



## Be Real #2: Character

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*"It is not time or opportunity that is to determine intimacy; it is disposition alone. Seven years would be insufficient to make some people acquainted with each other, and seven days are more than enough for others."* Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, 1811 by Jane Austen

### INTRODUCTION

When you're scrapbooking photos of people, you've got an opportunity to document and show so much more than is immediately obvious. The things they're doing and how they're doing them, what they say and how they say it, and even the items they're holding or using or wearing may all point to more about their personality.

The examination of what people do and what it means has been going on as long ago as 475 B.C., when the Greek philosopher Heraclitus proposed that "A man's character is his fate." Heraclitus placed the fates right inside a person and maintained that we are all in control of our own destiny. Later, Aristotle saw the connection between action and character differently. He believed that individuals do not act in isolation. He spoke of how actions happen within a complex web of relationships and events that affect many more than just one person. Let's take a look at what you can do on your scrapbook pages to reveal character and leave a meaningful record of the people in your life.

## WAYS TO REVEAL CHARACTER ON YOUR PAGES

## 1. Convey abstract ideas with concrete evidence

Whenever you can SHOW something, as opposed to (or in addition to) TELLING, the viewer of your page gets to come to their own conclusion about your subject. Why should you care if the viewer figures it out on their own? To begin with, this draws them more deeply into your page and the events you're scrapbooking. It connects them to your story in an active way, it's satisfying to observe evidence and connect the dots on one's own, and it's all more believed.

The way to show--as opposed to tell--is to accumulate evidence, to build up the concrete details we talked about in lesson #1. Your job is to include the details that reveal your subjects' opinions, sorrows, aspirations, prejudices, phobias, interests, regrets, joys and much more.

An abstract is a concept or idea not associated with any specific instance. Examples are "good," "proud," and "kind," which I used to title my layout here. What was I thinking in so obviously using this abstract? I was thinking I sure better provide some evidence that my son is kind--and I did in my photos and my journaling.



How I used evidence to support my abstract title in "Kind:"

- ◇ Title. I did something I often consider a "no-no," using an abstract word as a title. It is a great introduction to my subject and a word I'd recently been talking about with my oldest son so it's relevant. HOWEVER I made sure to back it up with evidence in the journaling.
- ◇ Photos. The two photos here are from an instance of kindness related in the journaling. These photos were, in fact, what spurred me to create the page. These everyday photos of a scraped knee took me to an exploration of one aspect of my oldest son's personality.
- ◇ Journaling.
  1. I begin with an introduction to the page's subject by writing about a conversation I'd recently had with my oldest son about him being "kind," I drop in a few lines of dialogue from this moment. This serves as an introduction to the photos, and . . .
  2. the story going on in the photos, which I wrote about next.
  3. From there I added several more pieces of "evidence" to make sure I'd earned my abstract title.
- ◇ Embellishments. Alpha rub-ons saying "Hey, shortstuff" echo the ending of the journaling.

JOURNALING for "Kind:"  
 One day this past school year, Joshua, you talked to me about how you had several friends who were really POPULAR-- and how they were your friends even though you weren't popular. "What do you mean?" I said. "People like you!" "Well, yeah, people like me because I'm kind, but these guys play sports and have their own band." You weren't at all unhappy to consider yourself liked for your kindness and a step removed from being popular. And you ARE kind. Here, you've just brought Isaac in on the WAHHHmbulance after a fall in the yard, and I told him to sit while I got a bath running, but you wanted to soothe him and grabbed this book and started entertaining him. It's more, though, than when one of us is in immediate trouble -- you're the one who remembers if I've been sick or bothered by something the day before and you ask how I am and really wait to hear. I see you sometimes with Dad when he's tired and in pain and you spontaneously give him a huge hug. Even when you're away on a sleepover, if you & your friends are online, you check to see if Isaac's online and give him a holler, calling him "shortstuff" and sending that trademark kindness of yours hurtling through cyberspace to touch us all.

## 2. Consider what behavior means about character

If Aristotle is right and “action is character,” then a look at what your subjects do and the choices they make is a great place to start to make pages that show who the people on your pages really are. When you’ve got photos from an outing, event, or everyday situation that you’d like to scrap, try this:

a. Begin by asking what is/are your subject(s) doing?

