

CLASS #5: Everyday Incidents & Epiphanies

- The incident report
- The everyday epiphany
- Sketch bundle for scrapbooking everyday life

In my mind, the INCIDENT REPORT and the EVERYDAY EPIPHANY sit on opposite ends of a scrapbook page-type spectrum. The INCIDENT REPORT documents life with photos, words, design, and products. THE EVERYDAY EPIPHANY tries to make sense of life and come to new understandings about it (also with photos, words, design, and products).

THE INCIDENT REPORT

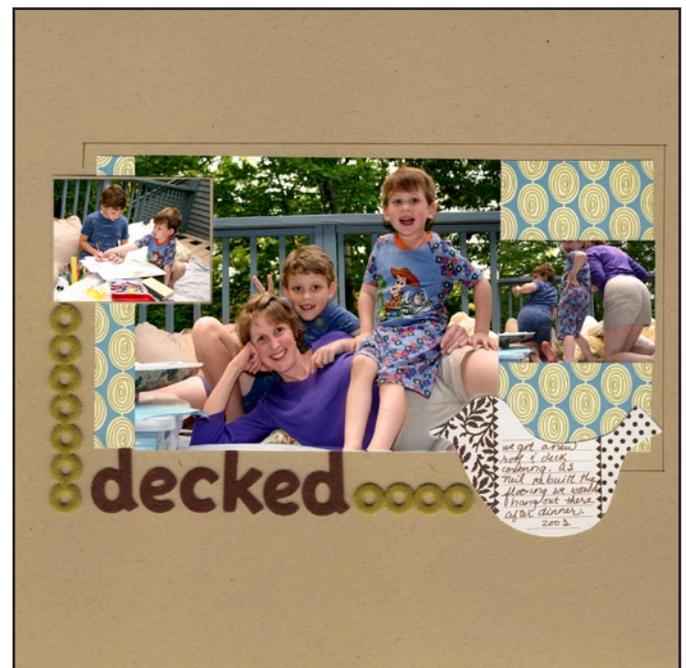
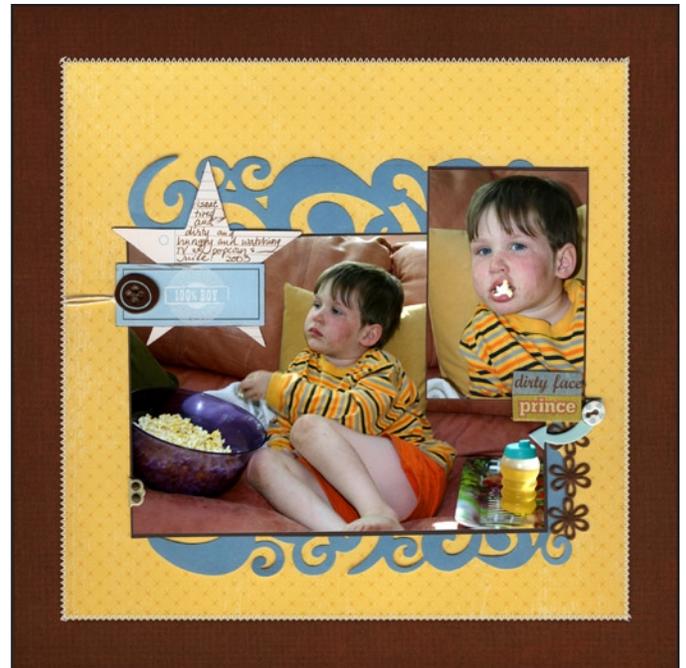
I took 100+ photos on the afternoon the photo in "How Many Shovels Does It Take?" was snapped--and I've scrapped a few multi-photo pages from that bunch of photos. This one shot, though, of my boys and their cousins crowded into a not-finished snow-fort with umpteen shovels all around, just kept nagging at me to scrap it on its own page with nothing else upstaging it. This is a just-because-I-love-it page that records a bit of snow play in Grandma and Grandpa's yard.



Documenting moments that don't appear to be remarkable in themselves, creates a snapshot of life that combines with other snapshots and accumulates to create a larger portrait of your daily life. It's a way to scrapbook those "just-because" photos: just because I had the camera nearby, just because the scene called to me, just because someone said, "You should take a picture of that." Often I find that this basic act of documenting leads to discovering meaning--and other times: it's a simple record. The following are approaches you can use on your own "incident reports."

