



Viewpoint Mike Smith

Photographer Mike Smith comes up against a worthy antagonist in his wedding photography - his own Uncle Jeffrey

It wasn't so much the 'decisive moment' I was waiting for as the decisive expression. I was shooting with an 85mm lens (on a full frame) for those tight-crop and small group portraits, along with a 27mm (on an APS-C, making it a pleasing 42mm semi-wide equivalent). That gave me nice prime lens performance along with flexibility of framing, eschewing the traditional 24-70mm zoom. Guests of the wedding party were nervously, perhaps slightly excitedly, interacting with each other prior to the ceremony itself. There was a buzz, an energy - the familiarity of friends and due deference to the importance of the occasion.

Documentary-style photography is intended to capture the emotions, unposed and unrehearsed. I wanted that special moment, the genuine smile, some raucous laughter and a little empathy in the eyes. I want to capture those 'essences' that reveal character - the traits that leave a visual imprint of the person and provide an emotional stimuli when we view them at a later date.

It is a responsibility that wedding photographers bear - the moment is lived once but retold through that photo for generations to come. We are writing a social history at the grandest of scales, one couple at a time.

Except, that is, for damn Uncle Jeffrey. He was looking straight at the camera, knowing eyes, straight expression, refusing

to interact with the group. And it wasn't just that photo - but frame after frame - there he was, unflattering expression, gazing directly into the camera. I like to think my hit rate is good, that I am largely inconspicuous, that I am a person watcher, waiting for people to be a part of life, of living, and then capturing that.

So Uncle Jeffrey troubles me for two reasons. On a personal level, why oh why can't I get a picture of him? It questions my very ability as a photographer that, there he is, an arbiter of my professionalism to whoever views the photos, muttering under their breath, 'Uncle Jeffrey has done it again!'

However, it's on a philosophical level that I am particularly concerned. The photo has now ceased to be an inconspicuous auditor of events, truthfully recording how they unfolded. The viewer is now conscious that *they* know I was there. It has broken the illusion of the documentary photographer, the storyteller, the Hollywood director who presents the world within the aura of the all-seeing eye. They have now simply become a participant in the world they inhabit, their cloak of infallibility crudely thrown off. There are only two solutions to this problem - either Uncle Jeffrey doesn't come to the wedding or I need to get better. Does anyone have any weddings coming up?

Mike Smith is a London-based wedding and portrait photographer. Visit www.focali.co.uk



Mike's Uncle Jeffrey engages with the lens once again, making for a not-so-candid shot

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