*In “Persistence is the Up Side of Stubborn,” my son is rolling a hoop at a local museum.*

b. Connect this obvious action to what it says about the character or personality of your subject(s), including what it might say about attitudes, approaches, and just a general way of being.

*My son did not want to stop trying to get the hang of rolling a hoop. He kept doing it over and over. This is how he approaches many things in life and the journaling uses the photo as a springboard to talk about this aspect of his personality.*

JOURNALING for “Persistence:” Isaac, when you saw hoops at Strawberry Banke you HAD to try rolling them. & then try one more time. & again. You started figuring it out. You love mastering new skills & are willing to stick with a task even though you’re not good at it at the beginning. I love this persistence. & I will try to recall it whenever I’m up against that vein of stubbornness in your personality.



How I scrapbooked actions being revealing of personality in "After Treasure."

- ◇ Photos. When I went to Florida with two friends for a getaway, my friend Elaine wanted to go looking for treasure from sunken ships, and these are the photos of us tracking down a metal detector and then using it at the beach. A series of smaller photos supports a larger focal point photo.
- ◇ Title. The title echoes the opening line of my journaling and references not only the act of looking for treasure on the beach but that we were all after some kind of treasure on this trip.
- 1. Journaling. The journaling doesn't ever say that my friend is someone who is determined to make things that she really wants happen, but, rather, tells of the things she did on our trip to bring us to this point on the beach.

JOURNALING for "After Treasure:" We were each after our own "something" on this trip. I wanted quiet. Jill wanted fun, and Elaine wanted treasure--or at least to look for the kind of shipwreck treasure she'd seen on the travel channel. At restaurants, stores, gas stations and beaches she asked people where we should go and where we could rent metal detectors. We received lots of general ideas but no specifics. Nonetheless, we started driving south along the coast, Elaine, quickly veering and rolling down her window to yell out to people, asking them where we'd find metal detectors.

We found them at Boppy's--that is we found one (seem others had this same idea). Elaine yakked it up with Boppy about where we should go and what kind of a deal he might give her. We discovered he went to UNH for college @ the same time as Jill. We ate the stuffed peppers they sold which were made by a chef who used to "chef" in NYC. The beach was stunning. We played with the rented detector for a short while, finding only bottle caps and soda can pull tabs with it. We did find lovely shells and interesting stones, and we all took home several, cleaning them up and admiring them as if they were dubloons. And while Elaine didn't get dubloons, still she plans to come back better prepared next time --- and we all declared it a fabulous day.

## 2. Study the artifacts

Look to the items in your photos--clothes, toys, tools, trinkets--and think about what they reveal about your subject that may not be obvious from the photo alone. As in the allegorical paintings I studied in art history, these artifacts often function as a metaphor or symbol for something more, perhaps a preoccupation, a style, or a need.



JOURNALING for "Much to Admire:"

At about 5 years old, Joshua loved getting and playing with Papo figures of knights, horses, kings and other soldiers. By his 10th birthday he wasn't playing with or thinking to buy them very often. I got him a knight and horse for his birthday, though, because I know he always appreciates treasures.

He opened this gift last, and his eyes started watering when he saw it. I thought maybe he was disappointed--maybe he had his hopes on something he didn't get. I started making apologies: "Maybe this is too young--"

He said that he wasn't upset. "I'm happy,"

"Are you crying?"

"I'm happy, though. I've wanted this exact one forever."

Here he is a growing-up 10-year-old who not only loves his knights, he understands what these toys have meant to him AND about him.

How I looked at what clothing choices tell about a subject in "Stranger Than Fiction:"

- ◇ Photos. One enlarged photo is the focal point of the page and indicates that my husband, in his matching lime green glasses and coat, is the subject.
- ◇ Title. Inspired by the older science fiction publications on display in this museum, I used a title that sounds and looks like it comes from a tabloid.
- ◇ Design. The motifs and materials on this page support its subject. Patterned paper with images of clothing is combined with another pattern of retro-space-age ovals. I made the sci-fi cover tag from a photo I took in the museum. The gutters between blocks on the page are made with seam binding.
- ◇ Journaling. The journaling is written in a reportorial styles that goes with the tabloid title and that continues the light tone of this page.



