

WILLIS PETERSON – Wildlife Photographer

Extended Biography

Willis Peterson's photographic career began when he received a camera for his fourteenth birthday. Now, instead of tramping through the wilds to collect animals for his backyard zoo he began to photograph them, thus the beginning steps of a distinguished career in nature photography had begun.

He grew up in open of the West's most beautiful states, Colorado, where the lure and excitement of the hills and mountains actually started him into this nature work. The land where Peterson Field now stands and the bluffs along Fountain Creek were his to roam and explore and its citizens, the animals and birds, were his to watch and cherish. After receiving his camera the whole world of nature took on a new meaning, for now he could record those intimate scenes.

Peterson says this is his philosophy----to portray life in all its glorious manifestations. His photographs are a blend of art and a naturalist's zeal. "A naturalist's interpretation combined with poetic artistry," says Joseph Stacey, a former editor of Arizona Highways Magazine.

"It's sort of a spiritual thing with educational overtones," Peterson says. "I think that a man should know more about his environment, and if I can create a bit more harmony between man and nature, then I have done well indeed. By using the camera in an artful manner I can contribute to people's knowledge in a small way. And thus, I suppose it's a statement of what I believe to be an ultimate truth. I want to show that there's a glory in every form of nature."

After many years as a photographer and feature writer with the Arizona Republic, Peterson broke away to a fulltime career as a free-lance photographer. Arizona Highways Magazine, National Geographic, Audubon Magazine, Pacific Discovery and Natural History are among the publications that have featured his work. His assignments have taken him to many places including Alaska, India, Ceylon, Central America, Mexico and Baja, California, East Africa and other areas.

Peterson's wildlife and nature photography has gained national and international recognition. He was a contributor to the International Wildlife Photographic Exhibit, produced in

London in 1969 by the Nature Conservancy Council. National Audubon Society features his color prints in their traveling environmental exhibit in 1970, and Eastman Kodak displayed a selection of his prints in their New York City gallery in 1972.

"To emphasize my own philosophy of nature photography I decided to produce my own exhibit, and what better name could it have than The Glory of Nature 's Form? " The first edition was shown at the Heard Museum in Phoenix. Updated editions were later shown at the American Museum of Natural History, Colorado Springs Fine Art Museum, Boston Museum of Science and Scottsdale Center for the Arts and many more.

The Glory of Nature 's Form exhibit proved so popular that 113 images were produced in a coffee table size book called The Glory of Nature's Form published by Beautiful America Publishing Co. in Beaverton, Oregon. Three children's books were also published by Follett Publishing including Unusual Animals of the West, Piti, King of the Woodland and Nature's Lumberjack.

During this time Mr. Peterson was invited to start a Photography Program at Glendale Community College. During his teaching career he received the Arizona Journalism Teacher of the Year Award (Community College), Distinguished Arizona Highways Magazine award and Outstanding Phoenix College Alumni Award. He was chosen Kappa Delta Pi National Educational Honor Society. He has received many photo and writing awards, including several from The Arizona Press Club. Palmer High School in Colorado Springs where he graduated many years ago has inducted him into their Alumni Hall of Fame.

Mr. Peterson's artistic intuition and exceedingly high standards have been a major influence in the teaching of photograph in the Southwest. Adhering to his classical viewpoint, many of his students have become well-known professionals in their own right.

Mr. Peterson was graduated from Arizona State College in 1949 with a Liberal Arts degree with a major in English. In 1968 he received a Master of Arts degree in Educational technology. His research consisted of designing a TV studio for a closed circuit system.