

Part 1 - Why Self Portraits

You probably thought this workshop was going to be all about tripods and remotes (don't worry, I cover that too). But in this first section I want to talk about the 3 main reasons to turn the camera around and take self portraits.

It's good for you, for your family, and for your business.

Not convinced? Well, let me start with **why it's good for you**. If you take the time and plan ahead for it, self portraits can be such a relaxing and enjoyable activity. When I take self portraits I am relaxed, my mind is clear, reflective, and I am in my own world. If I was in the mood for self portraits (and actually had the time) I could probably do it for hours. I love to tell stories with my images, and make a visual representation of my emotions, and feelings because I find that to be therapeutic in a way. Sometimes I take pictures to *document* an emotion, and other times I take pictures to *release* an emotion. This picture on the right I planned ahead because I wanted to *document* this special little moment between my husband and I after we had just finished tucking the baby in and closed her bedroom door. The house was still and quiet and I wanted to remember how I felt in that moment, wrapped in my husband's arms. When documenting emotions I usually choose to capture happy ones. Why? Because I'm not usually one to dwell on sad things and I don't often prefer to look at pictures that make me overwhelmed with sadness. Not that there is

anything wrong taking pictures that evoke those emotions, because there is definitely a purpose for creating images like that. I simply tend to look on the bright side of things, when it comes to documenting my family. When I go back months later to view my self portraits there is always so much meaning behind them and I love reliving my happy memories. Being able to capture emotions in a single frame has always driven my passion for photography. Now, I'm sure there are many ways to document your own emotions, but I have found the best way for me to do that is through self portraiture.

Don't shoot what it looks like. Shoot what it *feels* like.

- David Alan Harvey

I really don't have many images of me alone (mostly because I haven't been alone since my daughter was born, lol) but I do think there is something special and very freeing when you are able to photograph just yourself. You can simply focus on you and your art and let your imagination go wild. The result can be very revealing to you as an artist and individual. The times I have done this I feel like I let myself loose as an artist and really found a new side to myself and my art. I definitely recommend doing this occasionally, even as an exercise, and see what types of images you can produce, and what things you can learn about yourself from the experience.





This next picture, of my husband and I on the couch, is another example of a picture taken to capture the emotion and feelings we were having that night. Earlier in the evening we had been out and about shopping and it occurred to us that a coupon we had to a restaurant was going to expire soon. We had planned on getting a babysitter and going on a little date together, but we didn't plan ahead and we decided to just take the baby with us. She had just turned one, and hadn't ever given us trouble in restaurants before, so we thought it would be fine. But we were very mistaken. I don't know what got into her that night, but she screamed, kicked, and yelled for the fun of it. She swatted at the food and made a huge mess with the water and straws. We decided it wasn't worth staying any longer and packed up our left overs and went home. We put her straight to bed and she fell asleep immediately. My husband and I then sat down on the stairs with our shoes still on, and all the lights in the house still off. After sitting in silence for a while I looked at the small glow of the last light coming from the window and thought it would make for an interesting shot. I set it up and then we cuddled until it was completely black out. I had to up the ISO like crazy, and it's super grainy because of it, but I love the raw feel it gives and I think the shot truly captured how we felt that night. Completely exhausted, but still connected.

So now that I've talked about how I am able to document my personal emotions with self portraits, I want to mention the other reason self portraits can be good for you. The picture on the bottom left is an example of a shot taken to *release* an emotion. This was the very last time I ever breastfed my daughter and I needed a way to express my emotions. I set up the shot ahead of time knowing this would be her last nursy, and also knowing how much I needed this shot to help me process my emotions.. It wasn't meant to capture something sad, but rather to **help me through this tough transition**. I know many people release emotions through photography, just like painters can paint their thoughts, or musicians can sing what's on their mind. I think it's important that we all find a way to release what's inside. Already being a photographer, I naturally gravitated to self portraiture as my expression.

Taking self portraits can help you *document* an emotion, or *release* an emotion.

I took this picture after having one of those sad mommy moments. My little girl woke up early one morning and started calling my name from her crib, but I had been up late the night before and just needed a few more minutes of sleep. I rolled back over on my pillow and closed my eyes knowing she was safe in her crib, and warm in her jammies. I don't know how long I slept for, but my husband got out of bed before me and went in to get her. He brought her in our room and told me that she had thrown up in her crib and had it all smeared on her face and in her hair. My heart was broken!! My poor girly. I felt so bad that I hadn't gotten up when she started calling my name. She was perfectly fine when she went to bed and I had no reason to think she was sick. It was the very first time she ever threw up. And I wasn't even there for her. I decided I wouldn't do a single thing but sit with her for the entire day. I know she quickly forgot about it, but I needed this cuddling picture for myself. I know I'm a good mom, and I needed to remind myself of that.



