

tripod. In every direction the sunbathers glistened on the sand. He played with his lenses, stretching the world with a wide-angle or compressing it with a telephoto.

The telephoto lens seemed best for the beach since it got you close to the people while allowing you to keep a reassuring distance. He focused on Susan.

She was wearing her headphones; bright orange buttons over ears, looking for all the world like tuning knobs. Jerry zoomed in till her head filled the frame. Her lips were slightly open and her face shimmered with the heat, looking uncertain, like a mirage. But before Jerry could tenderly squeeze the trigger a great glittering aluminum thing crunched into the sand like some spaceship crashing to earth.

Jerry jerked his head up with surprise and annoyance. Cheerful pop music played from the high-tech radio by Susan's head. Standing beside the ghetto-blaster was a heavy-set and deeply tanned young man. He was looking cheerful, talking easily with his hands on his hips, glancing from time to time out at the lake. Susan was sitting up, the tuning knobs gone from her head. Jerry felt uneasy and then ridiculous because he had nothing to feel uneasy about. He put his eye back to the viewfinder.

The long lens neatly framed Susan's face, or at least it did once he had shifted it to take the cheerful man's bronze leg out of the shot. Her eyes were wide and intent, and a curl of blonde hair was wrapped about her finger. This image seemed familiar to him, like an old memory. He ran the camera and the wide eyes, the blonde curl, and the delicate smile were all caught in a magical pattern of silver nitrates and colour dyes.

Triumphant, Jerry swung the tripod and camera onto his shoulder and began to stride towards Susan and the young man. As he came near the man suddenly pointed to the lake.

"That's one of ours coming in now. I have to go meet it." He bent over and grabbed his radio. "See you!" he cried as he dashed away. Susan waved.

"Who was that?" Jerry asked, watching the sprinting figure disappear into the crowds on the beach.

"Oh, that's Todd," replied Susan, "His father owns the boat rental over there." She pointed at a dock at the end of the beach. "Todd checks the boats in and out."

"Oh," said Jerry. "How do you..." But Susan had already replaced the headphones and a distant pop band was tinkling away. Her pale skin seemed to be reddening despite the suntan lotion.

"I think you're burning, Susie." She just smiled and gently bobbed her head in time to the tinkling music. He felt foolish, like he had said hello and been ignored. He turned and left. He had to get ready for that evening anyways.

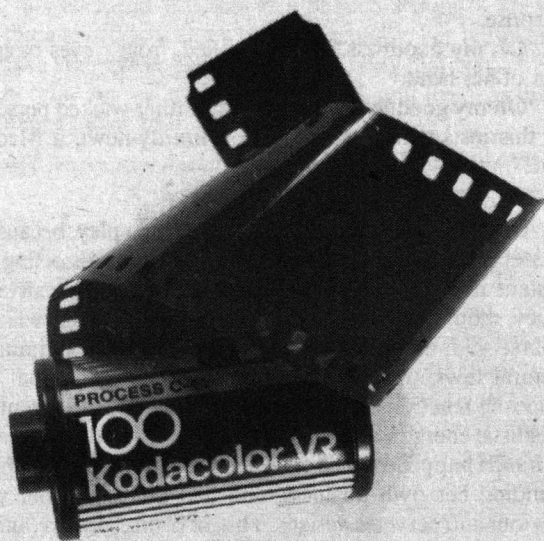


Photo Tim Kubash

Jerry figured that with the extra lamps he would have just enough light. It was not easy to calculate the exposure but he had done experiments with the barbeque pit at home. What made it tricky were the orange filters on the lamps, since they threw his light meter totally off. Still, if he could create the illusion of natural firelight, the effort would be justified. He adjusted the last lamp.

"Colin! Dale! Susan! It's ready!" The two boys ran from the tent and straight to the edge of the blazing firepit. Jerry pulled them back.

"Careful, you'll burn yourselves."

"Where are the hotdog sticks?" asked Colin, who was already rummaging through the food.

"Over there, by the cooler..." Dale, don't eat those raw. Cook them." Dale grabbed a stick from his brother and impaled a wiener.

Susan walked out. Her hair was tied back and she had a cardigan wrapped around her shoulders. Jerry watched her as she settled at the table. She seemed younger, like a teenage girl.

"Do you want a hotdog, Mom?" Colin asked. She laughed.

"Why don't you cook me one?" she said.

"Sure!" Colin, filled with new purpose, ran to get another stick. "I'll do two at once!" he shouted.

