



Greetings of the Season

Mastering the perfect holiday photo

By Kelli Wheeler

How did I ever do it without a digital camera? Really, I need to send a fruit basket to Mr. or Mrs. Digital Camera Inventor. Especially at the holidays when I have taken and erased my 78th picture of non-smiling children whose underwear is showing and whose eyes are closed again.

I've made several hundred failed attempts at capturing the perfect holiday picture of my family. I was slow to the digital age and would take several rolls of film hoping to get one useable print. I've been doing this since my first fuzzy baby came into our lives. Yes, I've sent out a Christmas picture with my dog in antlers. If you're a dog owner and, especially if you're single, just admit right now that you have too.

Call it an identity crisis, but I would be nothing if I did not send out a creative "awww-inspiring" delightful little memento of my family. People have come to expect it (read Mom, Dad and Grandma here).

Let me give you an example of my neurosis. Months ahead of Christmas, I scour catalogs and stores looking for the most adorable holiday get-up to highlight the preciousness of my children. Then I brainstorm a creative idea, construct props, scout settings and watch forecasts for days with filtered light.

I do fittings, purchase bribes for sitting still and smiling (nothing that will melt or become sticky). In the

past, I have bought Costco-size film packs so I'd be fully prepared to seize the moment.

I've taken pictures at mall holiday displays with Santa and sometimes Mrs. Claus, Christmas tree farms, Christmas tree lightings, my living room, my yard, and other peoples' yards if they

have cute displays. I have even contemplated sneaking my kids into the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade all in the name of the perfect photo op.

And I have taken—pause here for emphasis—lots and lots of pictures. So imagine my joy when I discovered the ingenuity and ease of the digital camera!

Take a picture. Take a look. Nope, Logan you weren't looking at the camera. Wait, Whitney, I can see you pinching your brother. This time, please pretend you like each other. Remember, you're perfect! No detectable flaws! My parenting skills will be judged and reflected by this one defining moment. Smile!

Right now you should not pity me, but applaud me for realizing I have a problem. Plus, I am in excellent company. In just a few short weeks, the entrance into my den will be lined with all the equally anal and interpretive portraits of my friends'



Logan and Whitney, Christmas 2001 photo from the reject pile

and family's children. Each will try to out-do the other in cuteness and creativity.

My self-proclaimed title of "world's most precious Christmas card" has had some serious challengers, such as the friend whose mailing stamp was a miniature portrait of her kids. Others include real sand glued to the beach

photo of the family, a picture of just the feet of five kids under the age of six lined up in descending order, and a family dressed as the characters from the movie "The Incredibles" under the greeting, "Have an incredible Christmas."

But I know when I've been beaten as well. There is no way I could top the book-style, accordion fold-out display of a very photogenic and famous family with a generous donation made in my name. Well, I could if my name rhymed with Driver and Forteneggar and I had their money, but it doesn't and I don't and they shouldn't really count in my division of the world's most precious Christmas card category anyway.

So this year, I'm trying to embrace the true meaning of Christmas and not get so wrapped up in how my family comes across in a greeting card. It's about staying in touch with friends and letting people know you are special to them and spreading the joy and cheer of the holidays in your own unique way.

I consider it a step forward that if you're on my Christmas card list this year you will receive a cute photo of my children that I randomly snapped in August. Pretend my son's hair is longer and my daughter's front tooth has grown in.

Hey, we can't always time perfection.

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