

# Southside Living

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## Meet Mark Turner Southside Living's Resident Photographer!

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Photography by Mark Turner Photography



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# Meet Mark Turner Southside Living's Resident Photographer!

By Sara Welsh

## Photographing Gardens + Wildflowers

Mark Turner has always been passionate about photography. He got his first camera as a child in West Virginia at age 7, upgraded to a Kodak Brownie Starmite (with flash!) on Christmas when he was 9, learned to process and print his own black and white film around 7th grade, got his first 35mm camera in 9th grade, and was a high school newspaper and yearbook photographer.

Mark also found his passion for plants as a youngster in West Virginia, strongly encouraged by his father. Some of his first photos were made of flowers in his dad's garden, as well as wildflowers found along trails in West Virginia and upstate New York's Adirondack Mountains.

Mark only applied to one college, Rochester Institute of Technology, where he majored in photography and then graduated with a degree in audio-visual communication. Following a master's in telecommunications from Kent State University, Mark worked as a television and interactive media producer for Nebraska Public Television and Western Washington University from 1979 to 1993. After leaving Western, he returned to photography.

Mark launched his business, Turner

Photographics, in time for the 1993 holiday season with a line of note cards featuring his landscape and wildflower photography, as well as large prints sold at the Allied Arts Holiday Market.

Even before the advent of digital photography, the market for landscape and other nature photography was challeng-

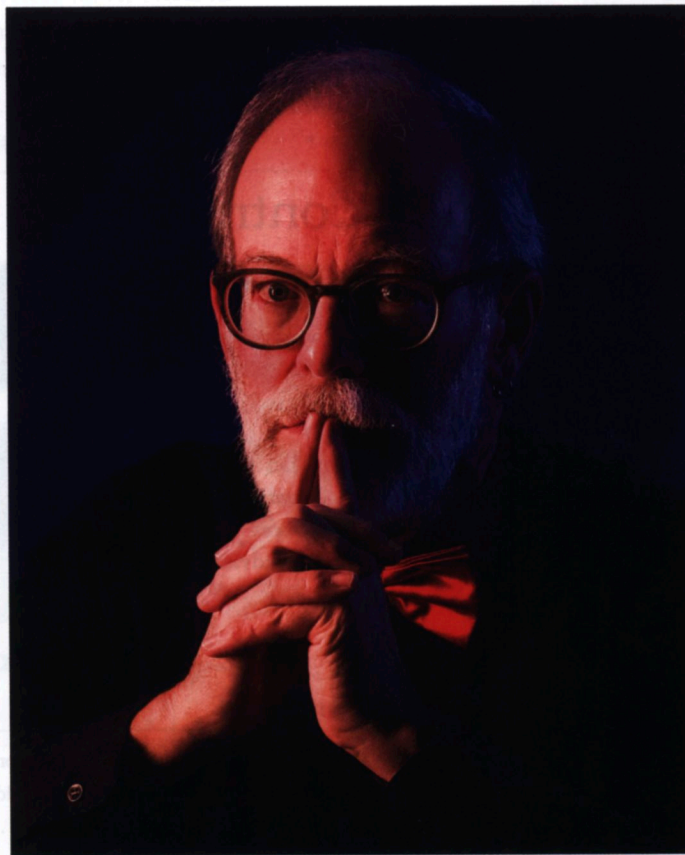
publishers. They didn't bite, but in 2002 the acquisitions editor at Timber asked Mark if he'd be interested in doing a new wildflower field guide for the northwest. If you know anything about publishing, you'll recognize that this is highly unusual. Publishers usually don't reach out to photographers to invite them to do

a book. *Wildflowers of the Pacific Northwest*, which has now sold over 45,000 copies since 2006, was the result. His co-author, Phyllis Gustafson of Central Point, Oregon wrote most of the text and all of the descriptions. It took two years of field photography from March to September and nearly another year of selecting and editing the photos. The book won an American Horticultural Society book award when it was first published.

Most flower field guides are written and photographed by plant experts who have learned some photography. Mark turned that around, with his knowledge and expertise in photography coming first. He learned a lot of botany along the way, coming to understand the technical characteristics of plants that one

needs to observe to make an accurate identification. He grew up in a scientific environment, with a father who was an outstanding college chemistry teacher who also had a strong interest in plants as well as art. A lot of his dad rubbed off on Mark. He likes to say that he combines art and science in his plant photography.

Flowers along the trail become "old



ing and extremely competitive. It took a while, but he built a business photographing gardens for publication in magazines like *Garden Design*, *Sunset*, *American Gardener*, *Horticulture*, *Organic Gardening*, *Birds and Blooms*, *Garden Gate* and more.