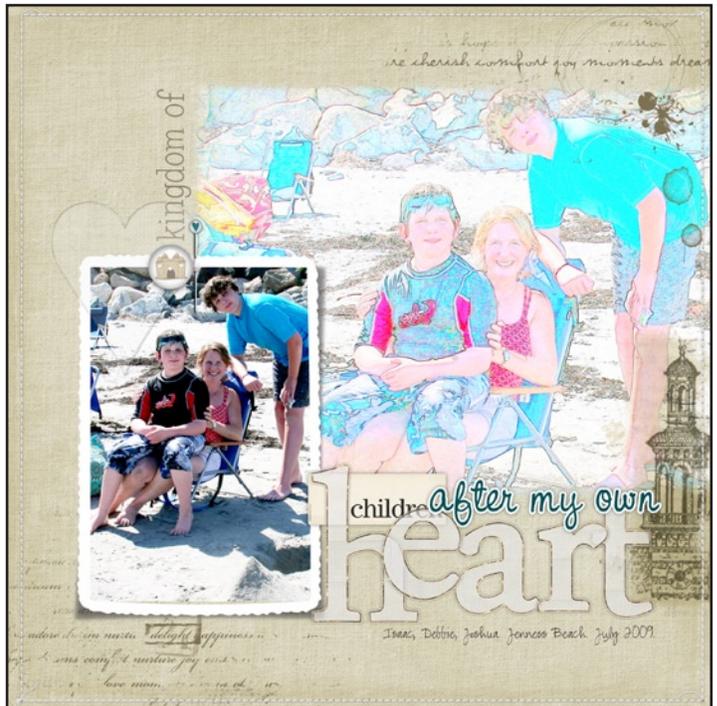
combine compelling photos and minimal journaling

"Decked" and the untitled layout of my son with a dirty face shown here are examples of pages that capture people and place at a particular moment. These photos bring instant smiles and memories to my family. We recall the repairs on the deck and how we played games on it in the evening. We see the goofy photo of us shaking our bottoms and don't even know exactly what was going on but have a sense of how we were (and still are) together. The photos in the dirty-face layout bring out tender feelings. Isaac looks so tired and dirty. What's more--he still eats a lot of popcorn. And what's even more--that red leather sofa was the first piece of furniture we bought when we moved into this house. It's no longer here, but photos like this help us remember.



create a mood with design

“Kingdom of After My Own Heart” features a photo of my sons and me. I LOVE photos of the three of us together. I still plan to make an event page with the photos from this particular beach outing, but I wanted to show off this photo and try to create a sense of the feeling this photo evokes for me. I used a title that makes sense to me, no journaling, a realistic rendering of the photo and a colorful, dreamy sketch as background as well as motifs and design that reflect what I feel about this photo.



