

## Fleetwood, New Mexico 1976

It was a beautiful early New Mexico morning in July 1976. I was living in Albuquerque and had become a bit more confident as a photographer from consecutive years attending summer workshops in Yosemite with Ansel Adams. I now had my own darkroom and had been supplied with the developing formulas from the workshops but was still deep into learning the art of photography. I set out at the crack of dawn to capture the image that had been pre-visualized and sketched out on my little pad. The camera of choice was my Hasselblad with a 50mm lens and in the car was my sturdy tripod, which I had ordered to be exactly as the one Ansel had last summer. My Dad once told me: "If you want to do something well then pick out a person with great talent and try to learn all they know and how they do it". This was one of the best pieces of advice he ever gave me.

I was behind the wheel of Leo Bartolucci's incredible 1960 Fleetwood Cadillac hardtop coupe. Leo was an older neighbor and a wonderful character. One day I saw him come home in the shiniest metallic lavender and most fabulous machine my eyes had ever seen. Jaw dropping! As he drove by he stopped and rolled down the window, looked at me with a big grin and said, "My wife is going to kill me when she sees this, but I couldn't help it, I am a sick man"! Leo lived, and Mrs. Bartolucci, being a sweetheart, was happy for him.

One day while Leo was in his garage giving his "Jewel" a beauty treatment I told him how much I would love to photograph his treasure. He looked up and said, "Anytime, just come over and pick up the keys, take her for a spin".

Oh boy, this was going to happen! Thank you, Leo!

I had picked up Her Majesty the night before. Now 5:30 a.m., Susan had my thermos of coffee filled and ready, gave me a kiss goodbye, sent me out the door, and into the cool morning I roared off in Leo's masterpiece. This work of art had big horsepower under its long nose with a gleaming chrome grille bumper leading the way and those sleek aerodynamic fins following. The vision of my sketch was in my mind but now panic set in about where is the spot? I headed in the direction of desolate Placitas, wound down graveled roads that just took off into the wide-open landscape. Sandia, a mountain with many moods was in the distance. This was an angle I had never viewed Sandia from before. Suddenly, the road came to an abrupt end. I stepped out and walked around the Fleetwood, which had begun to look more like a space ship in the desert than an alluring auto from Detroit. Better give it a try. If I fail at least I tried. Setting up and looking into the viewfinder all was ready, and then feathery clouds came floating into the scene. They had not been in my sketch. As years went by it became a constant that in the moment something always greater than my original idea would present itself in the making of an image. Fleetwood, New Mexico was the first of many of these kinds of experiences to come into my life as a photographer.

At home I cleaned and polished Leo's lavender jewel before returning it back into his care. Now, 42 years later, this recollection is a beautiful memory for which I am deeply grateful. The tribute and celebration of this moment came when The Center for Creative Photography took "Fleetwood, New Mexico" 1976 into their permanent collection. The Center, located in Tucson, is where Ansel Adams entrusted the life long treasury of his works.

*E. McD July 21, 2018*