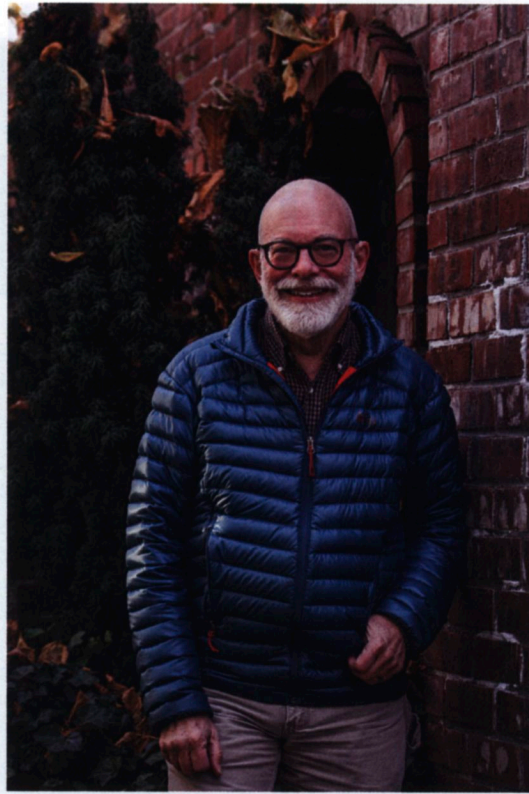
While he was concentrating on photographing gardens, Mark pitched a couple of books to Timber Press and other

Photos by Mark Turner

friends" that you meet again and again as you pass through their habitats while hiking. Finding less common, or even rare, plants can become an obsession. Mark doesn't think he's actually obsessed with plants, but they're an important part of his life. At home, he's an avid gardener.

Apparently not remembering all the work involved with the first book, Mark created a second book for *Timber, Trees and Shrubs of the Pacific Northwest*, with co-author Ellen Kuhlmann of Bellingham. That one also took two years on the road and 40,000 miles of driving to find and photograph all the plants. Published in 2014, it's now sold over 23,000 copies. Both books are available at Village Books in Fairhaven.

In 2018 Mark decided there might be a market for a new book about weeds



and proposed it to Timber. His original working title was *Kill This Plant!*, but the

folks at Timber decided the more prosaic *Weeds of the Pacific Northwest* would be a more appropriate title. He recruited Sami Gray, a plant geek from Port Angeles, to write the text. It took another year-plus to do the photography, most of it during the pandemic lockdown of 2020. It's now in the hands of an editor at Timber, with publication expected in early 2024.

### A Passion for the Outdoors

Mark is an avid gardener, both for flowers and vegetables. He and his husband Brian, and with his ex-wife Natalie before, have over 1000 square feet of vegetable garden which feeds them throughout the year. There's rarely a day when they're home that they don't eat something fresh, canned, or frozen from their garden.

In the 1990s and early 2000s Mark was an active climber, including serving as an instructor for the Bellingham Mountaineers basic climbing course. When his

*Continued on page 6*

Mark Turner photographs families and individuals on location and in the studio.



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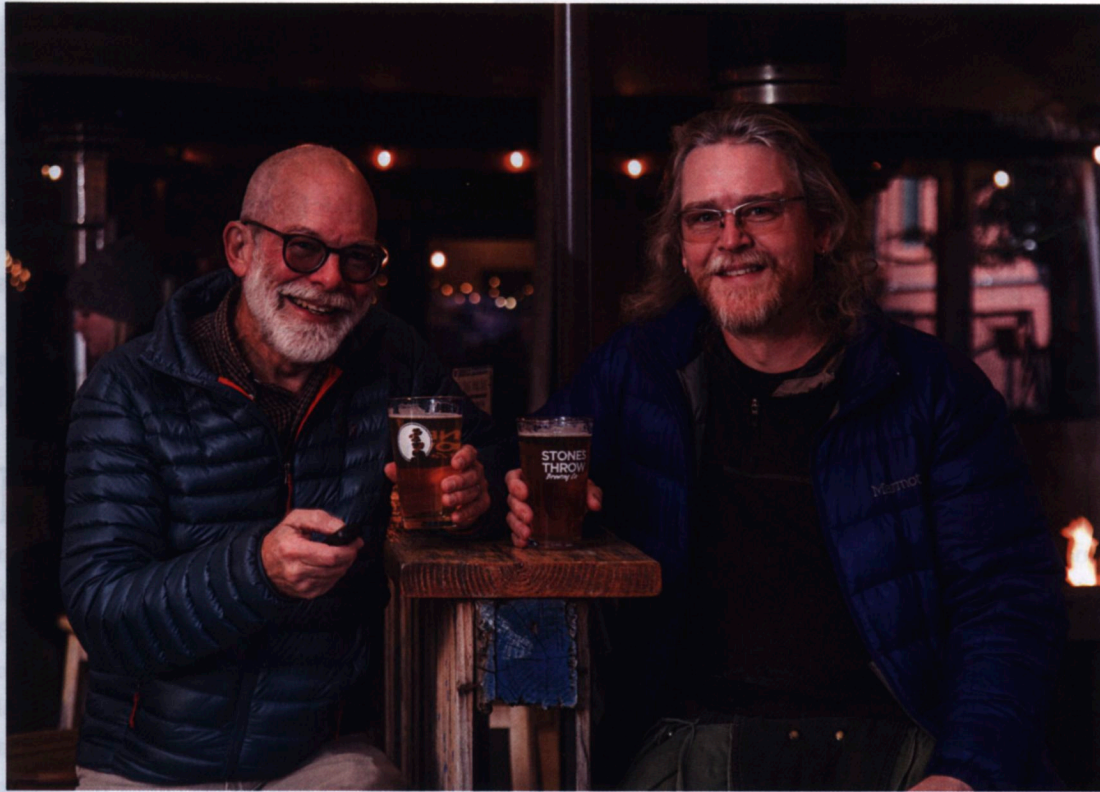
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boys Zach and Ian were the appropriate age, he was a Boy Scout leader and chair of the Troop 3 outdoor committee. He loves sharing his knowledge of the outdoors with people of all ages and skill levels.

