online sharing and display, any size of camera will do. On the other hand, if you wish to sell your photography to the public or to further your career goals in the business of photography with your photo blog, you will need at least a 5-megapixel camera and preferably one with 8 megapixels or more.

I have a 1-megapixel keychain crapcam that I bought at a local discount store for \$9.99, and I carry it around in my jeans pocket. Occasionally I will take a photograph with it and upload it to my Flickr account; often, it is one of these photographs that gets the most attention or garners the most comments from viewers. Once I uploaded a carefully





<<<

Marooned, Off Octavia [Holga] LINK

RECENT THREE



smarter, faster, hotter

I'll be joining **Alexandra Samuel** and **Marnie Webb** on the **Advanced Tools** session at **BlogHer**, July 30 in Santa Clara.



FABULOUS ELSEWHERE

while seated, lead bike, dykes on bikes, pride parade

daily does of imagery, long exposed photographer

UPCOMING

7/7 SFlickr Meet
7/30 BlogHer Conference '05

SEE ALSO

JPG Magazine
The Mirror Project
Bay Area Photologgers

1-18

planned photograph next to one of my crapcam shots, and the little picture of a parking meter taken as I plugged a quarter into it was commented upon more times than the other photograph, which I eventually sold in a gallery show.

Many of my best-viewed photographs are taken with what I call the “pocketcam,” which is a little 4-megapixel point-and-shoot that takes fabulous black-and-whites. Figure 1-19 is actually a photograph I took of the crapcam with the pocketcam, and not only was it viewed frequently, but a little conversation arose around it.

Except for when it comes to producing prints, the size or scope of the camera you have or choose to



1-19

purchase is not the most important factor in the success of your photo blog.

What you choose to do with the camera after you get it out of the box (or plastic bag, as the case may be) is what makes or breaks your photo blog.

WHERE ARE PHOTO BLOGS GOING?

This is like the question you hear on those old black-and-white newsreels. Some news guy with a pointy hat and a bad hairdo asking someone like Elvis or Jerry Lee Lewis, “So, where do you think this rock-and-roll thing is going?” People laughed at Elvis, you know, when he said, “It’s here to stay, man.”

Photography has always been about documentation. Sometimes it is artful and creative, such as one of the portraits I do for clients, and sometimes it is strictly about recording an event or moment accurately, such as some of the photographs sent home from the front of World War II. Either way, it’s always about recording something that is happening, even if you made it happen yourself (Figure 1-20). Analog photography changed our lives by allowing us to see things — the Eiffel Tower and the Sistine Chapel, for example — that we may never be able to see in person. Through the lenses of such masters as Ansel Adams, Man Ray, and



Eve Arnold, we learned that photography can allow us to view not only the real, but sometimes glean a glimpse of the possible, and now and again of what appears as the improbable (Figure 1-21).

Each time we look at a new photograph we learn something, see something we’ve never seen before, catch a glimpse of another way of being and seeing. Without photography there would be no image of the soldiers at Iwo Jima raising the flag, no Dorothea Lange image of migrant workers during the Great Depression, and no Nat Fein’s “Babe Bows Out,” for these are moments that only a photograph could capture with absolute accuracy.

That was back when a good photography setup would cost you what would amount to tens of thousands of today’s dollars and processing was an ongoing cost that few could bear. And if you did not have an agent or a list of clients, all that you got for your trouble was a stack of photographs that faded with time.

Now from the hands of the few and into the hands of the multitudes, photography has made the leap that all the arts do eventually. Digital science has brought photography home to the people, and the people are responding enthusiastically and energetically. They’re buying cameras and camera phones and pencams and snapping pictures at the fisherman’s market in Manila, the burlesque halls of New York, and everything in between. They’re creating grass-roots documentaries that really do alter the way we all see things and understand the world around us. Did you know, for example, that a Javanese spider is the size of a man’s hand (Figure 1-22) or that Wales has not only its own Stonehenge but a slew of interesting castle ruins as well (Figure 1-23)?

By extension, the places we put those photographs, our photo blogs, have already changed the way we live and see the world. Every day millions of people from more than 100 countries visit one or more photo blogs, and though not all of them speak



1-21



1-22



1-23



English, all of them can relate to the photographs. As I learn about Javanese spiders and New York burlesque queens, others learn about prairie sunsets (Figure 1-24) or what you might see in my town on a Sunday cruise night in the summer (Figure 1-25). It is my belief that personal photography made available on the World Wide Web is one of our society's most significant evolutionary achievements. Not only is it gratifying to the photographer to have his work viewed, he



1-24

contributes to the global tapestry of visual documentation and the viewer is enriched in ways that a thousand textbooks could not manage.

Elvis was right about rock-and-roll — it's here to stay. And from the amazing number of people who are putting their photographs online I believe it's a safe prediction to say that photo blogs are here to stay, too.



1-25