

A GUIDE TO LEGACY PORTRAITURE

Before the Light Changes



*My mother, 82 years old, during a summer evening walk
in Vegreville.*

*Seven things to consider when photographing your parents in the places, routines and
relationships that make them who they are.*

*Read this once,
then pick a date.*

You have thousands of photographs on your phone and none on your walls.

A parent reaches a birthday. The family is home for the summer, everybody in one house for the first time in years. And somewhere in it you notice that between you there are thousands of photographs on everyone's phones, and almost none that show your parents as they actually live now. Not good ones, at any rate — the blurred one from Christmas, the one where your father isn't smiling. Those are records. They are not photographs anyone would put on a wall.

A wall-worthy portrait gets made on purpose. Someone decides it matters, chooses a day, and makes it happen. That is very nearly the whole difference. The picture that ends up above the mantel or in a photo archive box on the shelf — the one your family will point at in 30 years — exists because one person stopped waiting for a better time.

This guide is about being that person. It is seven things to think about, in order, and none of them are complicated.

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Why it matters more than you think

Photos are a gateway to memory. As years pass, we look to the images we have taken to help us remember the stories we value. Photographs are a kind of time machine; they allow us to hold on to past moments in defiance of ones that follow.

A good photograph keeps more than a likeness. It keeps a posture, a pair of hands, a season of a life. Twenty years from now it will be the closest thing you have to standing in the room with someone.

There is also the person in the photograph to consider. To be looked at with attention, and then shown the result, tells someone that they were worth the trouble. Many people in their 80s have not been properly photographed since their wedding day. Watching a parent see themselves rendered with dignity is something families do not expect, and never forget.

And the plain truth — things change, and nobody expects it. Regret lives in versions of the same sentence — *'we always meant to'*. The ones who never say it are the ones who picked a date.

This is not about who your parents were. It is about who they are now, in the midst of a life still being lived.



My mother, exploring a canola field near Vegreville, Alberta, where they live.

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When to make it

Find an occasion. A birthday, an anniversary, the summer everyone is home, a first great-grandchild — any reason that belongs to the family. It makes the day and the photo taking easier to ask for and easy to say yes to. And where there is no occasion, make it this year anyway. There is still value in capturing people as they are now, rather than waiting for a better version of someone. Those times may not come.

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- Book it around something good: a birthday, an anniversary, a reunion, a season they love.
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- An unhurried hour is easier now than later: standing, walking out to the garden, sitting a while for attention.
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- Families gather on a calendar. If everyone is home in July, July is the date — not some better one you are imagining.
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- A session made in a good season is a pleasure. One made in a hurry is a scramble, and it shows.
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“I don't want my picture taken”

Expect hesitation, and take it seriously. “I don't want my picture taken” can mean: I feel self-conscious. I don't want a fuss. I don't know what will happen. Or — they are thinking you are asking because you think something is wrong. Don't argue. Work out which one it is.

“I don't like how I look in pictures.”

Nobody studies a photograph of their grandmother and appraises her skin. They look for her. We are all getting old, and changing along the way. The best time for pictures is now.

“You think I am dying, don't you!”

Better answered plainly than argued with: you just want photographs of your family as it is now, and you want to be in some of them. It's not about the future. It's about right now.

“I wouldn't know what to do.”

Say exactly what will happen: where, how long, who comes, what to wear — and that nobody must perform. Uncertainty is easily mistaken for refusal.

WHAT TO SAY · FOUR SENTENCES YOU CAN BORROW

THE PLAIN ONE

“I'd like photographs of us together, at home, while everyone is here. Nothing is wrong. This matters to me.”

FOR A BIRTHDAY OR ANNIVERSARY

“Instead of a present this year, I'd like an afternoon of pictures — you, at home, the way you are.”

IF THEY THINK IT MEANS SOMETHING IS WRONG

“I'm not asking because of your age. I'm asking because we love you, and there isn't one decent picture of all of us together.”

IF IT'S HOW THEY LOOK

“Wear whatever you want to wear. Nobody looks at these and thinks about clothes.”



Looking at family pictures on my mother's iPad.

Photograph them where they live, doing the things they love

A studio backdrop makes for decent head-and-shoulders images, but they tell you nothing about anyone. A house tells you everything. Photograph your parents inside their own life and the picture carries the place along with the person.

Your mother's chair that nobody else sits in. The workshop, the garden, the sewing room, the garage where dad keeps his boat. The front step of the house they have kept for 40 years. The truck he refuses to sell.

