

# Outdoor Flash Technique

By Michael Willems

A word or two about outdoor fill flash ... first: you need it, quite often, and for various reasons:

- ✓ To fill in dark areas on those bright sunny days;
- ✓ To brighten the foreground subject and get a darker background subject;
- ✓ To add a catch light in the subject's eyes.

So what techniques are best to get pictures like this? When deciding on modes and techniques, look for where the issues may be; the constraints. The need to stay clear of these will help you decide the most appropriate modes and settings. The issue in using on-camera flash outdoors is that (and follow the deductive reasoning here, step by step):

- ✓ I want the background to be darker than the subject
- ✓ Outside I can achieve that by means of a low ISO and small aperture.
- ✓ But these will both reduce flash effectiveness ... exactly what I do not want on a bright day.
- ✓ So, I can also do it by selecting faster shutter speeds – these do not affect flash.
- ✓ Until, that is, I get to the flash sync speed – beyond that, if I exceed that I can either no longer use flash at all, or I go to high-speed flash (Nikon: Auto FP flash), and that decreases the flash effectiveness enormously.

## Therefore:

- ✓ My shutter speed should be at my flash sync speed.
- ✓ I need to choose a mode where I set the shutter speed (Shutter Priority (Tv) or Manual)

A common technique for finding a good fill-flash starting point when using an on-camera TTL flash in variable outside light:

- ✓ Shutter Priority exposure mode (Tv).
- ✓ Select your camera's flash sync speed (if unsure, select 1/200th second).
- ✓ Exposure compensation: -2 stops.
- ✓ Aim at your subject and check that aperture is somewhere around f/5.6. If not, change ISO until it is.
- ✓ Flash compensation: if and as needed (Do a test shot. On a Nikon, and when shooting a bright white dress, you may need it, up (+). At other times, down (-) may be called for).

A common technique for finding a good fill-flash starting point when using an on-camera TTL flash in more predictable light:

- ✓ M exposure mode (manual mode).
- ✓ Select your camera's flash sync speed (if unsure, select 1/200th second).
- ✓ Set Aperture (Av) until your meter reads -2 stops.
- ✓ Aim at your subject and check that aperture is now somewhere around f/5.6. If not, change ISO until it is.
- ✓ Flash compensation: if and as needed (Do a test shot. On a Nikon, and when shooting a bright white dress, you may need it, up (+). At other times, down (-) may be called for).