Through The Lens

A guide to digital photography for computer enthusiasts.
After the click of your camera, you're only half done!

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Silhouettes and Vignettes
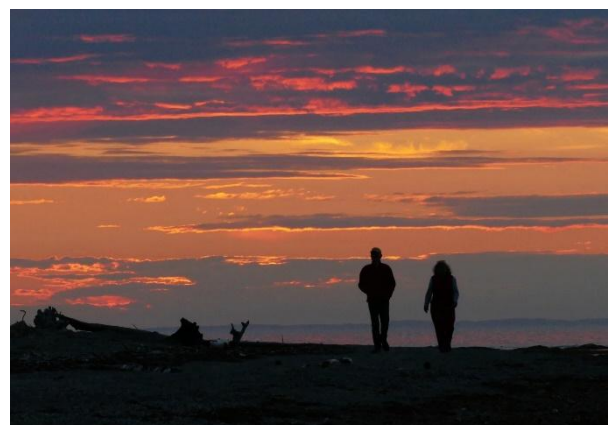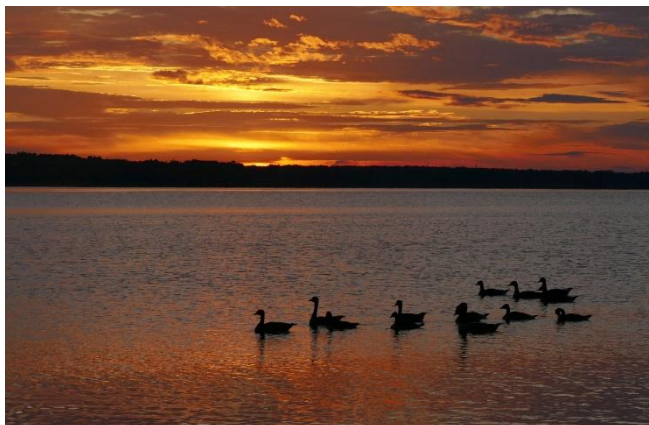*by Lynda Buske*

There are certain situations where the details of an object you are photographing are either not important or indeed could be distracting from what you want your image to say. Perhaps just a general shape or outline is best. In cases like these, you may wish to consider having your object(s) of interest underexposed to form a simple silhouette.

The easiest silhouettes to take are during periods of low light such as dawn and dusk where your camera will automatically underexpose the foreground if you are focused on the sky. I like to add human interest to some sunset scenes but do not want details of their faces or clothing as it detracts from the colourful sky.

Choose objects that are easily recognizable such as human form, birds, boats, rocks, etc. That way the viewer is not squinting or puzzling over what is contained in the image. Clearly, you would not choose a silhouette if you wanted to show a particular bird species or a friend's face.

If you have been unable to achieve a silhouette while shooting, the easiest way to create or intensify one is to darken tones. This can be achieved with photo editing functions such as "darken", "deepen", "shadows" or simply adjusting "exposure". These kinds of adjustments can be made using free photo editing software such as Windows Photos or Photoscape X.
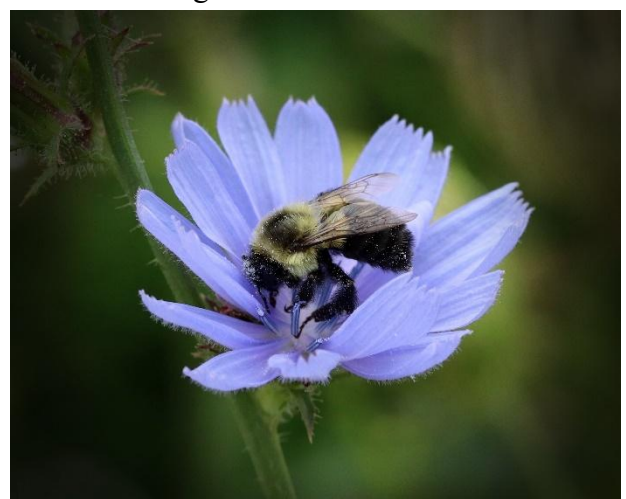
Vignetting can add darker or lighter tonal areas to the border of your photo to create an effect. Dark vignettes are typically used to draw your eye towards the main subject of the image by toning down other areas. This can be very effective with portrait photos. Even with free software programs such as Windows Photos or Photoscape X, the vignette can be adjusted for size and intensity. With more advanced programs, you can control the shape and position as well.

While not as common, using a white vignette can add an ethereal quality or even a halo type effect. It is often used with baby or bridal photos but can also soften busy edges that might be distracting such as tree branches.

Before vignette   After black vignette

Before vignette

After white vignette