photokaboom

Learn Photography

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Blur the Background

There's one drawback of digital photography.

There's lots of depth-of-field—everything is in focus.

This occurs when using cameras with sensors that are smaller than 35mm film (24mm x 36mm).

The smaller the sensor, the greater the depth-of-field.

Digital point-and-shoot cameras have tiny sensors, so almost everything is in focus, no matter where the aperture is set.

To a lesser extent, this is also the case with cameras using APS-C sensors, such as most digital SLRs.

Having lots of depth-of-field is great for close-up photography.

But, lots of depth-of-field gets in the way when you're doing a portrait.

Usually, you want the background out-of-focus when doing a portrait.

What can you do?

You can use Photoshop Elements to blur the background.

In defense of the distracting background in the photograph below, perhaps it was included to show:

1) Where the mother and child are—a tropical climate

2) What they've been doing—biking.

Also, when photographing for stock, it's good to include areas for titles and text.

But, the background could be more out-of-focus.

(The horizon is way off, too.)

Let's blur the background to make it less distracting.

Be sure to check off as you go along.

☐

Preparation

☐ 1) Preserve your original file.

If you haven't already done so, go to <u>Preserve Your Original File</u>.

☐ 2) Create a Background copy layer.

If you haven't already done so, go to <u>Create a Background Copy Layer</u>.

Make the Selection

☐ 3) Select the Quick Selection tool.

If you haven't already done so, go to <u>Selection Tools</u>.

☐ 4) Click, hold, and drag to make the selection.

• When the Add to selection icon is selected, in <u>options bar/Tool Options</u>, you're selecting more.

• Click the Subtract from selection icon, in <u>options bar/Tool Options</u>, to remove parts of your selection.

• Or, to subtract from the selection, press Alt.

When you press and hold Alt, the cursor changes from a plus to a minus.

There's no need to click the plus and minus icons in <u>options bar/Tool Options</u>.

Just press and release the Alt key as needed.

• As you work closer to the edge of the selection area, use a smaller brush.

You can change brush size by pressing [and].

• Be sure to enlarge the photograph with the Zoom tool when working in the nooks-and-crannies.

☐ 5) Go to Select > Feather to add feathering to a selection.

2 px was used here.

Feathering can make the transition between the selected area and the rest of the photograph less obvious.

If you're going to save the selection (next step), you may want to save it first, without the feathering.

☐ 6) Be sure to save the selection if you may need to return to do more work.

If you haven't already done so, go to <u>Save the Selection</u>.

Here's the selection.

Blur the Background

☐ 7) Go to Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur.

☐ 8) Set the Radius to 5, and click OK.

You can experiment with other radius settings, as well.

The background was blurred below.

Here are the two versions side-by-side.

Original   Blurred Background

Another Method

Go to Blur the Background with a Gradient.

Saving the Photograph

If you haven't already done so, go to Saving Files.