

# Why You Should Never, EVER Photograph Subjects on Railroad Tracks

By Jacqueline Tobin // January 15, 2015 // Posted in Featured Articles, Industry News, Photography, Portrait  
In January's Focus section, we ran a short blurb about a senior portrait scholarship program, and along with it, an image shot by a photography studio of a senior posed on railroad tracks. We've recently received a number of responses explaining the gravity of a location we had unintentionally overlooked.

Aside from this being a lesson for us, we thought we'd share it with our readers as well.

Julie A. La Combe, Executive Director of **Kansas Operation Lifesaver**, sent me a gravely serious and incredibly important email last night, which she gave me permission to share here.

*Dear Ms. Tobin:*

*I am writing in regard to a complaint I received from a concerned photographer about an article in your January 2015 publication of **Rangefinder**. The article, titled "Senior Shoots For All," was about a scholarship contest. I have contacted the organization awarding the scholarship as well, but wanted to reach out to you, as you may not be aware that the photo shown depicts a very dangerous and illegal practice.*

*Posing subjects and models on railroad tracks is a practice that the Professional Photographers of America joined Operation Lifesaver in strongly discouraging. I have attached information highlighting the dangers. Every three hours in the United States, someone is hit by a train. The vast majority of the fatalities are trespassers. Unfortunately, posing on tracks and shooting from railroad rights-of-way is trespassing, and subjects may not even know it. Train crews and others who have been subjected to the horror of these preventable incidents are deeply offended by these images as they bring into cruelly sharp focus the memory of those events. Seeing a person of any age sitting, standing or lying on a track is the last thing the train crew sees before that person loses his or her life. I know photographers are not intending to cause that kind of grief or endanger anyone, but that's exactly what happens. People who see the images want to mimic the shots that glamorize trespassing, not knowing how dangerous it is.*

*Photographers and their clients are subject to legal action when found on railroad property (which is private property), including citation and even arrest. Please join us in helping to educate your readers about the reality surrounding this illegal practice, and help us to save lives.*

*—Julie A. LaCombe, Kansas Operation Lifesaver*

Of course, I immediately wrote an email back to Julie expressing my thanks and explaining that although I've been reporting/editing about the photography industry for almost 30 years, I'm upset and embarrassed that I let this image slipped through the cracks.

*"I can try and cite the usual 'short-staffed, holiday crunch' type of excuses that I might potentially try to make in similar but far, far less serious situations, but there truly are no excuses and I deeply thank you (as well as the photographers who are starting to write in) for calling us out on this matter,"* I wrote to Julie.

We are printing some of the letters we've been receiving in the Rf Conversations page of our February issue (due out in a few weeks), with a response from me on how we plan to bring attention to this important topic — including running an article on the importance of photo subject safety as well as the dangers of railroad shoots and the depiction thereof, whether on a live track or not.

We want to make clear that *Rangefinder* does not, in any way, condone the practice of photographing subjects on train tracks. It is dangerous and irresponsible and has proven to be fatal. Also, it is not our intention to call out the photographer who shot this personally, or make her feel worse by posting this. We simply want our readers and our staff to be more aware of why this type of shoot can't happen again anywhere (or with anyone).

And yes, we'd like to publicly admit that we screwed up big time and are deeply sorry for the blunder. Thank you.

—Jacqueline Tobin, Editor-in-Chief, *Rangefinder* magazine

- See more at: <http://blog.wppionline.com/2015/01/why-you-should-never-ever-shoot-subjects-on-railroad-tracks/#sthash.1biogVRf.dpuf>