

The Seven “Must-Know” Secrets

For getting Fantastic Senior Portraits

Introduction

Hello, my name is Dave Meir and my wife Kate and I own and operate *d. holmes meir studios* in Rochester, MN. We’ve been in the same spot on Broadway for over 15 years. We have one grown son and of course we’ve been through the senior portrait process with him. But we’ve also been through the process with parents and seniors from all over southern Minnesota – at last count - over 1800 times!

Kate and I put this report together for parents – parents like you who have high school senior portraits in your future. It can be a confusing process and selecting the right photographer for you, your senior and your family can be a challenging decision.

Do I hope you’ll read this report and decide to choose *d. holmes meir studios* for your senior portraits? Of course. But more than that I want you to be able to make an informed decision; if we do turn out to be the studio for you – you should have a reason for thinking so. (*There is my obvious charm and dashing good looks – but that and ninety-nine cents will get you a Cappuccino at Kwik Trip – it won’t make any difference in your portraits.:-)*

A Short – But Important - History Lesson

I’ve been at this since 1994 – from “back in the day” when we still loaded film in a camera. As recently as seven to eight years ago, photography was still a mystery to many. Digital has changed all that – or has it?

What really has changed? Two very minor, but very important things; A) the camera/method we use to capture the image and B) the way those images are retouched and enhanced. Nothing else – NOTHING else has changed.

I read a survey recently that asked professional photographers how long it took for them to get comfortable behind the camera. How long did it take to really know their equipment, to understand composition and color harmony, to be able to “see” and control light, to learn how to pose their subjects naturally and comfortably. The average answer was five years.

The local phone book and the internet are filled with “professional” photographers of which more than fifty percent were not listed four to five years ago. If a survey of professional photographers indicates an average of five years to become competent – is it reasonable to assume that everyone who calls themselves a “professional” photographer is truly – a professional?

Am I Just Being A Crank?

Certainly everyone who wants a successful career in photography has to start somewhere. Fifteen years ago was I the photographer I am today? Not by a long shot. Fifteen years ago was our studio the appropriate choice for every senior? Again, not even close; but then neither are we today.

Different families and different seniors have different needs and desires with respect to their senior portraits. It is my opinion that you need to look long and hard at sample images.

You can hardly exist today as a photographer without a website and you'll no doubt receive an entire rain forest of printed materials over the next few months. *(As an aside we're cutting way back on our mailings this year and utilizing the internet more – save a few trees in the process)* Peruse those images carefully and try NOT to be distracted by the fact that you know the person in the image or you think their outfit is cool. Step back and be impartial – analyze the photography itself.

Look at the expressions and the poses – do they seem natural and relaxed? And the lighting – do the faces appear washed out or do they have big dark circles under their eyes? Have the images been retouched? Are there still obvious blemishes and imperfections? If the studio sample images are not retouched is it very likely yours will be any different? If you want casual and formal in-studio poses for some of your images and the photographer you're considering doesn't show any samples of studio poses – you might want to reconsider.

Finally – The Seven Secrets for Fantastic Senior Portraits

SECRET #1 – Experience

Earlier I said anyone who wants a successful career in photography has to start somewhere. Kind of like saying anyone who wants to be a brain surgeon has to start somewhere. “Fine, start somewhere – just don’t start with me!”

Obviously botched senior portraits aren’t quite as serious a problem as botched brain surgery. No one is going to die if your senior portraits are screwed up. (*You might think they should but they won’t – at least I hope not;-*)

Ask around about the studio, or if they don’t have an actual studio, the photographer you’re considering. Find out how long they’ve been in business and if they have satisfied clients. If you decide to go with a less experienced photographer at least do one thing – make sure you choose someone who’s passionate about photography. A passion for creating beautiful images and for satisfying their clients can make up for a lot of inexperience.

Senior portraits can be an emotional and time consuming venture. I’ve had any number of senior mothers start crying in the middle of the portrait session; (*Yes, possibly they were tears of joy – their child was going to graduate and yes they were going to move out.*) but tears of emotion none the less.

