

## THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PICS

ONE TO WATCH 21 | SIDE BY SIDE 24 | PERSONAL PROJECT 26 | THE PIC 30

# FOCUS

21



### CLOSE-UP

JENNIFER EMERLING

**Grew up in:** Fresno, California

**Studied at:** Brooks Institute,  
Eddie Adams Workshop

**Awards:** National Press Photographers  
Association Women in Photojournalism  
2009; Brooks NPPA Top 20 "Week in  
Pictures" 2006 and 2008

**Favorite gear:** Canon EOS 5D Mark II, Canon  
EF 16-35mm f/2.8L II USM zoom lens

**Spends summers as:** Naturalist Photography  
Guide in Juneau, Alaska



**Above:** To capture the dazzling atmosphere of this dimly lit scene, Emerling took advantage of another photographer shooting with a flash on the opposite side of an aerialist in the performance group Lucent Dossier. The image is part of her *Night Crawlers* series, an exploration of nightclubs across the country.

### WEST WORLD

Jennifer Emerling finds her inspiration along America's backroads | **BY AIMEE BALDRIDGE**

► The highways of America have always been a second home to Jennifer Emerling, who grew up making frequent cross-country expeditions with her father, camera in hand. So when other students in her travel-photography class at Brooks Institute headed for the airport to shoot far-flung destinations, Emerling set her sights on Leadville, Colorado. "When I got there, I was just so excited by how visual it was," she says of the former mining boom town. "And it's in one of the most beautiful valleys to be settled in Colorado or even the American West."

As she got to know the people who live there, Emerling, 25, began to unfold the story of how Leadville is seeking a new



© JENNIFER EMERLING (2)



identity in the 21st century. These days, she observes, “it doesn’t really know what it wants to be known for.” Her Leadville project extended well past her graduation in 2008, becoming the first in her ongoing series of photographic explorations of the western U.S. As the native of Fresno, California, explains, “I take a lot of pride in the fact that I’m from the West, and I want to tell stories about it.”

While Emerling drew early inspiration from the classic Western landscape photographers — especially Ansel Adams — her focus on narrative has led her to develop a style that’s also informed by documentary and journalistic image making. “I go out into nature and am so awed by how beautiful it is,” she says. But, Emerling continues: “I like to see the impressions man has left on our world. That’s what inspires me.”

She also follows her subjects indoors, photographing the female roller derby teams and nightclub denizens of the region. “I really like to explore the different identities of these characters in the clubs — the personas that people put on. I’m just fascinated by how people define themselves, and how a town defines itself.”

If there’s a moral to Emerling’s visual tales, she puts it like this: “I would really like to inspire people to go out and hit the road, and see the Great American West. I hope that would be the most meaningful part of my work.” AP

**Left:** Emerling captured this image in the wetlands of Juneau, Alaska, where she spends summers teaching travelers about both nature and photography. **Above:** During other seasons, she heads to Leadville, Colorado, exploring life in a small Western town. For this shot, she tagged along on a coyote-hunting trip.

## TRADE SECRETS

“Almost all my pictures are shot at  $f/16$ ,” Emerling reveals. She uses the small f-stop to increase depth of field, allowing her to create images with many layers of narrative elements, from foreground to background. “I want to put in as much information as I can without overstimulating the viewer,” she explains. But she cautions that it’s an approach that requires practice to master. “You can really make a scene look cluttered if you don’t know how to compose it right,” she says. To avoid this, Emerling pays careful attention to where relevant elements appear in the frame “so your eye is going straight to what you need to focus on.”