1/125 sec; f/1.4; ISO 320



Besides being a valuable way to release and document your emotions, your self portraits can be a **precious gift to your family**. When you are the photographer in the family, you will most definitely be the least one photographed. That's just how it works. But what is that leaving your children? We as photographer moms try so hard to document our family's life accurately, but if you pay close attention you will find gaps in the story you are trying to capture. I would hate for my kids to have to ask questions like, "Did you go on vacation with us too, mommy?" or "How come only daddy played with us as babies?" Of course you could always hire a photographer to capture the whole family together. I think doing that once or twice a year is a great thing if you are able to. It puts less stress on you, and all you have to worry about is getting the kids dressed, ready and then show up. The problem with this is that some moms may only get professional pictures done once a year, or maybe once every few years! That's barely any photos of you in comparison to the pile of hard drives you have of your kid's pictures. And think about all those in between moments and interactions with your family that happen on a daily basis. As nice as it would be to have a photographer come over a few times a week to document your life, that's just not practical. This is why it is SO important to know how to photograph yourself.

I also think there is often more meaning behind self portraits because we, as the mom, get to interpret and then capture motherhood in our own way. Not the way another photographer might see it and capture it, but the way we see our own life....from our view.



You could hire a photographer to take beautiful photos of your family, but it would be from their perspective, not yours.

Becoming your own model isn't always a fun or easy thing to do, especially at first. With it can come many emotions of its own. For example, those who deal with body image issues might have a harder time relaxing in front of the camera. For some people the stress of missing the focus too many times will take all the enjoyment out of self portraits. It's always going to be hard when you first start, "Where do I look? Where do I put my hands? Is this a good angle?" But if you give self portraits a chance it could really change the way you view yourself, and give you the very boost of confidence you need right now.

Learn how to see yourself the way your family sees you - a beautifully significant part of their life, and someone they want to have pictures of to look back on and cherish.

This is so very important to remember as you start learning how to take self portraits. While every image you take of your kids has your artistic fingerprint stamped on it, your family really deserves to see your face in the pictures, and **you are more than worthy of being the focus for a few shots.**



Before you can start taking self portraits of yourself, you need to feel comfortable being in front of the camera. For some women staring at the camera is extremely difficult or awkward. But it's not the camera we're afraid of, it's what the camera might reveal.

This picture was taken just a week or two after giving birth. I was still very swollen in my face, mid section, and arms, but I chose to give myself some grace and do a few self portraits with my tiny newborn anyways. I remember thinking I would crop it in tight so my stomach wouldn't be in the shot, but then I saw those skinny baby legs laying on my post-baby belly and knew at that moment I needed to be truthful to the story and capture the very thing that I was most self conscious about.



We all have insecurities. Some big, some small. We go about our lives trying to hide them, and the last thing we would ever think to do is photograph the very things that we are self conscious of. But sometimes confidence and healing can come from doing exactly that. When the focus is on the things you are afraid to show, then you are turning it around and showing the world you aren't afraid to be you.

We aren't perfect, and we will never look like those photoshopped super-models or movie stars we see on TV, because *they don't exist.*

I know many women who have challenged themselves to find the beauty in their flaws and they have discovered a new love for themselves and the body that has brought their children into the world. It's a very personal and intimate thing to do as the images that result are a representation of how the person sees themselves. A great example of these types of pictures are in a blog post called, "We are Beautiful" on the Self Portraits of Motherhood blog. These brave and beautiful women photographed themselves in a new light and showed what true motherhood really looks like.

On the other hand, we also need to be photographing the things that make us feel beautiful as women. Spend time on your hair, put on a little extra makeup, pamper yourself and get your nails done. Whatever it is that makes you feel fabulous, do that, and then try taking some self portraits.

Once you have become comfortable in front of the camera - found the beauty in your insecurities and embraced the real you - the images you create will portray that.





**“My love of photography is melded with the
ability to capture what I want to remember
in the moment I never want to forget.”**

-Devin Dygert



Taking photos of yourself can be a fantastic tool for your photography business, if you have one. Have you ever wished for a client that would let you try a new style, pose, or technique on them and then not get upset if it didn't turn out amazing? Well, when you are able to use yourself as the guinea pig there is no need to try things out on your clients! There have been many times that I have tried a new lighting setup or new pose on myself before using it with clients. It's great going into a session already knowing that the pose you were going to make the mom try is actually a terrible idea and should be taken off your shot list immediately. Save yourself some embarrassment and try those poses out on yourself ahead of time. It's so much easier directing clients when you have put yourself in their shoes and discovered what it's actually like to have the camera staring in your face. Having the ability to relate better to your clients is worth the effort to learn how to take self portraits.

Self portraits can be a great way to experiment with different poses, discover your unique style, and expand your portfolio.

For this shot below, I had forgotten my tripod so I got my camera settings ready, got into this pose, told my husband where to stand and then he clicked the shutter. I was so happy with this shot when I saw it, and thought the pose was unique. A little bundle of baby girl cuteness! I love experimenting with different poses, and I try to make them look less "posy" and more natural. Perfect your poses yourself before having a client do them. Trust me, it will make a huge difference in your sessions.