You will visit our studio a minimum of four to five times over the course of the summer. First for your pre-portrait consultation, second for the session itself, third to stop in and pick up your image catalog, fourth to place your portrait order and fifth to pick your order up.

As stated previously we’ve been in the same location on Broadway in downtown Rochester for 15 years. Having photographed over 1800 high school seniors in our 15+ years (*not to mention countless babies and families and athletes*) we do have a system for doing things. A system that assures your satisfaction with the least amount of fuss on your part; a system born of experience.

SECRET #2 –Pre-portrait consultation

If you’re not totally sure what type of senior portraits you want – how would anyone else know? It’d be like trying to buy a house without telling the Realtor what you wanted and needed. You could waste a lot of time looking at four bedroom colonials when you really want a three bedroom rambler. It’d be nothing but hit or miss.

We encourage all clients that are new to our studio to come in before their portrait session for a pre-portrait consultation. Usually about a 30 minute

appointment, you sit down with Kate and look through sample albums. She asks you what images you like best; indoors? Outdoors? Close-ups? Formal? Casual? Do you like solid colored backgrounds better than wild and crazy? Do you look better semi-serious or smiling? Are you going to bring your pet or your car? Your motorcycle or your sports stuff? We want to know – we need to know what YOU want in your senior portraits.

If the photographer you're considering doesn't ask what YOU want – what might you expect for results?

SECRET #3 – Professional Level Retouching

Years ago most studios charged for retouching based on its complexity. In the film days retouching was done on the negative with oils and pencils and then that retouching blended on each and every print with more pencils and oils. The retouching charges from the lab were far more than the cost of the prints themselves.

Back before it was “fashionable” our studio was one of the first in Minnesota to include – at no additional charge – all inclusive portrait retouching. I had a senior Mom complain one time about her son's tie in his formal image. It wasn't cinched tight at the neck and she felt I should have caught that and since I hadn't that I should cover the retouching to fix it. A loose tie was – at the time – not something anyone covered in “normal” retouching; so I decided it was time for a change.

All portraits at our studio ordered larger than a wallet are completely retouched and enhanced. I take a great deal of pride in my abilities as a photographer. I take just as much in my abilities as a portrait retouching artist. I personally process and retouch every single image that leaves our studio. (*One of the reasons that if you want your finished portraits day after tomorrow – it ain't gonna happen;-)*

When you're analyzing sample images be sure to look at the level of retouching. D. holmes meir studios was THE first studio to be completely digital in southern Minnesota and I have been using Photoshop longer than any other photographer in this area. I have studied with the best retouchers and portrait artists in the country and the quality of our finished images is matched by no one.

What's the benefit of all this bragging on my abilities? (*other than making me feel good about myself*) Your finished portraits are going to be beautiful! One

of the most frequent comments we receive from past seniors is, our retouching looks so natural and not over-done. I think you'll be pleased.

SECRET #4 – Price

A 2010 Ford Fiesta starts at \$13,320. A Honda Odyssey EXL starts at \$35,600 and you can get a Rolls Royce Phantom for around \$350,000 – nicely equipped no doubt! All three do the same thing, as my Dad used to say, “A car needs to get you from point A to point B and nothing else.”

If you were going to buy a new car and like my Dad, you were concerned only with “getting from point A to point B” you might consider the Fiesta. (*Obviously I'm using the Fiesta as an example simply based on its price*). If you had money falling out of your pockets, were looking to impress friends and family and you wanted a ride that provided the ultimate in luxury – you might consider the Rolls Royce.

If your family and their safety are important, if you need room to grow and take the gang on vacation, if quality and reliability and track record are important – then you might consider the Honda Odyssey.

Our studio is not the Ford Fiesta of portrait studios – neither is it the Rolls Royce Phantom. We have the quality, the reliability and the track record of the Odyssey. (*Personally we drive a 2009 Toyota Camry. I tried to think of an analogy using it – but it just didn't work!!;-)*

My point is this. If you simply want pictures and you care nothing about quality, composition, color harmony, proper exposure, retouching, artistic posing, beautiful lighting . . . the list goes on – then go with the cheapest photographer you can find – because likely that is what you'll get.

