USING LAYER MASK TO REMOVE BACKGROUND – PHOTOSHOP TUTORIAL
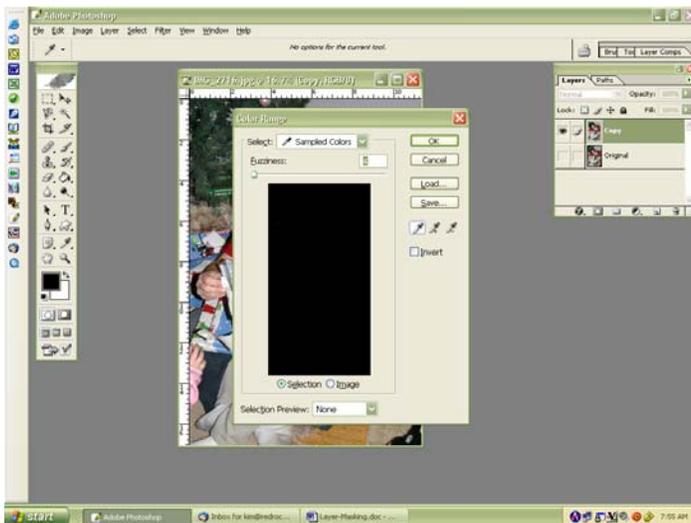**By Kim M. Hill**
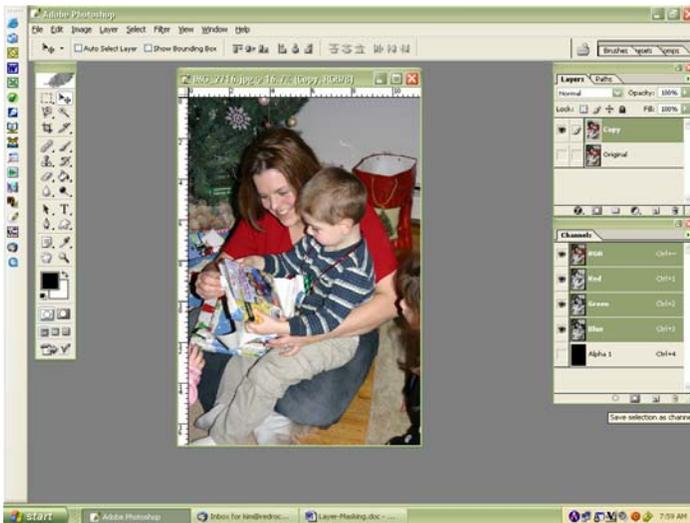If you have any questions about this tutorial, please contact me at kim@cgessentials.com

Sometimes you have a background that is rather distracting from your subject and you'd like to remove it. This method of removing the background is more precise than simply using the lasso or extraction filter, especially for very detailed images.

Once you open up your photo, go to your layers palette and right click on the photo and choose "duplicate layer". Keep the original photo layer in your palette for reference later on. You can simply turn off the viewing of the layer by clicking on the eye that is to the left of the layer. This keeps the original there, but hidden.
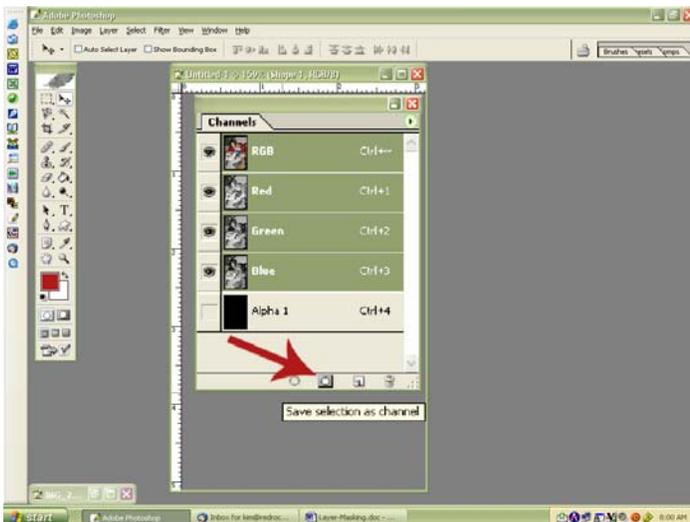
Next, go to the options bar at the top of your screen. Click on Select and then Color Range. A new window will open. Move the Fuzziness Slider until the image is mostly black and the background is a clean as you can get it. Click OK.

