

Portraits the E.Z. way by Lorette Burke, APSA

Evelyn Zeek was a long time member of the Photographic Society of America. Mrs. Zeek perfected this E.Z. way of taking beautiful portraits. Her method of doing portraits this way influenced photographers around the world and it is my pleasure to pass this knowledge on to all of you.

It won't matter if you are going to take portraits of cats, dogs, clowns, babies, babes, men, women, bare bottoms or belly buttons this will be an inexpensive and simple way to get great portraits.

The subject before your camera is the most important element in any portrait therefore it is necessary that the photographer concentrate on the subject and not be concerned with technicalities.

EQUIPMENT:

The equipment is simple, inexpensive, & easily available.

You will need 3 light stands and two mop handles or other light weight sticks, about 4 feet long, and drill a hole in the middle - not all the way through. One of these will go on the top of a light stand about 6/7 ft. high to hold the sheet. A white bed sheet folded in half (so the light doesn't pass through and is long enough to reflect the light).

The second stick will hold the backdrop. This can be made by getting a large piece of dark colored oil cloth - to get a nice muted look use a sponge dipped in different dark colored paint.

You need a deep seated light reflector that you can get at a hardware store. With a clear flood light you will need a blue filter (it is possible to purchase blue bulbs and avoid buying the filter).

Some cheesecloth, folded in half, to put over the light. Be very careful to tilt the light so the cloth does not touch the bulb and catch on fire.

PLACEMENT:

Seat the model about 45% angle to the camera.

Put the light about 5 feet from the model on one side and the sheet on the other side.

The sheet should hang as long as it will, and close to the subject.

The light should be bouncing off the sheet & reflecting light to the other side of the model.

Catch lights in the eyes should be at 1 or 11 o'clock.

The nose shadow should fall at the corner of the mouth.

LENS:

You don't want to crawl in to the face of the subject - people need their space.

Use a 100 mm lens or a zoom lens.

Use a wide open diaphragm at all times and focus on the eyes - don't worry about anything else - who cares if the ears are sharp?

Use all your filters and diffusers, experiment with anything you can find.

A diffuser will soften line and color, but leave the detail recognizable.

Try cutting a hole in the plastic lid off a can or a small hole in a stocking and put it over the lens with a rubber band. Diffusers are very helpful with taking portraits of older women.

PROPS:

Props are very important they can add or subtract from the picture.

Don't just have some one sit down and take 10 pictures all the same. Change the look, change the clothes, and have fun with props.

Talk to your model about what he or she should wear, ask questions - find out if they have hobbies (hunting, fishing, do they have a pipe collection, etc.) Have them bring things with them to the shoot. You may want to have a few hats, scarfs & pieces of chiffon handy in soft and complimentary colors. These can be thrown over the shoulders or on the head.

For the children something to hold or to play with.

If you are getting paid for the portrait and if they insist that they want to wear a certain garment or sit a certain way then of course do it their way.

If you would like to practice this method - find someone you like and who likes to be photographed like clowns, dancers, gymnasts, or fellow photographers would be a good place to start.

RULES:

A few rules can be learned quickly to make the session a joy and not a chore for either of you.

To start with build a rapport & be patient - show enthusiasm - and most of all plan ahead and be prepared.

Make certain that the model is comfortable - if she isn't it will show on her face.

Try to steer clear of white things and anything that is too busy and will draw attention away from

the face.

Avoid shiny jewelry and clothes - watch how the light is hitting it. Shiny or bad backdrops can really take the attention away from the model also.

Keep your eyes open — someone may move something into the picture or your camera angle may change. A bra strap may peek out or a surprise smile might show shiny braces.

Have some face powder handy for shiny noses and foreheads.

Don't let hands be as large as the face. - turn them side ways.

No heads touching the frame and it is just as bad if they are too low in the frame.

Don't cut off toes or dismember arms or legs.

This very easy method of portrait photography will allow you to put all of your thought into creating the mood and the models expressions and not have to be concerned with the technicalities of the camera, lighting and background. This procedure will make it easier on you and your wallet. The equipment is light weight, easy to transport and it will be a lot more fun for everyone.

I can't promise miracles only maybe a little magic and a lot of help.

Lorette Burke, APSA

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