If you want the ultimate portrait – finished prints enhanced with oils and surrounded by frames gilded with gold – I can give you the name of a photographer in California – last I heard his price for a single eight by ten was in excess of \$600.

Certainly price is a determining factor – especially in this day and age. However, seniors portraits are a once in a lifetime opportunity. This is very likely the last time you will have your son or daughter photographed professionally – until their wedding day.

Consider the value you are getting for your dollar and how much you will be comfortable investing in senior portraits and base your decision – in part – on that. And remember, you will have these portraits for a lifetime.

SECRET #5 – One cool picture

Years ago before I opened the studio I received lots of encouragement from friends and family. “Oh boy Dave you take such beautiful pictures – you should be a photographer.” (*to be honest no one ever said, “Oh boy” but you get what I mean*)

What my friends and family failed to realize can be summed up with one of my favorite sayings: “Even a blind hog finds the barn once in awhile”. Yes I did take a great picture – occasionally. What my friends and family members didn’t see were the rolls upon rolls of film and the hundreds of images that were anything but great.

Recently I was considering a different web designer for a new website. They had a ton of samples on their website which I assumed were of sites they had designed; but the examples only showed the main page. I emailed and asked them to send me the actual links for those websites so I could explore the entire site. Sorry. The samples they were showing were just that – there were no actual working sites that went along with them.

This goes back to the photographer’s experience. Don’t base your decision on a single image. Do your homework and look at other images from the photographer or the studio you’re considering. Does their work have a general theme or look that you like? Do they offer a variety of backgrounds, props, poses and outdoor locations? Or does everything look the same? One image does not a photographer make.

I could go on here and describe the variety we can offer at ***d. holmes meir studios***. I think it would be much easier to see for yourself by visiting our website at <http://www.dholmesmeir.com>. In the testimonials we receive from our past senior clients the variety they experienced in their images is something frequently commented on.

SECRET #6 – Uncle Harry and his digital wonder camera

The easiest thing for me to do here would be to write; “go back and read secrets 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5”; but some people might find that offensive;-)

Remember the TeeVee commercial with the guy sitting at his kitchen table, paring knife in one hand, phone in the other. He’s talking to his doctor on the other end who’s about to walk him through taking out his appendix. I think the tag line is, “You can do it yourself but you might not enjoy the experience as much.”

Having senior portraits in a professional portrait studio is an experience in itself and one every senior should have. You (the senior) are the center of attention and while many people shy from it, you shouldn’t. How often do you get to experience something so totally about YOU? There’s not enough of that sort of thing.

We go through life as part of a very large crowd; few of us ever get to stand out. Every senior deserves this experience. Senior portraits mark the end of childhood and the beginning of their adult life. It **IS** a big deal. To let it be minimized by having a friend or Uncle Harry snap some images with their digital wonder camera, is a crime.

SECRET #7 – Guarantee

This is number one on my personal list - with anything I purchase – who’s standing behind this product. I think we’re all aware senior portraits aren’t cheap. No matter where you go you’re going to invest from \$300 to a \$1000 or more. Any such investment should obviously come with a guarantee.

Since our fourth year in business we’ve had a 100% total and complete satisfaction guarantee. No matter what the reason – if you’re not happy with your images we’ll either refund your money or do additional images until you are happy.

In over 15 years of business we’ve been asked to refund money fewer than a half dozen times. I can’t count the number of times we’ve done retakes. It’s usually just a few extra images – often times because I hadn’t been able to get the senior totally relaxed just yet. But we’re happy to do it. We shoot for over-the-top complete satisfaction – it’s one reason we’re still here after 15 years.

Summation

So there you have it – the seven secrets to selecting your senior portrait photographer and getting fantastic portraits.

As I said in the beginning obviously I hope, after having read this report, that you'll at least consider *d. holmes meir studios* as your senior portrait photographer. If you don't I understand, as I also said we are not the studio for everyone. But I think I can say, with this report you are better equipped to make a solid, sound decision.

Kate and I wish you the best of luck on your senior portrait adventure. Have an absolutely wonderful summer and we hope to see you soon!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Meir". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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