Jerry turned on the lamps and a soft orange light filled the area around the firepit. Susan blinked and frowned while the children oo'd with delight. Jerry began to film. Circling the fire he focused and refocused, first on his children and then on his wife. Her staring eyes looked black and mysterious in the flickering firelight. Jerry prayed he had the right exposure. Occasionally he would set the camera on a tripod and attach a cable release to it. Then, sitting on a stump and being careful to stay in the shot, he filmed himself as Colin and Dale ran back and forth feeding him hotdogs.

The session took nearly an hour and a half, as Jerry often paused to reset light or change lenses. When he was finished, or rather when he had run out of film, the children were sleepy and Susan had the fidgets.

"Are you done yet?" she asked, cracking her knuckles. She knew that sound annoyed him.

"Yes, I'm finished." He began to collapse the light stands, being careful not to jar the lamps too much. Jarring shortens their lifespans. Susan stood up and stretched, looking restless not tired.

"I'm going for a walk. Will you get the kids to bed?" Colin and Dale were quietly poking at the fire. Jerry shrugged.

"Sure. I'll just get this equipment away first. Okay?"

"Okay," and she walked from the fire and into the darkness. Jerry packed up the lights and his camera. The kids went to bed with a minimum of the usual fuss. He promised to take them for a hike the next day and that pleased them. Then he sat down at the table and began to clean his lenses. It was fiddly work done with little pieces of tissue and camel-hair brushes but it kept him busy.

When Susan still had not returned after he had done every lens in his case he felt uneasy. He pulled out his Pentax and his film camera and cleaned them but that did not take long. All you can do with a camera is brush it off. He was left sitting at the table, waiting. To kill time he played with the fire, placing a stick in the flame and then waving the glowing tip to make patterns in the black air. A childish game.

After half an hour and half a stick, Susan returned to the fireside.



"Still up?" she said, "You didn't have to wait for me."

"I wasn't tired." Jerry was lying, he felt very weary. "Where did you get to anyways?" he asked.

"Oh, ...I walked to the beach and sat by the lake for awhile. It's beautiful down there." She turned away from the fire and the tip of her cigarette waved in the darkness. Her calm manner was unsettling to Jerry, though he could not think why. It seemed almost a bluff.

"I'm going to bed now. Are you coming?" Jerry said. The cigarette tip twitched.

"In a moment," she answered.

Jerry fiddled with the projector, carefully threading the film.

"Is everybody ready?" he finally asked. The boys, on the couch, cheered. From her chair even Susan waved an agreeable cigarette. With an anxious chatter the projector came to life. Jerry turned up the sound.

A black screen. Then Gershwin music came up on the soundtrack. "Lakeland Vacation" appeared in bold graphic letters. There were waves of music and with every crescendo a new title appeared.

"Starring Susan Gregory" Susan smiled.

"Starring Colin and Dale Gregory" high-pitched cheers and laughter.

"Also Starring Jerry Gregory" Applause.

"A Film by Jerry Gregory" More applause.

Then the music changed to something pastoral. A lone road. A blue Toyota entered the shot and rolled up to the camera, its windshield reflecting sky and trees but obscuring the driver. Slow gentle panning shots of the empty campsite. Waving trees shot from down low. Blue sky. Everything was peaceful.

The music got jazzy. More Gershwin. The tent filled the screen. Cut to the children running about the camp.

"Hey!" Colin yells, "that's me!"

A long shot of Susan walking down the road. Jerry licked his lips and glanced away from the screen to see her reaction. She sat in her chair, her knees drawn up under her chin, glaring at the image.

Shots of the beach: swimmers, water, sand. Dale arches through the air, crashing into the lake.

"Hooray!" Dale cheered, "Remember that dock, Mom?"

"Yes Dale."

"That was great, and I really like that guy's neat radio. remember him? Did you film him, Dad?"

Jerry looked away from the screen, annoyed. "What?" he shouted over the noise of the projector.

"Did you film that guy?"

"What guy?"

"The guy with the radio. He bought me and Colin a coke. He was great, he could sail boats and everything."

"No, I didn't." Jerry did not really remember. Susan's face filled the screen. A close up, long lens, shimmering with heat. She smiled and flirted with someone offscreen. Jerry loved that image, the shimmering was perfect. The framing was perfect. No extraneous details. He glanced at Susan. She was smiling to herself, the same mysterious smile as on the screen. He felt uneasy and looked back. There the tightly edited images of his family flickered and sparkled. It was a campfire more rosy and cheerful than any before. Jerry turned up the volume and leaned back to enjoy. Susan got up and quietly left the darkened room.