attempt to show rather than tell

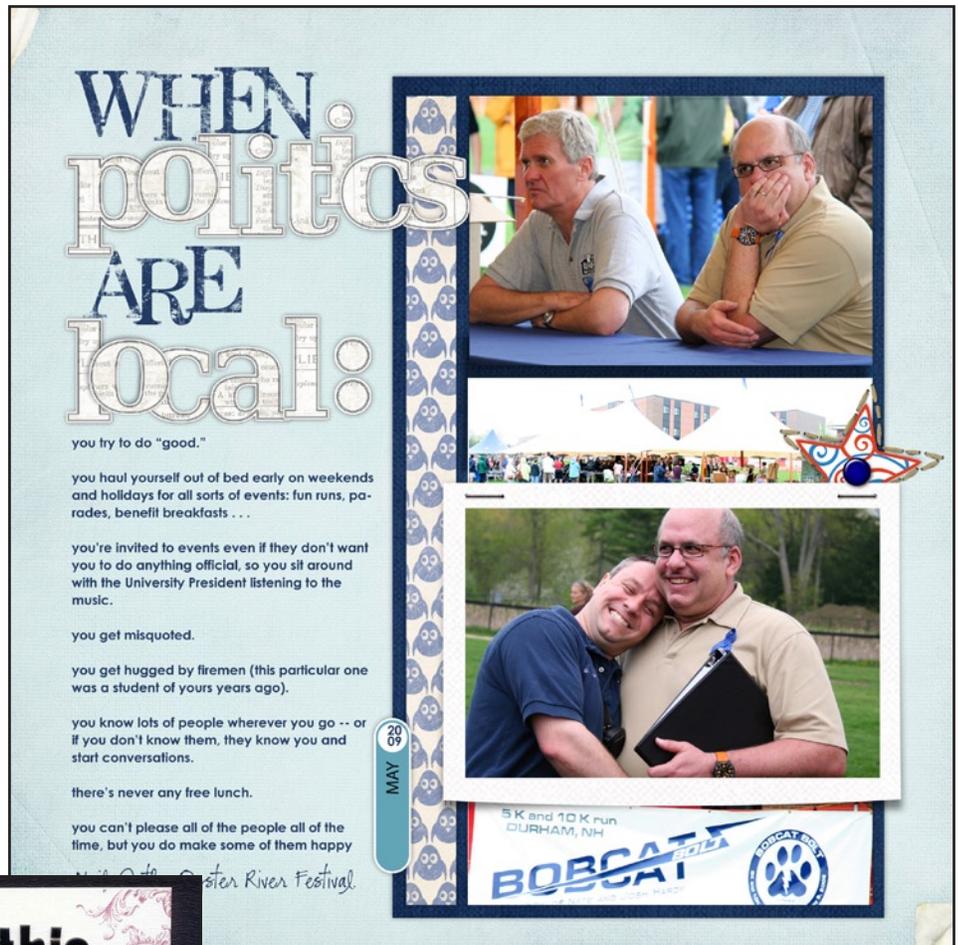
A first impulse when writing the journaling to go with an everyday life photo that doesn't involve an interesting story or extraordinary situation is to start with sweet abstracts (i.e., You always look so sweet and thoughtful when you're swinging . . .). In "Homework Helper," I could have written about how it "warmed my heart" to see my boys bent over a math book together. I might have written of their "brotherly bond." Instead, I relied on the concrete details of the scene and what was going on to show these feelings rather than tell them. Oftentimes feelings are understood and believed much better when they're presented via evidence rather than abstractions about feelings.



CLICK for journaling.

use lists

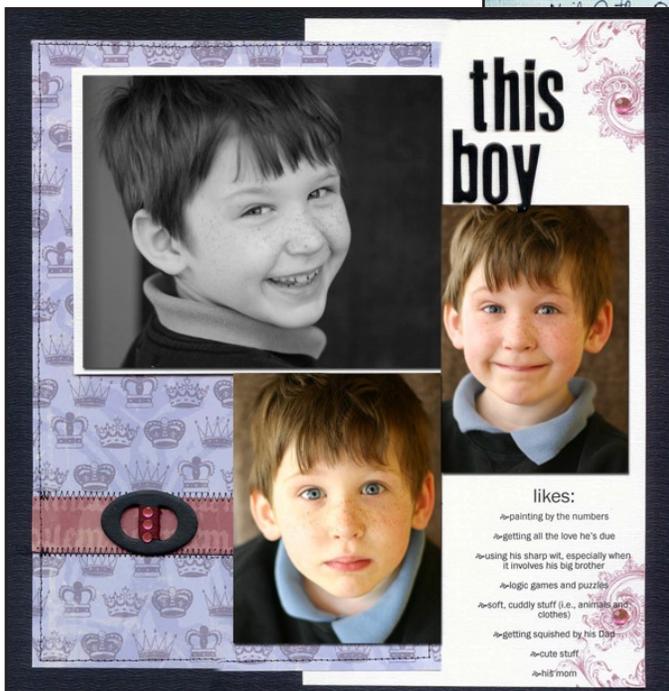
Use lists to capture “how things are” succinctly. “When Politics Are Local” used photo “onesies” from local events that really didn’t merit their own page. The journaling is a list of the kinds of things that my husband, as a local politician, experiences. The quick broad strokes of list journaling let you cover a lot of territory with limited words.



CLICK for journaling.

“This Boy” lists several things that my youngest son liked at that point in his life. Four years later, while some of the specifics have changed, the essence that underlies these preferences still describes him.