A backpacker since the early 1970s, Mark continues to spend many days on the trail, always with camera in hand. Trips in the past few years have taken him to the Pasayten Wilderness, the Goat Rocks, Glacier Peak Wilderness, and numerous other places in the North Cascades. He's slowing down a bit,

and now likes to find places to spend a couple of nights with dayhike opportunities. He and Brian also like to car camp and dayhike, both locally and in eastern Washington.

What's Mark's favorite aspect of being *Southside Living's* resident photographer?

In the mid-2000s, as publishing fell in love with e-books and magazines cut back on printing and moved to the web, his business began to founder and Mark looked around again to find another photographic niche. A recovering introvert, he decided to pursue photographing

families, high school seniors, and business headshots. He's photographed countless people since beginning his portrait business.

"When publisher David Pillinger asked me about a year ago if I were interested in taking over as feature photographer for *Southside Living*, I looked at the job as an opportunity to meet some interesting people and do some creative portrait photography that would help tell these individuals' stories," says Mark.

"I enjoy the challenge of working with a wide range of people and helping them feel comfortable in front of the camera. The techni-

cal aspects are certainly important, but it's working with people to help them overcome their shyness or fear of being photographed that brings me a lot of joy and satisfaction."

A big part of Mark's business these days is professional portraits, often referred to simply as headshots. He prides himself on delivering high-quality and consistent portraits for his corporate clients so that as they add new staff, their portraits match those made in previous years. Like photographing families,

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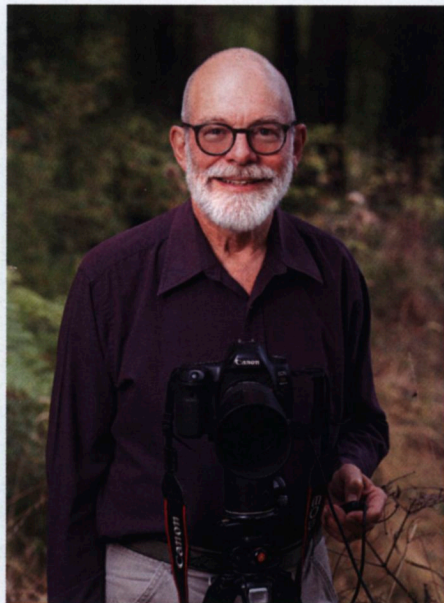
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one of the important factors is helping the person in front of the camera feel comfortable and relaxed.

His corporate clients include PeaceHealth St. Joseph Hospital, Wilson Engineering, Marathon Anacortes Refinery, Clarity Tax Management, Freelance Engineering, Carmichael Clark Attorneys at Law, and numerous individuals and smaller firms.



Mark hasn't forgotten about film, and after over 10 years of leaving his film cameras in the closet, he began working with 35mm black & white film again in 2021, mostly for his personal enjoyment and the challenge of seeing the world in shades of gray. In late 2022 he decided to reacquaint himself with large format photography and bought a new 4x5 field camera, seen in the cover photo. Working with a camera like this requires extensive knowledge of the craft of photography — everything is completely manual — while also applying his experience seeing the world and interpreting its three dimensions onto a two-dimensional plane. It's the fifth time Mark has owned a 4x5, having parted with the last one around 1997. He's still getting back up to speed with the medium, but plans to use it for both landscapes and portraits. Look for an announcement about "slow portraits" in the coming months. In today's fast-paced world, Mark thinks there's a niche market for more contemplative, thoughtful portraits made with old-fashioned tools. *SL*

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