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Published in *The Christian Science Monitor*.

837 words.

Gathering Images from a Wandering Journey

My elbows and knees are dusty. Grass seeds stick in my socks and trousers. I have sand in my shoes. And I've barely started. I want clear portraits, and I'm willing to get dirty to get them.

Sand all over me and grass seeds, that isn't too bad. Last summer, I took portraits of small streams running wild down the side of Mount Ireland, in northeastern Oregon, with all their attendant brush, grass, and rocks. By the time I left the mountain, with about 30 photos in my camera, I was wet and muddy, elbows, knees, a broad streak of mud down the front of my shirt, and I'd sat in mud. I had water and mud in my shoes. I had managed to keep my camera out of the mud and water, but I used a branch to help pull myself up from one of my prone shooting positions, and the pitch I got on my hand from the limb smeared onto the camera. The lens stayed clean, and that's the part that counts.

I'm on the Oregon desert now, and the last rain was weeks ago, so no mud. Plenty of dust and sand. Ah, the next portrait, rabbit brush, light green, with yellow flowers, and in front and to one side, a perfect clump of grass, bleached light yellow by the fall of the year, with seeds headed up. Down on my knees isn't low enough, so prone, elbows in the dusty sand, camera in front of my face. I shoot from a low perspective so the photo includes sky, Oregon desert blue, with grey and white clouds above the brush and grass. I stand up, move two feet, and lie down again, stand up and shift a ways to the side and lie down again, and now I have it right, so I press the button.

I do remember saying, in an essay in the Home Forum some time ago, that I didn't want a camera between me and what I'm looking at, and that's still true most of the time. But the publisher bringing out three of my books didn't find pictures I could accept for cover designs, so I bought a digital camera and started gathering images. The publisher designed satisfactory covers that incorporated my images.

Though the project of gathering images for book covers is complete for now, I'm still gathering photos. My website describing my books will need more pictures.

I've walked half a mile. I've left a wandering line of footprints, elbow prints, knee prints, body prints in the sand, and I have forty-two photos in my camera, brush, grasses, very small purple flowers, jumbles of lava rock rising above the Oregon volcanic dirt, sometimes with currant bushes, rabbit brush, and clumps of grass growing from spaces between rocks.

A year ago, I wouldn't have thought I would pay for the publication of my own books, shepherd them through production, gather and edit photos for the books and for the website dedicated to the books, and do most of the work of bringing the books and the website to the attention of readers. But then, I'm not really in control of my plans. I map out a journey, with several goals, but circumstances and a still, small, inner voice changes my plans and sometimes my goals, so my path is often not what I expected it to be.

An unexpected side journey, tributary to my main direction, rises from this project of photographing parts of Oregon. I don't consider names of plants and places terribly important. Names are given by other humans and have no eternal value. Yet, I've learned the names of many birds and trees for the sake of communicating about birds and trees with other people. When I can find books that are efficient for me for this learning process, I'll learn more names of brush, flowers, grass, rocks, dirt itself.

I'm dusty all over, decorated with grass seeds, and I have dust and sand in my shoes. Dusty fingerprints ornament my camera. Dust sticks quite well in the pitch I've carried on the lower right side of the camera since my image gathering on Mount Ireland. The lens is clean.

My tracks across the Oregon desert look like a map of my journey through life, wandering one way and another, an unexpected tributary to one side to investigate a particularly nice clump of rabbit brush with profuse yellow flowers and to look at a large jumble of black rocks. This is a beautiful day on the desert, attended by warm sunshine, dramatic clouds, and soft breezes. I

have some good images in my camera. I'm on a pleasant journey through life, and I have many strong, good memories. I set up tentative goals to head toward. I'm always willing to travel an unexpected direction to capture a particularly good image, for my camera, or more often, for my mind, to find something new to learn, to build good experiences and good memories.