CLICK for journaling.



tell a story

When the little stories of your everyday life are preserved on a scrapbook page, they are greatly appreciated by future readers, and, what's more, they are likely to be retold in other situations. You give the story a longer life by preserving it on the page. You bought encyclopedias captures an act of mine one summer as well as details about how each of us behaved around this purchase.

include context in both your photos and your journaling

"Playing Solitaire Together" shows photos of my husband helping my son play solitaire. It wasn't a remarkable conversation they had or a remarkable game. It was just a nice moment on a busy afternoon. Given how uneventful the moment was – what was I to journal about? These photos gave me the excuse to ramble about what else was going on that day, how I felt about that white leather ottoman they're playing upon, and my son's attitude when it comes to playing games. Let those everyday incidents be a springboard for sharing more of the everyday details that cannot be photographed.



CLICK for journaling.



CLICK for journaling.

EVERYDAY EPIPHANIES

An “epiphany” is one of those “ahha” moments when you realize something you hadn’t before, when you have a flash of new understanding. You may have a quick moment of understanding that you realize is important and have to take a photo to go with the subject. Alternatively, you may have to track these understandings down. Everyday life photos (and the concrete details they trigger in your journaling) are the perfect jumping-off spot for discovering your own everyday epiphanies.

look at behavior

Look at your own behavior or that of someone in your life from many angles. Try to understand the motivation for the behavior. You might ask: Why am I always late? Why does my son avoid competitions?

My oldest son is almost always bringing up the rear of any group outing or event. It took me years to realize that no amount of cajoling was going to speed him up because he values this part of his personality. Your own drummer shows him bringing up the rear of a hike, and the journaling talks about his history of “marching to his own drummer.”



CLICK for journaling.

begin with a photo that compels you

Select a photo that compels you, one that you really love and keep coming back to, and then begin journaling about the concrete circumstances of the photo. When was it taken? What was going on? If there's something in the photo that's important – a place or thing – write about that. If you keep on journaling past the concrete details, you often find yourself getting to the real heart of meaning. I began "Tender Boy" just wanting to feature this photo, thinking I'd use a quote rather than journaling because I didn't have much to say. But I did want to put down a few of the where, when and why details. And then I found I was writing about my son's nature and the effect his love has on us. That photo that I didn't think had much of a story turned out to have a really Important story.

