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# Photographing People Using Wireless Lighting Techniques

Featuring **TOM BOL**



© Tom Bol

D700, AF-S NIKKOR 24-70mm f/2.8G ED, 1/160 second, f/9, ISO 200, Manual exposure, Matrix metering, SB-900

Tom Bol didn't just discover people; they were there all the time. It's just that he's recently started to put them in the spotlight.

For a long time his photography was about landscapes and the great outdoors. Then he became involved with adventure sports as both a photographer and a guide, and that's when people became a little more interesting. Then along came wireless flash technology and suddenly people got a whole lot easier to photograph.

Tom admits to being intimidated by flash photography back in the days when it seemed to be all about numbers, formulas and flash meters. That's all changed:

"Now I've got an LCD on my camera and wireless control of my flash units," he says, "and it's let's go explore that." With the [SU-800 Wireless Speedlight Commander](#) and his [SB-800](#) and [SB-900](#) Speedlights, people are no problem. "You can put the flash units where you want them and then stand at the camera and control the output of your flashes." In addition, Tom says that a final piece of the puzzle fell into place thanks to the wide selection of accessories that work so well with Nikon Speedlights, from the color gels and the diffusion dome supplied with every SB-800 and SB-900 to the variety of soft boxes (for additional light diffusion) and snoots (for precise focusing of the light) offered by other companies.

Just about the time Tom started to pick up on the possibilities of flash for people and other outdoor subjects, participants in his workshops began requesting more information on the subject. "Time and again I'd be conducting a landscape workshop and people would be asking, 'What about adding a little bit of flash to this flower?'"

Soon people pictures became an important part of Tom's work—for stock images, for commercial assignments and to illustrate magazine and web articles. Which opened up a whole new area of creativity for him: namely, the ideas and the settings for his people shots, which are light years beyond the standard "go pose by the cactus" shot.

The ideas come from everywhere. "We went to a junkyard," Tom says of the first photo you see here, "and talked the owner into letting us shoot there. We had a friend who had the James Dean, white T-shirt thing going, and then I saw that great sky and thought, I'll shoot the whole scene with an incandescent white balance favoring a cool blue tone, then put warming gels on the lights to warm up the subject and the immediate area. Then the guy asks, "Do you mind if I smoke?' Perfect!"

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“ I can be dramatic with lighting, or playful, or just experiment and dream up ideas. I can be mysterious or puzzling...or anything I want. Light makes it all work. ”

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And once he started dreaming up ideas, it was hard to turn it off. The cemetery shot, for example, came from the location. "It's near my home in Ft. Collins [Colorado]," Tom says, "and I've driven by a zillion times. I used to run through there on long runs, and one day it was foggy and misty and I thought, there's a shot that has to be done here. I thought, a woman, with a flower, visiting someone." Once again, he used the cool white balance/warming gel technique. "To really compress the tombstones I had to use a long lens—the [200-400mm \[AF-S VR Zoom-NIKKOR 200-400mm f/4G IF-ED\]](#) at 400mm."

Sometimes the ideas, and the locations, come from the models. The tango dancers, for instance. "The trick was the location," Tom says. "Buenos Aires is a very busy city, but we ran into this couple in a plaza—they were the real thing, real tango dancers, and they knew of a blocked-off road, and it was a beautiful cobblestone street. We walked over at twilight, got the shots and got out of there. They wanted shots for their portfolio, so it worked out beautifully."

All but four of the photos here were done with SB-800s and SB-900s; the exceptions demanded the power and recycle speed of location strobes. For the majority of his work these days, though, Tom says "you can't beat the simplicity and portability of those SB flash units."

Combining flash technology with people as his subject matter has opened up a whole new area of possibilities for Tom. "I can be dramatic with lighting, or playful, or just experiment and dream up ideas. I can be mysterious or puzzling...or anything I want. Light makes it all work."



Tom Bol has been an NPS member since 1996.

Tom Bol's [website](#) features a variety of his images of people, places and outdoor adventures as well as complete information on his photography workshops.

### *Featuring*

#### **TOM BOL**

Tom Bol is an adventurous and inventive photographer with over 25 years experience shooting editorial, commercial, lifestyle and advertising assignments. He is the author of *Adventure Sports Photography: Creating Dramatic Images in Wild Places*. Examples of his work and information about his workshops can be found at [tombolphoto.com](http://tombolphoto.com).

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