

## The Seven “Must-Know” Secrets For getting Fantastic Senior Portraits

### Who am I and Why Would You Want to Listen to Me?

My name is Dave Meir and my wife Kate and our Bichon puppy Lucy own and operate **d. holmes meir studios** on Broadway in downtown Rochester. (*Lucy’s not really one of the owners – more like the office manager*)

Anyway, we put this report together for people like you – high school juniors who’ll soon be searching for a photographer to do their senior portraits.

Do we hope you’ll read this report and decide to choose *d. holmes meir studios* for your senior portraits? Of course. But more than that we 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.:-)*)

### Yes History Might Suck but This is Important

We’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 when you were a freshman. 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?

### **Wow – Do I Sound Like 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 seniors have different needs and desires with respect to their senior portraits. I would suggest you look long and hard at sample images.

One 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)*

Carefully examine the images of the studios you’re considering and try NOT to be distracted by the fact you know the person in the image or you think their outfit is cool. *(I don’t mean to imply you’re shallow in your thinking – I do the same thing when I look at pictures – it can be difficult to be impartial)* So 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 worse 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 aren’t retouched is it 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 – well, you might want to reconsider.

## **Finally – The Seven Secrets for Fantastic Senior Portraits**

### **SECRET #1 – Experience**

**New**, cool, fun, cutting edge, stuff is always attractive. The newest phone and the latest app, cars with USB ports for your MP3 player, first a laptop, then a netbook now an iPad. We are constantly bombarded with **new**.

Probably it's important to note that while we're constantly inundated with new products – all those new products come from a very few companies – companies that've been around for a long time.

The old companies that roll out new products – successfully – can do so because of their experience; they have the business end down pat. They can concentrate their efforts on keeping up with and developing the **new** and the **cool**.

It takes more than someone with a new digital wonder camera to create beautiful, artistic portraits; cutting edge portraits you'll be proud to own and give to your friends.

Wouldn't it be great if you found someone who understood color harmony and composition; even proper exposure for heaven's sake. No one **wants** to be **posed** but "just standing there" doesn't look good either. So maybe your ideal photographer should be someone who's studied posing, who knows how to help their subjects achieve natural, relaxed positions. Poses that don't **look** posed.

Yes new **is** cool and fun. But experience **combined** with the ability to **develop** the new and the fun – the new and the fun that other photographers emulate – that trumps all.

## **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 new phone without telling the salesperson what you wanted and needed. You could waste a lot of time looking at flip phones when you really want a slider smart phone. If the salesman's a slick-willy you could wind up walking out of the store with a phone you don't really want or need.

Ideally, wouldn't it be great to find a photographer **who cares what you want** and is willing to take the time to find out? What do you like best; indoor portraits? 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?

Any photographer worth his flash card wants to know – needs 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**

What about retouching? Yeah everyone knows how to use Photoshop – but few know how to use it **professionally**. It's not just hitting a couple of buttons – it takes years of practice and study to retouch professionally. Good retouching is invisible – you should look, in your images – as though that's how you look on your very best days.

It is inevitable; the day of your portrait session will be your **worst** complexion day that week. Wouldn't it be wonderful to know you don't have to worry about it – that your portraits were going to be beautiful? Wouldn't it be great to know that every single image you ordered from would be completely retouched and enhanced? Professionally.

When you're looking at sample images – look closely. Have they been retouched? Are there obvious blemishes and imperfections? Are the faces “soft and mushy” like some bogus filter had been applied over the whole thing? Are the colors drab and washed out?

Or ideally, are the faces and the skin smooth and natural? Do the eyes of the person seem to be looking directly into yours? Are the colors brilliant – literally popping off the page?

### **SECRET #4 – Price**

A 2010 Ford Fiesta starts at \$13,300, a Mustang GT at \$31,500 and you can get a base model Lamborghini Gallardo for \$198,000 and change. 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. (*Of course 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 always have a problem getting to school on time – you might consider the Lamborghini. (62 mph in 3.7 seconds)

But if you wanted to maintain some semblance of coolness **and** reliability, at a reasonable price, you'd go with the Mustang

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's what you'll get.

If you want the ultimate portrait – finished prints enhanced with oils and surrounded by frames gilded with gold – there's a photographer in California who's price for a single eight by ten is in excess of \$600.

Certainly price is a determining factor – especially in this day and age. However, your senior portraits are a once in a lifetime opportunity. This is very likely the last time you'll be photographed professionally – until your wedding day.

Consider the value you're getting for your dollar and how much you and your parents will be comfortable investing in your senior portraits and base your decision – in part – on that. Remember, you'll have these portraits for a lifetime.

### **SECRET #5 – One cool picture**

Margaret Mitchell wrote one successful book; "Gone With the Wind". The Baha Men had one hit song (*thank God;-*) "Who Let the Dogs Out" and the same for Lou Bega – "Mambo No. 5". Certainly these people went on to create other works – but apparently none that were very successful.

Those successes can be summed up with an old saying – (*probably from the Farmer's Almanac*) "Even a blind hog finds the barn once in awhile".

Chances are you don't want to 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 "professional" photographer make.

### **SECRET #6 – Uncle Harry's Digital Wonder Camera**

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

Remember the TV 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 your senior portraits in a professional portrait studio is an experience in itself and one every senior should have. **You** 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 your childhood and the beginning of your 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**

You buy a car it comes with a guarantee. You buy a new pair of jeans but they just don’t look right with your favorite shirt – you can take them back. Your new phone has a 30 day return deal and after that it’s covered by an insurance policy. If everything else comes with some sort of guarantee shouldn’t your senior portraits be the same?

This might be a hard question to ask the photographer you’re considering but you need to; “Do you have a guarantee?” You have a right to know. If they give you some song and dance like, “Sweetie, you don’t need a guarantee when you come to me for your seniors portraits” run as quickly as you can in the other direction. *(side note – if you’re a guy and the photographer calls you “sweetie” don’t even wait for him to finish – start running now!!!;-)*

Ask them, if you’re not happy with your original images then what? Will they do more images at no charge to you? Will they refund your money with no hassles? And what about your finished portraits? If they miss a big blemish will they redo the portrait so you’re happy?

A guarantee is basic good business. If the photographer you're considering can't come right out and say, "Absolutely, we guarantee everything we do," maybe you should look elsewhere.

### **That's All I Got**

So there you have it – seven secrets for selecting your senior portrait photographer.

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're 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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