



# MONCTON SUNSETS

A Personal Photographic Project  
By Dan MacDonald

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# THE PROJECT

## THE SKY IS MY CANVAS

*Moncton Sunsets* is a personal photographic project that I undertook between 2013 and 2016.

The project arose from an ***Introduction to Photography*** course I was teaching at the New Brunswick Community College. It was originally intended as a field trip to introduce my students to low-light and long-exposure photography. However, it quickly developed into a personal project of my own.

During the fall of the year, between September and November, I would head to a certain spot on the trail that winds alongside the Petitcodiac River between Moncton and Dieppe. From this location, I could capture the sun as it set behind the city (which it also did earlier in the year, but I preferred working on the project during the autumn months). If the city was my backdrop, the Petitcodiac River was my foreground.

From its title, *Moncton Sunsets* would appear to be about the City of Moncton. That is not the case. The subject is, in fact, the evening sky.

The city's skyline merely serves as a backdrop in much the same way portrait photographers will hang paper, canvas, or muslin sheets behind their subjects. To a portrait photographer, the backdrop provides a constant to offset, and hopefully complement, the continually changing subjects. Here, the city is the constant that offsets, frames, highlights, and hopefully complements the ever-changing hues, tones, and textures of the sky that announce themselves just before, during, and shortly after sunset.

# THE STATEMENT

## THE FLUIDITY OF A STATIC MEDIUM

Photography is often thought of as a static medium – a single image typically only records a very brief moment in time. However, multiple images of the same subject, when compared side-by-side or in sequence, can capture how it changes as differing light and weather conspire to mix things up. Adjacent frames may be taken minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, or even years apart; they don't have to be recorded in a single take as with video. So, while a single photograph is static, a photographic series becomes fluid as the subject changes and evolves with time.

No two sunsets are the same. They change from day to day and from week to week depending on the clouds (or lack thereof), the weather, and the season. Even a single sunset can transform itself several times before the light finally disappears from the sky; the white of daylight becomes awash in yellow and gold, grey clouds suddenly burst with orange and red, and pale azure skies deepen into rich hues of navy and violet. Sunsets are one of the subjects we can return to multiple times and not only expect but also experience different results. When limited to a single location or scene, a sunset series is a fine example of the fluidity of our static medium.

# THE THREE PS

## PRACTICE PATIENCE PRAGMATISM

One of my students once asked me what I felt it took to be a better photographer. I thought about it for a while and then responded: practice, patience, and pragmatism.

Practice is obvious and self-explanatory, so I won't spend time discussing it here.

Patience truly is a virtue. With sunsets, we know the weather and the light can be fickle and uncooperative. We shouldn't give up right away if we're disappointed with the initial conditions. Nor should we make assumptions about how the sky will look after five or ten minutes. The next few minutes may confirm our fears, or it may produce some stunning shots. We must have the patience to wait and the resolve to stay, even if we think we'll be disappointed.

Pragmatism, to me, means that I'm not always able to get every possible type of shot that presents itself. If I head out somewhere with just my wide-angle lens, intent on only capturing landscapes, I'm probably not going to get many wildlife images. After all, I made a conscious decision to bring a limited amount of gear and to concentrate on a single genre. Tomorrow, perhaps, I'll head to the same spot with more gear so I can do both types of photography, or maybe I'll just bring my telephoto lens and forego any landscape work.

Pragmatism also means that I might not get any photos at all. Maybe I'm hoping for a beautiful sunset, but heavy clouds move in, and it starts to rain. I don't see vivid colours, just dull grey skies and unfavourable working conditions. It's disappointing, but I can't control the weather. Not every day will be good for photography, and we have to learn to accept that. Hopefully, tomorrow will be better.

# THE PHOTOS

I've presented the photographs in chronological order except to accommodate the sections on patience and pragmatism. I don't believe this will affect the overall presentation.

I've kept images captured on the same day together to allow for side-by-side comparisons. This is necessary to demonstrate how the light and clouds (if any) can change over even a short period of time.

I've posted images from the majority, but not all, of my outings.



October 8, 2013



October 8, 2013





October 10, 2013



October 10, 2013





October 10, 2013



October 10, 2013

October 12, 2013







October 15, 2013



October 15, 2013



October 15, 2013







October 17, 2013



October 17, 2013





October 17, 2013



October 17, 2013



October 29, 2013





November 2, 2013



November 2, 2013





November 21, 2013



November 21, 2013





October 11, 2014



October 11, 2014





October 11, 2014



October 11, 2014



October 11, 2014





October 15, 2014







October 18, 2014



October 18, 2014





November 10, 2014



November 10, 2014





November 10, 2014



November 10, 2014



November 23, 2014



November 23, 2014



November 23, 2014







May 13, 2015



May 13, 2015





October 6, 2015



October 6, 2015



October 6, 2015







October 16, 2015



October 13, 2016



October 14, 2016



October 14, 2016

# PATIENCE

November 5, 2013

I stood near the riverbank. I was ready. My camera was ready. The sunset wasn't.

A gentleman approached with his camera and tripod in hand. He looked at me, looked out over the river towards the city, and then sighed in frustration.

"It was absolutely stunning this morning," he said. "The sky was clear and the river was a mirror. I went straight home after work, grabbed my camera, and rushed down here to capture it. But it's nothing like it was this morning."

"A wasted opportunity," he muttered. He turned on his heel and walked away but not before calling back to me, "Too bad. You're probably disappointed, too. Good night!" He was gone as quickly as he arrived.

I could only shake my head and laugh. Did he really expect the conditions wouldn't change in nine or ten hours? The clouds wouldn't move in? The wind wouldn't pick up?

And if he had taken the trouble to come down, why wouldn't he stick around for a bit? It's the Maritimes, after all. If you don't like the weather, wait five minutes.

I did. Five minutes. Ten minutes. Fifteen minutes. Then the clouds broke along the horizon, allowing the light to seep through before fanning out on the overcast above and turning the sky a fiery red. A few minutes later, the red and orange hues turned golden.

As it turned out, it was absolutely stunning in the evening, too. If, that is, you had the resolve to stay and the patience to wait. I wasn't disappointed.





November 5, 2013



November 5, 2013

# PRAGMATISM

October 20, 2016

It hardly felt worth the time. Lacking light. Lacking colour.

Nothing but one shade of grey transitioning to another until  
everything went black.

But if I was there...





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[www.macdonald-photography.com](http://www.macdonald-photography.com)

[info@macdonald-photography.com](mailto:info@macdonald-photography.com)

(506) 863-8394

