Dramatic Clouds
By Nannette Dalton

Clouds are really interesting to me. There have been many times when I have taken a photo and was surprised to see how fascinating the clouds were. They really can give a dramatic feel to a photo.

I am going to show you how to boost those clouds just a bit and give them a little more contrast. This tutorial features one of the great tools that can only be found in Photoshop Elements, in the Enhance section of tools. So this time around, I will be providing a work around for Photoshop users.

Here is a photo that surprised me when I looked at it. I was focused on my son and his son walking down the path, but the dramatic clouds pulled me into the photo.

Step One: Open and Duplicate the Photo

- Open a photo with some gray clouds (File < Open).

- In the Menu Bar, choose File > Duplicate and click OK. (Photoshop: Choose Image > Duplicate.)
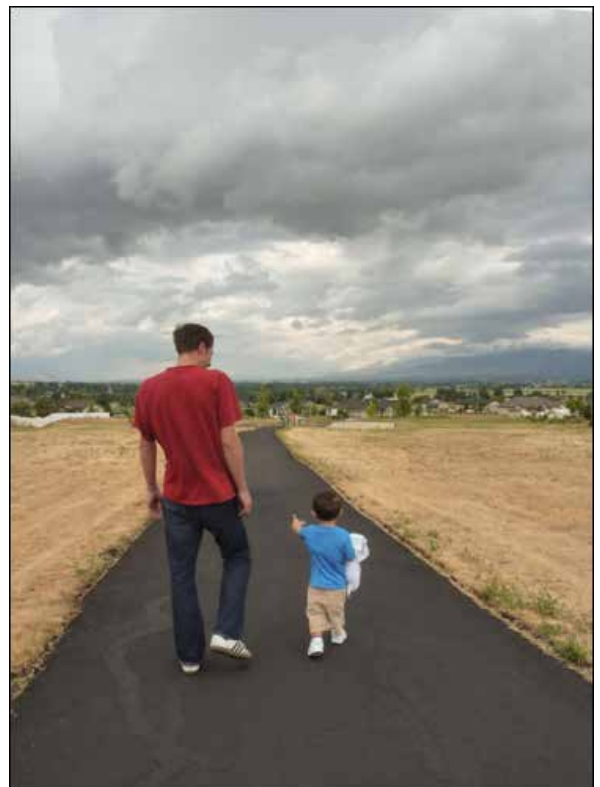
- Close the original photo.

Step Two: Select the Clouds and Adjust the Levels

Photoshop Elements: (Adobe Photoshop instructions are below.)

- Get the Smart Brush tool.

- In the Tool Options, open the Preset Picker, open the drop-down menu, and choose Nature. Choose the Cloud Contrast preset.

- Set the Size to 200 px or whatever works best for your photo. (Earlier versions of PSE, open the Brush Picker and set the Diameter to 200 px.)

- On the document, click and drag over the clouds to select that part of the photo.

Note: If you selected more than you wanted, hold down the Alt key (Mac: Opt key) and carefully click and drag over any parts that you don't want selected. Because this is a "smart" brush, the more you use it, the more it will learn what you want it to do.

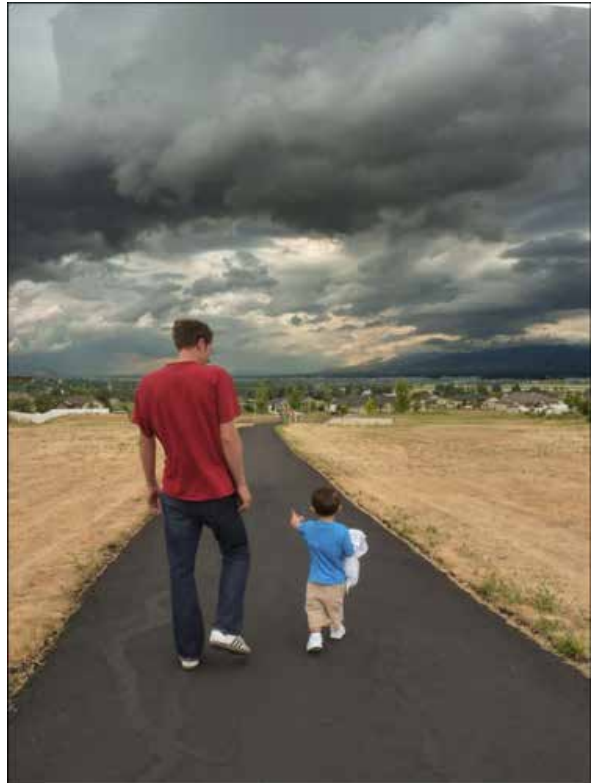- Press Ctrl D (Mac : Cmd D) to deselect.

- If you like what you see, you're done! If you think the clouds could use a bit more drama, continue with the following steps.

- In the Layers panel, double click on the Levels thumbnail of the Adjustment layer that you just created to open the Levels panel.

- In the Levels panel, click on the Shadow Input slider and drag it to the right until the contrast looks good to you.

Photoshop: (Instructions for Photoshop Elements are above.)

- Get the Quick Selection tool.

- In the Options Bar, click on the New Selection icon, uncheck Sample All Layers, and check Auto-Enhance. Open the Brush Picker. Set the size to 30 px, the Hardness to 100%, and the Spacing 25%.

- On the document, click and drag over the clouds to select that part of the photo.

Note: If you selected more than you wanted, hold down the Alt key (Mac: Opt key) and carefully click and drag over any parts that you don't want selected.

- In the Menu Bar, choose Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Levels, and click OK.

- In the Properties panel or Adjustment panel, drag the Shadow Input slider to the right until the contrast looks good to you.

Step Three: Save the Photo

- In the Menu Bar, Choose Layer > Flatten Image.

- Save the photo with a unique name (File > Save).

Here is my layout with my dramatic clouds. I love how it makes the photo look a little stormy, which works well with my title and pulls me right in.

Credits

Digi Scrap Tutorial: Dramatic Clouds by Nannette Dalton
Software: Photoshop Elements 12, Adobe Photoshop CC 2014
Scrapbook page: Walk Beside Me by Nannette Dalton
Papers and embellishments: Outdoor Dad by Brandy Murry
Chevron from Chevron Wave Video Tutorial by Jen White
Fonts: Castellar Regular, Calibri Light Italic