Now we are going to open up the Channels palette. Go to the options bar at the top of the screen and click on Windows / Channels. A new palette will open on the right of your screen.
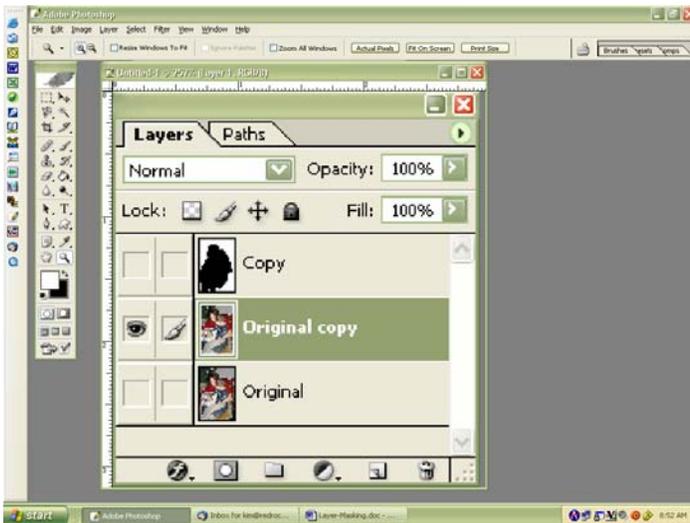
With the selection active, switch to the Channels palette. Click the save selection as channel button, it's the second one to the left on the bottom of the channels palette. A new alpha channel will now be visible.

In the Channels Palette, click on the Alpha 1 channel. Your image will now turn black. The advantage of using a channel is the ability to fine tune the selection without affecting the original image.
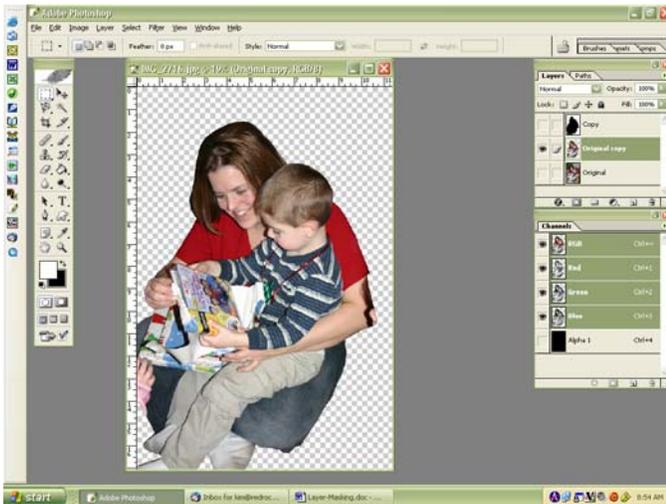
Now the fun begins. Go back to the layers palette and click on the Copy layer. Now go to your Tool Palette and grab a hard round brush, and change the foreground color to black. Using your paintbrush, paint over the subject area that you want to keep. You many need to adjust your brush size smaller for detail areas near the edges of your subject. Once you have that all done, then switch your foreground color to white and paint white on the background areas that you want to eliminate. You'll also need to zoom in from time to time to get a precise mask.
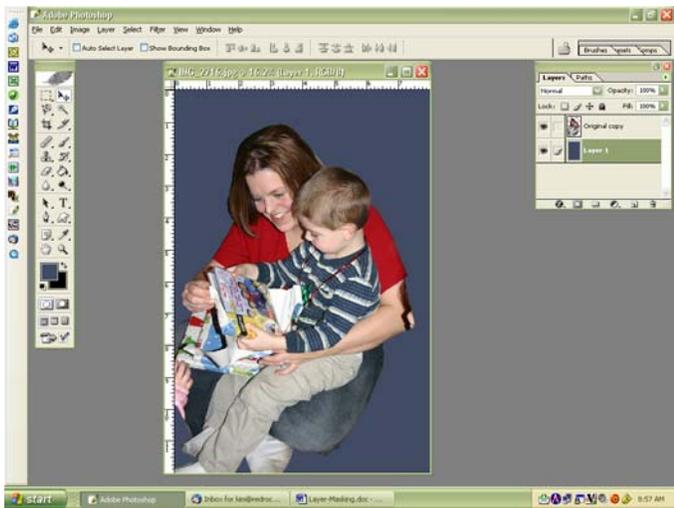
Use the magic wand to select all of the white areas. Now switch layers and go to the original layer. Duplicate this layer once again and then keep the original layer hidden. Hide the mask layer by turning off the eye.

With the copied original layer selected, press the Delete key. All of the unwanted background area that was painted white will now be removed. If you find that you need to go back and correct something, simply click on Edit / Undo, go back to the mask layer and correct it.

Now you will have just the subject that you wanted to keep and you can place it on any background of your choice. Deselect the marching ants. Save your image either as a working PSD file (layers intact) or save it as a PNG file (layers merged and transparent background).

If you have any questions about this tutorial, please feel free to email me at kim@cgessentials.com.