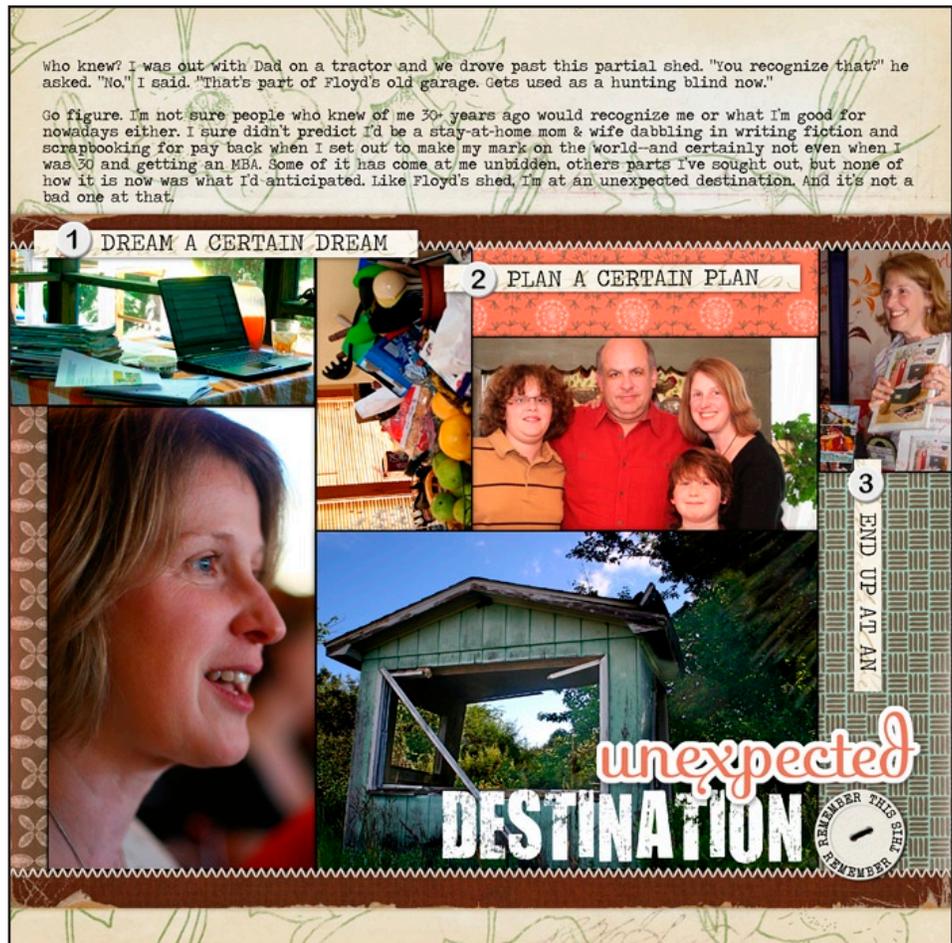


CLICK for journaling.

- Extend the commonplace to the meaningful. Grab on to things your family members say or do that you want to just dismiss and think about the why of it all. Is it Straightforward or is there something more going on?

pay attention and make notes

Some “ah-ha” moments are complex and not easy to articulate. An understanding that you just “get” in your mind and heart may not be easy to talk about. When you have one of those, though, stop your mind a minute and tell yourself to remember this. As soon as you get a chance, write about it—and again, it’s always best to start with the concrete and trust it to move you to deeper meaning. The “glimpse” that prompted me to create “Unexpected Destination” came during a tractor ride with my father. I pursued this in writing that filled a couple of pages until I finally understood what was important. With several images and greatly condensed journaling, I scrapbooked this “ah-ha” moment.

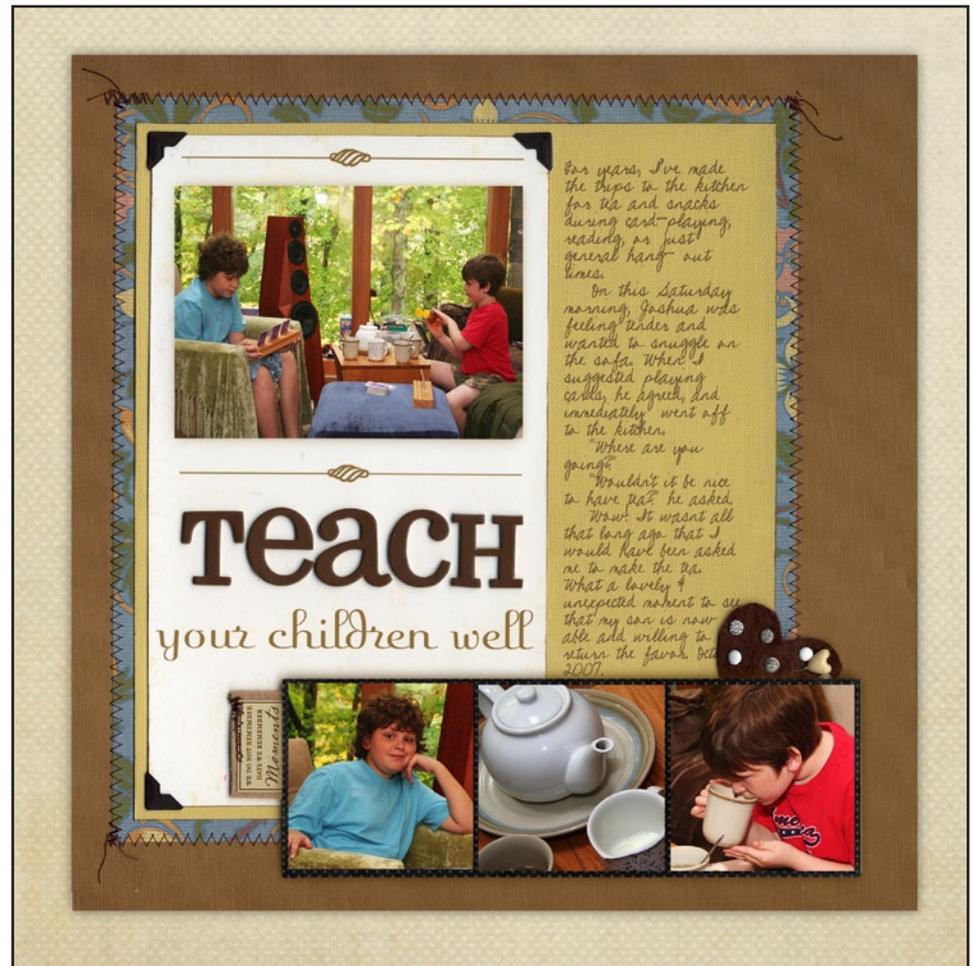


CLICK for journaling.

