

Technology among the tumbling tumbleweed! And a book on Picasa

Book: Beginners Guide to Using Picasa 3—
Managing Digital Photos Using Picasa, A Free
Program by Google

By Chris Guld, www.geeksontour.com/shopping.cfm

\$29.95, includes DVD with 2+ hours “Show Me How” Tutorial Videos. \$10 for download version.

Rating: ★★★★★

Some time ago, when googling for Picasa information, I came across a site called www.Geeksontour.com. Half suspecting I’d found a rock band instead of an instructional material, I was pleased to discover that the Geeks on Tour are Jim and Chris Guld.

They zigzag across the country in a motor home, teaching RVers to manage their computers, GPS equipment, wifi connections and use of Picasa to handle the zillions of digital photographs they’re all taking.

If the Guld’s report of having taken more than 22,000 photos of their travels is typical, a lot of digital photos are floating around the country. Evidently RV parks now have wifi connections and hold rallies, at which the Guld’s teach computer classes, hold seminars, and generally keep the RV crowd up-to-date on software, digital photography, and communications. Jim spent some of their early RV years providing support for the equipment and its use, and Chris served as support to the new users.

All in all, it sounds like a great way for them to have made use of their extensive computer professional backgrounds, pursue the travel they love, and curb the “stare at a monitor” habit by having to drive, take pictures, and visit friends. They’ve been at it, living in the motor home since 2003, so it must be working.

Their website is extensive and engaging. The Guld’s consider it an online classroom for travelers who want to learn to use their computers for managing digital photos, making blogs, and using maps and other online resources.

Anyone can watch their free sample videos, read articles on their Articles and Links Blog, sign up for their free monthly newsletter or Picasa weekly tips. For \$39, you can become a member and then can view any of 190+ video tutorials on these subjects.

And the book? It’s a delightful, invaluable guide to using Picasa. It’s small—5½”x11”, with 59 pages of clear instructions that take you from an overview of Picasa’s features and capabilities, through details of each step to use the program, to sharing and backing up the finished products after you download photos from your camera and work on them.

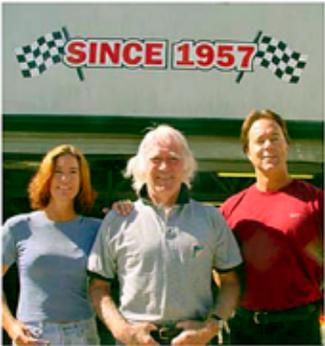
Chris Guld makes her points in a few succinct words. Nothing is overwritten, and nothing seems to be missing technically. The author’s style is conversational and understandable.

I’ve been fiddling with Picasa for a couple years, mostly by trial and error. I have another, longer

(Picasa book, cont. on page 11)

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Picasa book, cont. from page 10

book on Picasa, which never seemed to talk to me—and I had to go online for sample pictures to work on with its instructions.

This little gem, however, is concise, direct, and understandable. It also has excellent screen shots in *color*, which is not usual in small volumes like this. Despite its small physical size, the font used is clear and easy to read.

I especially like the way Chris Guld explains the basics of Picasa as well as its more sophisticated features, e.g. “Picasa does not move or copy pictures *into* Picasa. It works with them wherever they are on your computer.

If you want to use another photo editing program with one of your photos you can; Picasa doesn't store them...(they) are in your Pictures folder.” This is the kind of information I've never been certain about when reading Picasa's help files.

Illustrations display the part of the screen that the instructions refer to, not usually the whole screen. Therefore, despite the small size of this book, the illustrations are clear and readable, partly because they are in color. In fact, they are far more effective than the black-and-white screen shots in the larger-sized “Picasa for Seniors” that I reviewed some months ago.

The real bonus is the DVD with its 25 “Show Me” videos demonstrating what is described in this book. As you read the book, boxes appear on some pages with words such as, “Show-Me Video: Tree Structure.” This means that at this point you can use the book's DVD to view a video on the subject at hand; in this case “Tree Structure.”

The videos are outstanding and narrated by Chris Guld, who shows every stroke of the process at hand and goes slowly enough so you can follow and take notes, but not so slow as to be boring. The 25 videos each run from a little over five minutes up to 22 minutes.

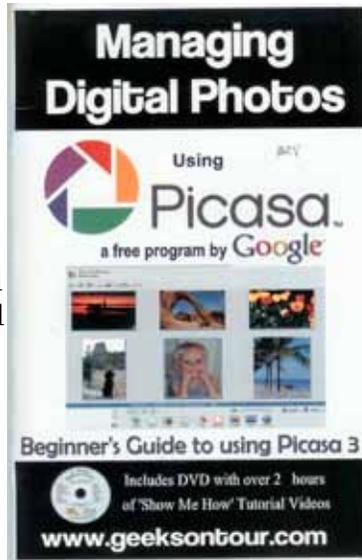
The book can be used in many ways. You could read it through, following its instructions on your own computer, section by section, then check out the videos for a more complete picture or to pick up something you may have missed.

Or, you could read it page by page, referring to the video as each one is indicated in the text. You also could begin by going through the videos, one by one and then use the book as a reference as you use the program. Whichever method best fits your needs, I think you'll want the book by your side as a tutor whenever you use Picasa, until you've mastered the program.

Meanwhile, the Guld's have promised to try to visit us at one of our General Meetings if they come to the Bay Area.

I can hardly wait!

—By *Babette Bloch, GGCS*





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