

## **Research and Study... Critical to your Wedding Photography**

By Gene Ho

Imagine yourself for a second in my shoes. I don't remember the exact date, but I do remember the venue.

It was one of the more high-end wedding venues in my area and the day was just hot enough to be comfortable, if you were in the shade. Up until then, the wedding was flawless; everything was working just as planned. The bride and groom were married without a hitch, the wedding party knew their place and they executed everything perfectly. Now, it was my time to shine.

I was going to march right through the formals, I was going to get some great bride and groom shots, and then we would be off to the reception. So here I was marching off groups like a champ: Bride with Maid of Honor, Groom with Best Man, the whole wedding party, then came the family pictures and I was on a roll.

"Ok... let's do the Bride with her Father." Pure Silence and my assistant looked at me with a stare I will never forget. Then it hit me, from the time the bride first booked me to the day of the wedding, her father had died. What's worse, at that moment, I recalled the conversation I had with the bride probably four months ago. She told me her father had died and I just didn't remember. Even my assistant remembered and it wasn't even her job.

How could I be so stupid? I faked my "cover up" pretty good, "Oh, I mean let's do the Bride with her Mother," the Bride knew but she was ok with it, she allowed me to save face. I knew and everyone knew I had put my foot in my mouth. It was an incredibly dumb moment in my career. If I didn't know, that would be one thing but I did know. I was what you call AFK, which is an online gamer's remark for "Away From Keyboard."

Now that was probably eight or nine years ago. After that day I vowed that I would never make that mistake again, I vowed to improve my skills. Flash forward to today. To combat this stupidity, the following is the attitude I've adopted.

To begin with I really care about my brides. Not that I didn't before, I am authentically honored when I shoot a wedding. In essence, I'm the third most important person that day. Granted, that's a stretch. But I would at least say that the wedding photographer is the most important vendor that day. (I hate that term, "wedding vendor," so impersonal.) I care for my brides as if they were my sister, I care about what they think, I care about how they envision their day to be, and because of that, I write notes.

Is that a bad thing? Is a little note attached to the wedding confirmation impersonal, I don't think so? I know that some people will put on their calendar little notes that on this day, it's someone's birthday. If you write on the calendar, "Mom's Birthday" does that mean that somehow you don't love your mom; no it's just a reminder. So, since that day, I started writing reminders and notes on my wedding contracts.

Most of it is in code: *3 BM – 3 GM, Mom w/BF, but no Pic, FG – is cousin, need pic of whole family.* Did you understand? I've already done my research during our conversations. From those notes I know the following: There are three Bridesmaids and three Groomsmen. The bride's mom is divorced and she has a new boyfriend. It's not good, so when you're doing group shots don't invite the mom's boyfriend into the picture. When you are doing the pictures, make sure that you get a picture of the flower girl with the bride and while you're at it take a picture of the flower girl and her family with the bride and groom. Since we're doing that, when you're finished with all the pictures go ahead and take a picture of the flower girl by herself.

See where I'm heading with this, research and study. Do your research on the bride, do your research on the groom and study it, review it in your mind. For me, most of this is done in the week before the wedding. My studio policy is that we check in with all our brides a week before the wedding. Some of the time we already have a ton of notes stapled onto the contract. I make it a point to put notes on the contract if we discuss something over an email or a phone conversation. In an extreme case we will even do more research.

For example, this past February, my studio did the wedding of Matt Schaub, the starting quarterback for the Houston Texans. He was Michael Vick's back-up quarterback and the Falcon's traded him before all the dog-fighting scandal went down. I have a studio in Atlanta so I knew of Matt Schaub even before he hired me to shoot his wedding. So you're doing his wedding, what research would you do?

This is what we did. We went to [www.houstontexans.com](http://www.houstontexans.com) and we studied up on all the players, that way if they show up at the wedding I know Matt will want a picture of them. Granted, those guys are hard to miss, they are big guys, but we did our research. We saw pictures of them and at the wedding we got some great candid shots of them.

This can be wrapped up into the following “Love your brides like your sister, and you’ll do a great job.” In reality, sometimes this means a lot of hard work. It means doing research, it means studying your notes, and sometimes, it means interviewing key people like the Maid of Honor or the Best Man. After all, they might know the inside story and being on the inside is what will build your career.

*Gene Ho teaches photography at Horry-Georgetown Technical College. He is the author of the book, “The Wedding Photographer’s Handbook” – available at Amazon.com and Barnes and Nobles. His studio specializes in wedding photography. View his work at [www.geneho.com](http://www.geneho.com) and read his blog for professional photographers at [www.undergroundgeneho.com](http://www.undergroundgeneho.com) He is a proud member of the C2K Neighborhood.*