

CANVAS PHOTOS TITLE EMBELLISHMENTS JOURNALING

The Challenge (#13): begin with the details

Use small details as a path to meaningful journaling

DON'T start out with "a grand message or insight" and then write to it.

DO start out with the photo, let it trigger particular details, write those details forward to a new understanding

write about the things in your photo

The journaling in "I am a Schlepper" begins with a clear and simple statement: *"I take a lot of stuff to the beach."*

It's followed by a list of those things I take. As I wrote the list in this journaling, I started to feel a little uncomfortable, thinking that clearly all of this baggage wasn't necessary and required extra packing and hauling efforts. This led to explaining (defending) my behavior: *"I think it has to do with wanting to be prepared."*

As soon as I wrote that sentence I realized and wrote about how being prepared lets me feel like I have control over my world.

The result is a snapshot of my behavior as well as my attitude and approach toward life --- something that I believe my family will look back at in future years and say: "Yep. That explains a lot."



*Journaling: I take a lot of stuff to the beach—shovels, buckets, chair, pop-up tent, food, drink, extra clothes, sand-sculpting tools. This behavior extends to other outings. I think it has to do with wanting to be prepared—but, even more, it may be that I think if I'm prepared, I have control & then all is right with the world. In my defense, I'd like to point out that at least I'm a self-aware schlepper. 08*07*

I did NOT set out to write about my need for control, but rather let the details from this particular photo lead me to it.

This approach is a process that you just need to have faith in. You never know WHERE it will take you but it will frequently take you to wonderful places.

write about the activities around your photo(s)

A recounting of the activities around your photos can lead to new understanding about yourself or the subjects. With Tender Boy, I didn't really plan on saying much -- just where we were and what was going on. As I wrote, though, of my son's spontaneous affection, a truth about my husband's life up until now occurred to me and I immediately got it on the page.

*Journaling: 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*



write about behavior that relates to your photo(s)

I stated that my friend Elaine is always on the phone in "Give Her a Ring" (on the next page) and I used multiple photos of her on the phone, but it's the repeated examples in the journaling that really drive home just how remarkable her behavior is. This isn't a deep understanding, but rather an accumulation of evidence that makes the story richer and more believable.

I knew Elaine called me a lot on the phone, but it wasn't until we went to Florida together that I found out she calls LOTS of people on the phone A LOT. She called Mike so he could hear the band at dinner, Leah to make sure all was set for Brownies, Lily to answer a question Isaac asked of me while I talked to him. She pulled a receipt from her purse and called a store we'd visited to ask where we could treasure hunt. This is one woman who has a lot of friends AND knows how to get things done. May2008

Writing active and detailed journaling

Even writing that's about something as lofty as life passions is best served with an attention to detail and specifics. When you provide the particulars that matter you show the reader in the best way possible what your message is. You convey a sense of joy with your specifics rather than naming it "joy."

- **be specific**

Write with significant, concrete, details.

Concrete means there is a specific image that can be sensed (seen, heard, touched, smelled, even tasted). Including details gives your image specificity. "Creature" is a vague word. "Animal" is more specific but still leaves a lot to the imagination. " But tell us about your "long-haired Persian cat with a wide face" and you're getting specific.

Finally, the details you include should be significant -- i.e., they should matter to the story and not just be filler. A significant detail suggests an abstraction or feeling like beauty or stress or joy. When you write the detail rather than the abstraction you've got a more compelling piece.

- **rely foremost on nouns and verbs**

Write your account first with strong nouns and active verbs -- omitting descriptors (adjectives and adverbs) on your first pass, and then adding them in where they're needed and where they add to the clarity of detail.

- **avoid qualifiers**

These are words that sound wishy washy and weaken your writing. These words include: really, very, rather, little, pretty, quite, kind of, sort of. Go ahead, take them out and see how much stronger your writing becomes.

YOUR CHALLENGE:

Write journaling that is rooted in details prompted by your photo. Use strong active writing.

