

“The Un-Candid Candid Picture”

By Gene Ho

I would make a horrible hunter and it goes beyond the fact that I can't shoot a gun. It also goes beyond the fact that I probably couldn't make a duck call to save my life; I have a hard time playing a kazoo. It has to do more with patience. From what I know about hunting patience is not only a virtue, it's necessary. You wait and get one shot. If you don't hit your mark, your prey skips along. If I was spying out that deer, at first sight I would be ready to shoot.

When it comes to photography, *impatience* can actually be a virtue. In fact, at every wedding I photograph I'm trigger-happy. I have no patience; I anticipate the shots. Sometimes I force shots. If I were a hunter, at the first sight of a deer, I would begin shooting. There would be no "lying in wait." There would be no "if the deer would come JUST a little closer..." No, I would anticipate and start shooting away. That is why I would be a horrible hunter.

As a wedding photographer, it becomes my strength. Don't get me wrong, when I go "hunting" with my camera I end up with a colossal collection of junk. When I'm searching to create a priceless candid photo I can't even begin to tell you how many worthless pictures I get. Some are blurry, some aren't even exposed right, and some are just bad pictures, but I work at it. I work to be quicker; I work to anticipate shots. Sometimes I just nail it; I nail a priceless picture. Unlike hunting, your "prey" isn't going to scatter off. So I work at being fast and trying to anticipate shots.

Here are some other tips in creating the "un-candid" candid shot. That is the so-called "candid moment":

The Formal Candid Shot:

Is it a real candid shot, or did I create it? It doesn't really matter as long as you work to deliver the shot. Only a small percentage of brides actually insist on going without posed formals. Even the established "photojournalistic" wedding photographers that I have talked to all say they are still expected to take a certain amount of formal posed pictures.

Here's how I make the best of it: Every so often, after setting up a group, this is what I'll do. I take my formal pictures and when I'm done, I'll say, "That's it! You are now done! Go to the reception and grab a beer!" Then I'll put my camera down and sometimes that elicits relief, they are done! Then as they are looking at each other I'll put my camera back up and go for another few shots. Sure, I can get nothing, or, the pictures could be priceless – a pure candid moment, big hi-fives all around, big smiles, and a lot of laughs.

The Turn Around:

This is an amazing technique that gives you great candid photos, and it works at least sometimes. Whenever I see the bride and groom doing something funny I shoot it and then turn around. I see who else is laughing and get pictures of everyone else. Before the days of digital, people with point and shoots would be laughing but would have their camera all up to their face, because you had to, imagine that.

Now most of the point and shoot cameras are now "video screen" cameras. Basically, with those cameras they are taking a picture by extending their hands in order to look at their camera's video screen. This is the perfect opportunity you to get a nice shot of them smiling and laughing along.

The Willing Prey:

Call it human nature, while there are a percentage of people that go into hiding when they see a camera, I have to say the majority of the people I photograph at weddings are willing accomplices, and why not? They look good, they feel good, and quite frankly its an honor that someone wants to shoot their picture.

Back in the day, if I were using a medium format camera and film, at the very least it would cost me \$1 to focus on them and press that button, right? Now with digital it's free to press that button, but it's still an honor. They are worthy of your attention; they must be important.

Sometimes, I do make a show of it, that I'm trying to get a good shot of them. You'll be surprised; be it the bride, the mother of the bride, or the maid of honor. When you actually try NOT to be sneaky sometimes they will help you get that shot. They will position themselves better, they will smile, and they will laugh.

The Mooch Technique:

That's right, no one loves a mooch, except for the actual mooch. We all knew that roommate in college that was always eating your Ramen Noodles and we all know someone that doesn't know how to play that "...no, I'll pick up the dinner check game." When it comes to being a professional wedding photographer being a "mooch" is quite profitable. Here's how it works:

You're walking around the reception and you see someone putting a group together. It's one of the guests and they are doing all the work for you. They are gathering up a group; I love those moments, I love being a photo mooch. While they are looking at the guest's camera I position myself to get an "off angle" photo. I like this because the guests are usually relaxed; they are laughing and acting up. Thank the amateur photographer that just made this possible for you.

Conclusion:

In all, creating candid photographs is challenging. You could start by getting it out of your mind that it is something that happens by accident. In reality, it's something that you have to work hard at, something you have to force at times and in some cases, something you actually create.

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