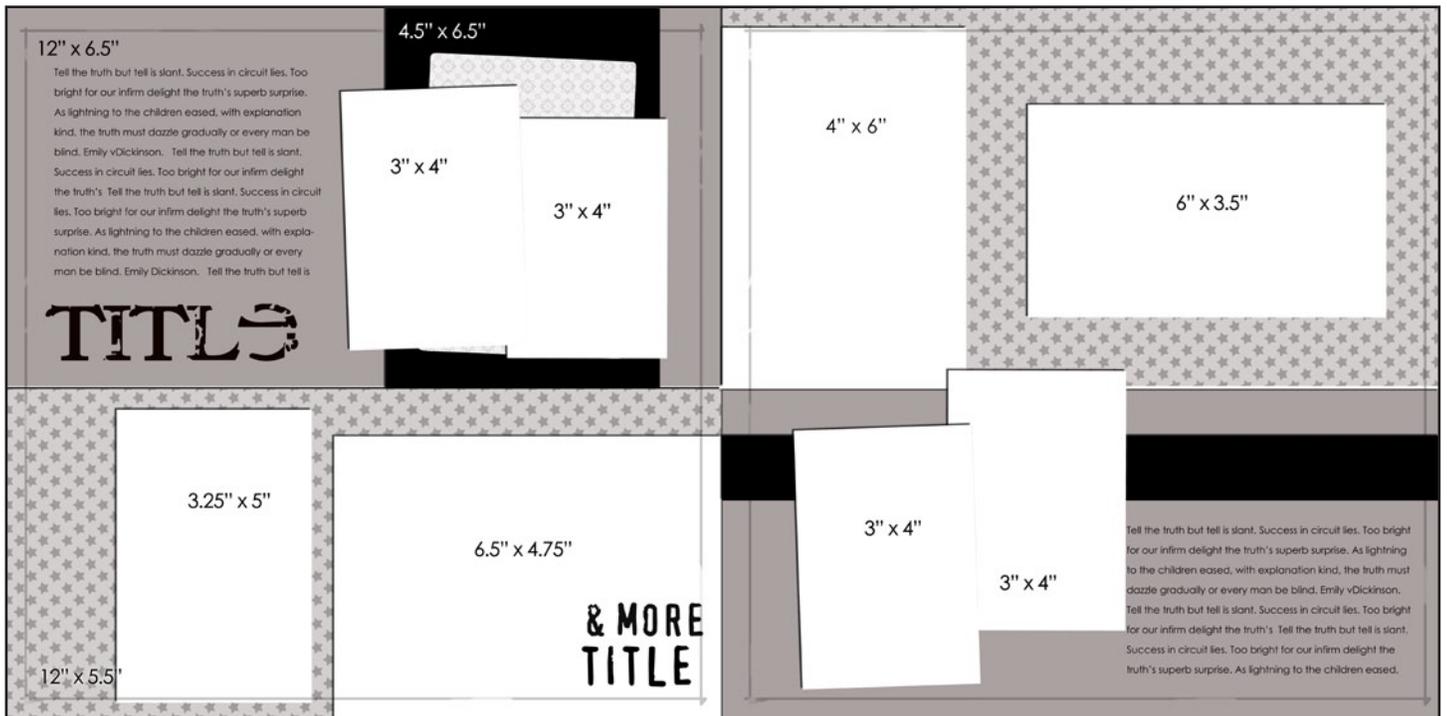
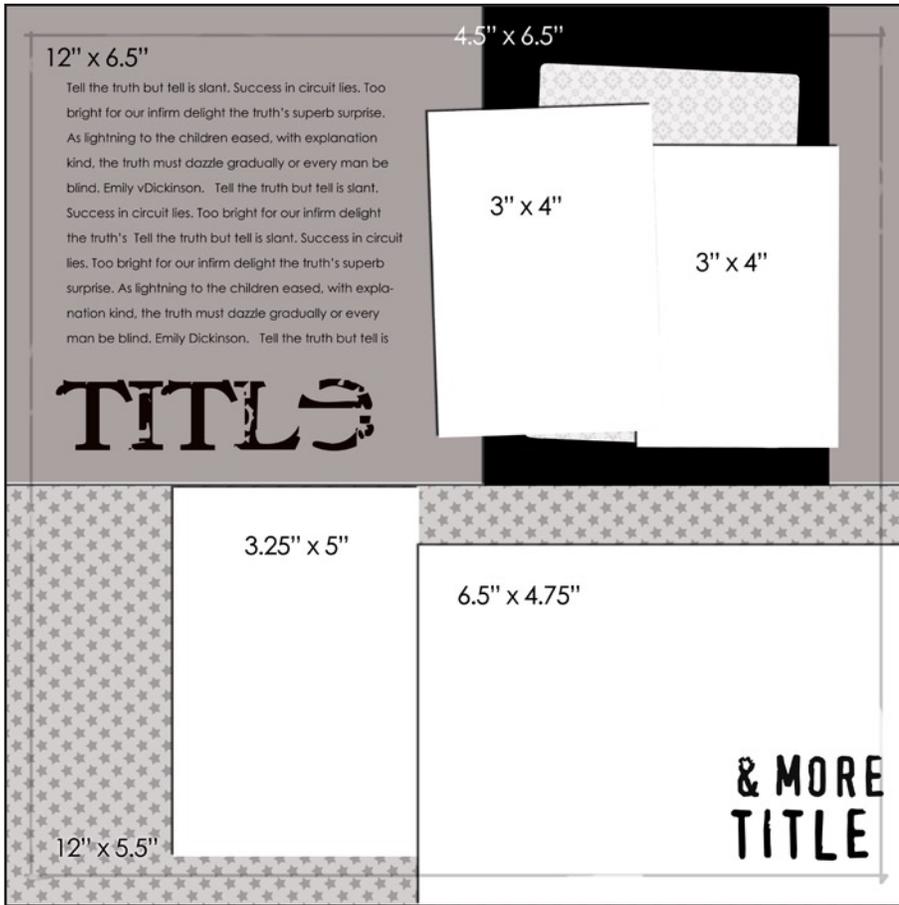
connect the specific to the general