These rooms change too — houses are sold, downsized, cleared out over a single weekend. Photograph the room while the room is still theirs.

And not every frame needs to be composed and polished. The formal portrait is the one that gets framed. The candid ones are the ones kept in albums and photo boxes, ones people linger over because that is how your parents actually were.



My father loves to drum. His favourite "set" is now a drum box he picked up on Amazon.



*An evening walk in the summer. Not every
portrait needs an occasion behind it.*

Who else belongs in the frame

A legacy session is rarely a single portrait. It is a small, deliberate set, and the set is what turns it from a nice picture into heirlooms.

Plan for each parent alone. The two of them together. Each adult child with their parents, one at a time. Grandchildren, if there are grandchildren. And once, everyone in the room at the same moment — which may be the only frame of its kind you ever get.

One practical note. Name a single person in the family to organize it, and choose a day when people are already in town. Ask everyone to dress simply and in the same register: no logos, no slogans, nothing that will date the picture. Then leave the rest to me.

Families rarely regret making these photographs. They might regret the years they spent meaning to, but not getting around to it.



Mothers and daughters: A friend's family, during a recent photo session.

The frames worth coming away with

Nine photographs. Ask for them by name, and you will not get home and realize something obvious is missing.

☐ i Each parent as themselves — looking toward the camera, or away. The one that ends up on the wall.

☐ ii The two of them, close enough to be touching.

☐ iii Their hands. Only the hands, together, rings and all.

☐ iv In their chair, in their room, wide enough to show the house.

☐ v Doing something familiar — the workbench, the garden, the piano, the dough on the counter.

☐ vi Each of their children with them, one at a time.

☐ vii The family around them: once guided, once not.

☐ viii The generations together — grandchildren, great-grandchildren, whoever is there.

☐ ix One with you in it. You organized the day; don't spend all of it behind the camera and end up missing from the record.

Print this page. Bring it with you.



They have been married for 61 years.



What to do with photographs afterward

Digital files are easy to store and easy to forget. Phones are lost, drives fail, accounts lapse. A photograph becomes part of family life when it is printed, handled, hung and passed on.

So the work does not end at the session. It ends on a wall.

A framed portrait

Large enough to be read from across the room. This is the one that stops guests mid-sentence.

A group of family photographs

A grouping planned together for the wall it will live on, so the generations hang as one arrangement.

An album

Printed to be handled, passed down the table, and read aloud from.

Duplicate sets, and the photo box archive

A set for each sibling so nobody has to ask, and archival files kept somewhere sensible.

Two habits worth keeping. Hang them where the family actually lives, not in the back hallway. And write on the back — names, place, year. Somebody down the line will be grateful you did.



Wall art makes a statement — the people we photograph matter to us.

What happens in a session

Nobody should arrive on the day wondering what is expected of them. Here is the whole of it, in order.

01 **A short call, first**

Twenty minutes on the phone. We settle who is in the pictures, where to make them, what everyone should wear, and a date that suits the whole family.

02 **The session**

About 90 minutes, at their home or somewhere that matters to them. Ordinary clothes, nothing bought for the occasion. I work slowly, and the best frames usually arrive once everyone has forgotten I am there.

03 **Choosing together**

We sit down with the photographs and decide which of them deserve to be printed, and where in the house they will live.

04 **The making**

Framed portraits, wall groupings, albums and duplicate sets for the family — printed properly, on paper made to last.



Three generations of the family together in one place, ready for the album or wall.

Everything in this guide, I make.

I photograph parents and grandparents in their own homes, unhurried, in black and white or colour, and I build what comes out of the session into wall art, albums, archives and prints made to last. Most of this work begins with an adult son or daughter deciding they want photographs of their family the way it is now.

If that is you, the next step is a conversation. Twenty minutes, no obligation and nothing to buy on the call. We talk about who should be in the pictures, where to make them, how to get everybody involved. And most important, am I the right person for your family?

Book a 20-minute call

No cost, no obligation, no pressure of any kind. Let's see if I am the right fit.

EMAIL ME TO BOOK A CALL

Or call — 250.299.3486
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ABOUT ME

For more than 25 years, I worked as a journalist in this region — sitting with people, asking questions, hearing their stories and learning about their lives.

Robert Koopmans Photography follows the same tradition. I photograph families, individuals and couples in Kamloops the same way — by looking for their stories, and for how they want to be seen and remembered.

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