

POINTING...

It's not just for the dogs!

By Kaytlyn Heesacker
Nunn, Colorado

My name is Kaytlyn Heesacker, and I am a ten-year-old photographer and dog trainer. I love taking pictures of dog training, testing, and especially hunting with my family. I had a lot of fun with one of my oldest friends, Mark Lance, who was a great teacher of photography. After taking a picture, I would show Mr. Mark the image on my camera. He would compliment my work but then he would perform his “magic” and set me up again, changing my angle slightly, and tell me to shoot the image once more. The photos always turned out better under Mr. Mark’s guidance. Unfortunately, we lost Mr. Mark to cancer in 2022. After that, it took me a while to pick up my camera again. Since losing my mentor, Mr. Mark, I found some new mentors and have been taking lessons with Dana Crego, Sharelle Gonzales, and Alex Augustine, who are all members of our NAVHDA chapter. It has been very fun to hear all their different ideas, techniques, and tools they use. I volunteer with them at the Rocky Mountain NAVHDA tests as a photographer and enjoy spending the day composing shots with each of them.

My first year of photography in 4-H, I took an amazing picture of a Pudelpointer my family had in for train-

ing named Timo. We were getting ready for the Utility duck search; he had just brought my dad a duck and was put on the chain gang while the next dog did their duck search. He was whining, so my mom told me to go stand with him. I told him to be quiet and took a quick picture of him with the water on his face. I was worried because it looked blurry but when we uploaded it to the computer, it turned out great! I entered it as my display photo in the Weld County Fair, and it won Overall Grand Champion. The photo went to State Fair and was Reserve Grand Champion. That experience boosted my confidence to spend more time behind my camera.

Last year my family went on five hunting trips. Each trip was an amazing experience. We went to two different areas in Montana and South Dakota, followed by our final trip to New Mexico. Each trip held its own memories and special moments. Even on the second trip to South Dakota, where it was very cold, and we had to cut that trip short because the camper froze. That was not fun, but the hunting and taking pictures were still worth it! There were so many things to capture with my camera through the hunting season: an almost tipped-over farmhouse, Faith and Laz jumping on each other, my sister with her first Montana rooster, and Heidi running on the ice, to name a few. I enjoyed taking in the scenery and beauty of nature around me by capturing small details, like a green leaf in a bed of dead brown leaves, a broken turtle shell, a church framed in a sunset, and more. All of our NAVHDA friends asked me to pick a favorite hunt and I really couldn’t give an answer because I loved every trip. Any hunting trip with my family, dogs, and camera will hold special moments that make it the best trip ever!

The following are some tips I’ve learned from my mentors and some of the things I like to use myself.

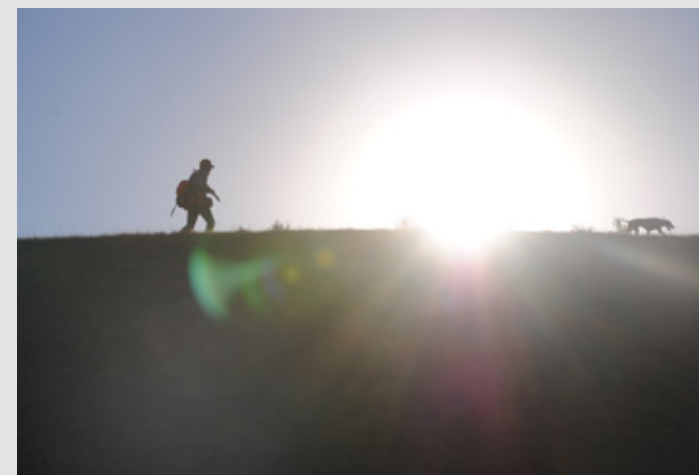


KAYTLYN AND ELSA
DANA CREGO © 2023

Tip #1 Lighting: Makes very good dramatic effects. Sunsets require patience. You must be willing to wait for the right moment in the sunsetting to get the effect you want. Each sunset is unique, which makes them so fun to capture! You never know what colors, shadows, or other elements you will capture until the colors start to build.