Small exchanges and incidents in our daily lives are often indicative of important character traits, of repeating patterns, and even new trends. Making those connections explicit on your page lets your viewers in closer and gives them a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the lives you're recording. What's more, writing through these things often reveals them to you as you write.

In "Teach Your Children Well," I begin with a specific morning of tea and card playing and used it as support for the more general idea of my children growing up to take care of the things I'd always done previously.



CLICK for journaling.



JOURNALING: “Homework helper”

Many nights when Joshua is doing his homework there's a lot of sighing and complaining. This night, tho, he asked Isaac if he wanted to learn 6th grade math. Joshua explained to Isaac how to know if something is divisible by 9 and how many zeros you need based upon the decimal point. Isaac loved the attention and helping Josh get his homework done, and Joshua kept calling out how smart Isaac is. It was just like the old days of bathtub math. Remember that? [CLICK](#) to return to layout.

JOURNALING: “Playing solitaire”

Stark winter sun shines on you and Dad. He's teaching you to play solitaire on the white leather ottoman he bought final sale (white leather final sale?! -- that's another story). Joshua is at a friend's house and I'm busting my you-know-what cooking for the fabulous-women party at Sandell's (that's yet another story). I'm guessing Dad had the stereo going, and I think you played until you won because that is how you'd do it, Mr. I-Demand-A-Rematch-Isaac. A quiet & fine Sunday afternoon. February 2007. [CLICK](#) to return to layout.

JOURNALING: “Teach your children well”

For years, I've made the trips to the kitchen for tea and snacks during card-playing, reading, or just general hang-out times.

On this Saturday morning, Joshua was feeling tender and wanted to snuggle on the sofa. When I suggested playing cards, he agreed, and immediately went off to the kitchen. “Where are you going?”

“Wouldn't it be nice to have tea?” he asked.

