

My Rebel no longer has a cause

Scents and smells have an amazing way of transporting us back in time. The smells that bring me back to my childhood in Florida are not what you might expect. They are not fresh orange juice or salt air. Instead, it's the smell of photographic chemicals – developer, fixer and stopper – that really remind me of home.

My father, Barry, has been a professional photographer for more than 50 years. His darkroom was in our family home – taking up half our kitchen space. I would spend hours in the dark learning how to develop negatives and make prints. He gave me a 35-millimetre camera and I took it to school almost every day. Eventually I was able to prep the darkroom by myself and process my own prints to share with classmates.

There is no darkroom in my home here in Kitchener. Sadly, the process of taking a photograph – from capturing the image, to processing the negatives and producing a print – has been replaced. We have a Canon Rebel T3i that gathers dust in the closet because, like most people, we end up taking photographs with our smartphones.

Last April, my dad gave me a camera to try out and it's changed the way I take photographs. It's part of a family of cameras called Micro Four Thirds. They're smaller and lighter than a standard DSLR (digital single lens reflex) camera, such as the Canon Rebel series, and pack an impressive set of features into a tiny package. Having a smaller camera got me back to carrying it with me everywhere I go.

The Micro Four Thirds (MFT or M4/3) camera system was launched by Olympus and Panasonic back in 2008.

There are four main features of the MFT camera system. First, they are mirrorless, meaning there is no moving mirror in the body. Second, MFT cameras do not have



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optical viewfinders. Instead, they have electronic viewfinders and, in many cases, a LCD screen in the body.

Next, most have interchangeable lenses like DSLR cameras, which gives you flexibility compared to fixed-lens cameras. Finally, their sensors are smaller than those in DSLR cameras. The smaller sensor would normally mean poor low-light performance. This minor deficit can be overcome by purchasing a prime lens, such as a 15mm 1.7.

If you haven't heard the term prime lens before, don't worry. Prime simply means it's a fixed focal-length lens. Many camera kits include a lens with variable focus lengths, such as an 18-to-55 mm lens, but prime lenses are "faster" and can capture more light in low-light settings.

Panasonic GX8 and GX9



Let's get back to that camera my dad lent me. Released in 2015, the Panasonic GX8 has a 20-megapixel sensor, can shoot up to eight frames in a single burst and can record video in 4K. Like all MFT cameras, the GX8 has an electronic viewfinder and

also includes a three-inch LCD screen.

What I really like about the Panasonic GX8 is its compact size. We've had a number of full-size DSLR cameras, the most recent being the Canon Rebel T3i that's gathering dust. The difference in size is significant, and it's what determines which camera I pick up.

As we were packing the car to visit family at Easter, my wife reminded me to grab the camera. Without thinking, I packed the GX8 into my bag. When it came time for family photos, I grabbed the GX8 and started snapping. My wife looked puzzled and asked why I didn't bring the Rebel. I showed her the photos on the LCD screen and she was blown away. The Rebel hasn't come out of the closet since.

Panasonic is releasing the GX9 this year, a newer model of the GX line. It will retail for about \$1,299 in a kit with a 12-to-60 mm lens.

Panasonic GH5



Here in town, photographer and filmmaker Timothy Muza also has a MFT camera as part of his gear – the Panasonic GH5. The GH5 is a higher-end MFT camera system retailing for about \$3,499 with a 12-to-60 mm Leica lens.

"Cameras are tools, and the GH5 is a good tool that suits the quality of image I capture," Muza says.

Muza notes the GH5, like most MFT

cameras, doesn't capture photos in low-light settings compared to cameras with larger sensors.

One of the unique features of the GH5 is Post Focus. Post Focus allows you to select and fine-tune the focus point of a photograph after you have captured the image. This feature is great for close-up portrait photography. The GH5 can also capture video at 6K resolution at 30 frames per second or 4K resolution at 60 frames per second. You can even pick a frame from a 6K video and create an 18-megapixel image from it.

"I use the GH5 for both photography and video. Mostly video professionally, and photography when I'm bumming around travelling," Muza says.

Fuji X-E2 and X-E3

Size when travelling was also a purchase-decision driver for photographer and marketer Caitlin McWilliams. A longtime member of the Abe Erb team, McWil-



liams describes her job as "everything but brewing beer." She splits her time between Settlement Co coffee shops or Abe Erb breweries in both Kitchener and Waterloo, and her camera of choice is the Fuji X-E2.

"It's a great camera for vacations and for work," McWilliams says. "Its size doesn't make people self-conscious – so I'm able to capture great candid photos."

The X-E2 is not a true MFT camera. It uses the Fuji X lens mount system and a 16-megapixel APS-C sensor, similar to sensors found in standard DSLR cameras.

Looking at the X-E2, you could easily mistake it for one of its Micro Four Third cousins. It is mirrorless and has a similar classic – almost retro – design to it.

McWilliams captures photos for social media using the XE-2. "Even though I have a newer iPhone, the photos it takes are never as good as what I take with my camera," McWilliams says. "The phone doesn't have the same dynamic range."

While both of the previously mentioned Panasonic models offer the ability to transfer your photos using WiFi, the XE-2 and XE-3 let you transfer your photos using Bluetooth. This means you don't need access to a WiFi network to get your photos from the camera to the phone.

The Fuji XE-3 comes in a kit with an 18-to-55 mm lens for \$1,649.99.

No matter what camera you choose, just remember to bring it with you wherever you go so you'll always be ready to capture every moment in a way that's unique to you.

Alex Kinsella has been part of Waterloo Region's tech community since 2004 and is always looking for the next great gadget (or tacos, if it's Tuesday). Find him on Twitter at @alexkinsella

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