

How did you Learn Photography?

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We all have different stories of how we learned about photography. Many were dependent on where you lived and also what financial resources you could count on. I was living in Mexico City and there was no place you could learn formally about photography, fifty years ago.

That led me to subscribe to a correspondence course by the New York Institute of Photography, and therefore I taught myself. I still have those manuals, which when one looks back upon them today, they really are as poorly written and conceived as my recollection of how hard they were to follow at the time.

The entire process of photography was technically very complicated, the process of receiving by mail the courses was a lengthy one and by no means inexpensive. The acquisition of equipment was a nightmare in an era when the notions of world commerce had not yet taken on the fluidity of our contemporary world. Neither people or merchandise traveled as freely then as it does today. Think of a world of only propeller planes, radio, telegraph, and no Fedex.

I was a young kid who just wanted to see his photographic images not spend countless hours as a chemist, but that was not to be, I had to first spend days chasing chemicals all over town, going by bus to all the various places that sold them, coming home and then mixing them up properly to develop the film which had been hopefully exposed correctly, something not necessarily assured without the aid of a light meter, all of this in the hopes of finally being able to see a first stage of the image.

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The world was not organized to make things simple. The courses took weeks to arrive between one and the next. My English was not too fluent so many things were, aside all the bad pedagogic notions of teaching in those manuals, a problem onto itself. Trying to find the correct translation to Spanish for some of the chemicals or the items described in the manuals was one of the things that befuddled me then. Today I look back upon all that, and I think it was an obstacle course in persistence more than anything to do with the art of photography.

Along rolls 2003 and we have the Internet, and people from all over the world have access today from anyplace they happen to live, to information one could only dream of fifty years ago. But this time and in this instance, the information is being brought to you from Mexico City. No longer are the traditional photographic power centers (New York-Paris-London) the only places from which the flow of information can emanate, it can come from anywhere.

As an interesting aside: if you place in your google.com search engine: "from analog to digital" you will have zonezero come up as number one, out of 1,990,000 searches; if you put "digital photography" it will come up as #10 out of 2,260,000 searches, even ahead of that great stalwart of photography: Kodak. So this tells you something of how the flow of information is changing in this era of the internet. Did I ever believe that we would have the potential to reach out to people all over the world, standing in that very same spot from where I was receiving those New York Institute of Photography correspondence courses fifty years earlier? of course not.

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Enclosed find what we consider to be a quite impressive [list of letters](#) from literally across the planet, both from professors and students alike, making observations about their use of ZoneZero as a teaching tool.

Let me point out, two particular instances of our relationship with such aspects of education. One was the thesis by King Tong Ho, from New Zealand, who asked me to be one of his thesis examiners for his Master of Fine Arts degree at the Auckland University of Technology. We were so impressed with the quality of his work, that we in time turned his work into an exhibition here in ZoneZero, and the document into a PDF that can be downloaded, and it has become one of the most accessed documents.

<http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/king/index.html>

A more recent surprise, along these same lines of a thesis, was by a young Chinese photographer Jia Xiao who sent us his work amidst the SARS epidemic in his city of Nanjing.

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<http://zoneb.com/editorial/june09/june.html> [our forums.](#)