Tip #2 Shadows: Sometimes, the sun can be your best friend. If it is right behind your subject, the sun will help provide shadows and texture to your image. A picture with this contrast has a way of allowing the viewer’s imagination to build more connection with the story being captured.





Tip #3 Background vs. Foreground: Clutter can be your enemy at times! When composing a picture, a photographer's goal is to give the eye a focal point. Most often, clutter distracts from the subject and can turn a great shot into an ineffective picture. Yes, cropping can help you remove clutter but removing too much negative space can hurt your shot too. Sometimes the right type of clutter can bring interest and a fresh viewpoint to a composition.



Tip #6 Action Shots: Action Shots are my favorite, and yet they are the most frustrating shots for me to capture. It can be so challenging to get a clean shot and not have blurriness in your subject. Instead of using autofocus, I like to set my focal square so that when I look through my viewfinder, my goal is to get my subject over that square before fully pushing the shutter release. For every clear picture, you will take hundreds of blurry ones. Have a big memory card, patience, and a willingness to delete blurry images when you look at your work on the computer. The great action shots are worth the effort!

Tip#4 Macros: Most cameras have a close-up setting, but to get really good macro shots, a specialty lens for your camera is worth it! I got a macro lens for Christmas, and it is so fun to play with. To be good at macro shots, you need to be inquisitive and willing to look at the ordinary in a different way. To start, find a subject with a lot of texture and detail. Then practice changing your camera angle, where you stand, looking down or up at the detail to capture the image in an interesting way.



Tip #7 Black and Whites: Creating a black-and-white image is easy. All you do is change the color on the computer when editing photos. Not every picture has the potential to be black and white. Contrast and shadow help build good black-and-white photos. Choose images that stir emotions as you look at them. If a color photo makes you feel something like contentment, sadness, or thoughtfulness, it might have the potential to be a good black and white.



Tip #5 Bugs Eye View: Sometimes being small is an advantage and allows you to capture how big nature really is by using your size advantageously. Looking up at objects (like trees or buildings) gives different dimensions, shapes, and interests to an ordinary subject.



Tip #8 Reflections: Hunting and dogs provide a lot of reflection opportunities with all the water around you. Reflections can make a landscape more interesting. It can be challenging to get the right thing reflected in the water and have both the image and reflection clear. Make sure the light source is behind you, and you are above the subject so the water has dimension to capture the reflection.

Tip #10 Panorama: Panoramas are very long pictures. I like to use this for sunsets and landscapes. New Mexico and Montana were my favorite hunting trips to take panoramas because they were so wide and open that I could capture so much landscape around us. It is important to have steady arms so that when you start recording your picture, the camera stays level, and the photo comes out clear.

Tip #9 Rule of 3rds: The Rule of 3rds means you draw 2 horizontal and 2 vertical lines at equal distances across the image, creating a 3x3 grid over the picture. Having your main focus on one of those lines or having your focal point fall in one of the boxes means you created a picture that follows the rule. This creates compositions that are more interesting. When I look at my pictures on the computer, I like to examine interesting shots closer to decide why I like them. Most often, the photo will follow the rule of 3rds. The more I notice that the more my eye and brain naturally start setting up pictures that way. Practice and recognition help me build muscle memory to help set up good shots in the moment.



When you start photography, it will take a long time to get steady and not wiggle your arms to get clear and amazing pictures. When you get a camera, you should start by going on either your porch railing or to a table and put your elbows on it to take shots of sunsets, landscapes, or anything that interests you. Then start to play with lenses, filters, and lighting. After that, start experimenting with different angles to take amazing pictures of nature, everyday life, or even hunting behind your dog with your family or your friends. There are tons of things to take pictures of; all you need to do is look through the viewfinder, POINT, and click! 🐾