## JOURNALING for "STRANGER THAN FICTION."

Fashionista Mistaken for Time Traveler July 2005. Seattle, Washington. The Museum of Science Fiction. Neil, my lover of sportswear and color, you have taken a lot of guff from New Hampshire folk who can't quite reconcile themselves to your style. There you are every week at Town Council Meetings and what do people comment on first? The issues? No! They want to talk about your footwear: the clogs, the Keens, the colorful athletic shoes. Maybe it's the California in you making itself known. Here you are in Seattle, on vacation, looking so . . . YOU! We came to the Museum of Science Fiction, a spectacular, multi-metal, shape-morphing building, and before we went in and saw what they thought belonged there--I had to get a picture of you, who I thought so belonged there. I love your independent sense of style, and your sweet smile, and your general lack of concern for what anyone else might think.

#### 4. Include voice

“Let’s see what she says about that!” or “What did he say about it?” How often do you hear or even express this exact sentiment? There’s an anticipation and satisfaction in hearing people speak. Whenever you can convey what a person says and how they say it, you’ve got a character-revealing record.

You can convey voice by:

- Including direct dialogue. This would be specific things said and placed in quotation marks.
- Including indirect dialogue. This would be a recounting a conversation but not with the specific words of the speaker.
- Writing from your own point of view in the way that you speak and think to capture your own voice.
- Writing with a 1st-person point of view, but as if you were your subject, trying to express thoughts as they would.

#### How I scrapbooked my father’s voice in “My Inheritance:”

- ◇ Journaling. The journaling is brief and to the point and includes one short line of dialogue. I don’t need to comment on how he said it because of the wry humor behind the statement. What I do include, though, is his tough health situation which



JOURNALING for “My Inheritance:” Icy cold temperatures don’t go well with lung and heart disease, so Dad has been inside a lot recently. One thing he’s been filling time with is rolling coins. He pointed it out last night saying, “I’ve been working on your inheritance.” At least the cold weather hasn’t affected his sense of humor . . . or . . . hmmm . . . at least I hope not



is important context since it shows how he's bearing up and keeping a sense of humor in hard times.

- ◇ Photos. I included a photo of my Dad smiling at me which cues the viewer to his good humor. I also included a photo of the "artifact" here -- the rolled pennies.

### Several voices

In "Big Old Stick in the Muds," several voices come through. The journaling is written in a conversational tone from my own 1st-person point of view. Punctuation and grammar are ignored with a focus on voice. My own judgment and opinion on things is conveyed by my "asides."

Indirect dialogue is used to relate that Bev is saving her money for a trip to Uganda.

Direct dialogue from Elaine conveys tone and personality -- and the page title comes from one of her lines.

JOURNALING for "Big Old Stick in the Muds:" Every group of friends needs that one member who makes things happens, who functions as the oil, and that's Elaine here. She was so determined to go to Florida, and she called us about dates and we said "sure, sure" not really understanding she was for real and that we were talking Florida, and then Elaine told me to bring my laptop to coffee, and she flicked it open (Elaine only recently learned how to google anything & that first thing was shoes) and wanted us to all buy our plane tickets right then and there. Jill & I were immediately . . . ummmmm . . . not ready. And Bev said she was saving her \$ and hours away from home for Uganda (thanks, Bev!) Right here in this photo, I believe Elaine is saying "You're the biggest old stick in the muds I ever met." Over the course of the next week, Jill and I came to see the sense in this trip and are now happily anticipating the getaway. It just takes us a little longer to come around to things. The debate now: Elaine called me up yesterday, and said "Get packed & no checked luggage!" It's a month away, and I hadn't even thought about it but my response was "I think I might want to check luggage." So we'll need a little more time to see how that plays out. Mar 08



## **TRIGGER for revealing character**

Trigger: Artifacts

Look through your photos for one in which the subject is holding an item that he/she often holds or uses or has nearby and answer the following:

- What is the item? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the item's history? \_\_\_\_\_
- Where did it come from? \_\_\_\_\_
- Who obtained it? Did your subject get it on their own or was it a gift? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How long has your subject had it? \_\_\_\_\_
- Does your subject have others? \_\_\_\_\_
- When and how does she/he use it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Does anyone else use it? \_\_\_\_\_
- What compelled you to select this photo? \_\_\_\_\_