Wow. It wasn't all that long ago that I would have been asked to make the tea. What a lovely and unexpected moment to see that my son is now able and willing to return the favor. Oct 2007. y. [CLICK](#) to return to layout.

JOURNALING: “Tender boy”

I remember the moment before I took this photo. We were at Durham Day, and, Neil, you had been working the grill and other jobs, and the 4 of us were finally coming together. When Joshua saw you, he was moved naturally to hug you long and hard -- a big old boy hugging his Dad in the middle of a festival. Neil, you and I have both been struck by how generous Joshua is with his love and affection. Every time I see him do this, I wonder what it does to you, and I think the love he gives you is probably the purest you've received in your whole long life. 09*07 y. [CLICK](#) to return to layout.

JOURNALING: “This boy”

likes: - painting by the numbers - getting all the love he’s due - using his sharp wit, especially when it involves his big brother - logic games and puzzles - soft, cuddly stuff (i.e., animals and clothes) - getting squished by his Dad - cute stuff - his mom. [CLICK](#) to return to layout.

JOURNALING: “Unexpected Destination”

Who knew? I was out with Dad on a tractor and we drove past this partial shed. “You recognize that?” he asked. “No,” I said. “That’s part of Floyd’s old garage. Gets used as a hunting blind now.” Go figure. I’m not sure people who knew of me 30+ years ago would recognize me or what I’m good for nowadays either. I sure didn’t predict I’d be a stay-at-home mom & wife dabbling in writing fiction and scrapbooking for pay back when I set out to make my mark on the world--and certainly not even when I was 30 and getting an MBA. Some of it has come at me unbidden, others parts I’ve sought out, but none of how it is now was what I’d anticipated. Like Floyd’s shed, I’m at an unexpected destination. And it’s not a bad one at that. [CLICK](#) to return to layout.

JOURNALING: “When politics are local”

* you try to do “good.” *you haul yourself out of bed early on weekends and holidays for all sorts of events: fun runs, parades, benefit breakfasts . . . * you’re invited to events even if they don’t want you to do anything official, so you sit around with the University President listening to the music. * you get misquoted. * you get hugged by firemen (this particular one was a student of yours years ago). * you know lots of people wherever you go -- or if you don’t know them, they know you and start conversations. * there’s never any free lunch. * you can’t please all of the people all of the time, but you do make some of them happy. [CLICK](#) to return to layout.

JOURNALING: “You bought encyclopedias?”

There are those in this day and age who: 1) don’t buy anything from a door-to-door salesperson AND 2) don’t see a need for printed encyclopedias. And on another day that could have been me. But it happened to be this day that Celeste, a college student from Nebraska, talked to the boys and me in our pjs while Neil was out biking. Yep. They were more than we thought they should be. Yep. The boys and I talked about what we’d forego at the bookstore the next several months. Yep. We evaluated the software add-on that the boys really wanted and decided that was too much. So, why did the three of us want these books? Well, they had all the

animal hierarchies, and flags, and presidents in order, and all the geometric formulas and how to do division the old way and the new way, and maps . . . lots of maps, even maps to trace for reports. During Joshua's first two years in middle school, he and I have spent a lot of hours combing the web for info he's needed ---- and it's not always all that easy to find. Lots of info? Yep. Easy to figure out which link will yield the right info? No. And then often that info is for sale. I love the idea of a "desk reference," of thick books with thin pages full of print and pictures and all of it with indices and chapter organization. I like the idea of having the right information accessible in a book that we can hold. My parents still have two BIG sets of encyclopedias that I used for most every report I wrote from 1st grade through high school. I loved those books, and I loved writing reports, and I hope my boys come to find a little pleasure in this, too. So am I a sucker? I guess time will tell, but right now these books are on Grandma Spicer's library table in our home and they representing that feeling of anticipation and hope every new school year brings. [CLICK](#) to return to layout.

JOURNALING: "Your own drummer"

Since preschool, you've been known as the boy who will bring up the rear of any outing. You're now eleven, and I cannot remember a time when you've had a sense of urgency about what you do. On this walk, you brought up the rear from the start -- even backtracking for a while. Nothing seems to bother you; no one else's impatience seems to reach you, and you are happiest when we leave you behind. Summer 2007. [CLICK](#) to return to layout.