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Smile!
By Anne Lies

Does this sound familiar?

Sit down, back straight, shoulders to the right a little more . . . okay, face to the camera, tip your head to the side . . . a little more . . . wait, not that far. Good, now *smile!*

In 30 seconds flat, a photographer can make something as spontaneous, natural and universal as a smile seem like strenuous exercise. Anyone who has ever sat in front of a camera knows how hard it is to follow all those directions and still muster a smile that looks real.

When I was in grade school, I would actually practice in front of the bathroom mirror, testing different smiles to make sure I would convey the right look on Picture Day. Of course, I had a generic, default smile. Using it had resulted in several years of school portraits that, had it not been for different hairstyles, would have been eerily identical.

Starting in fourth grade, I decided to take control. That year, since I was sporting my first pair of glasses, I opted for the intellectual look. I devised a smile that showed no teeth with a slightly bored look about the eyes. The result? I looked smug, but not all that intelligent. I tried again in fifth grade. This time I took the bold step of lifting my eyebrows slightly, but still showing no teeth. My mother described the look as haughty.

In the years that followed, I tried for glamorous, sporty and carefree. The results were pained, confused and maniacal. Looking back, the pictures of me that I like the most are the ones where I seemed to throw my rules out the window, and just smile — *BIG*.

My friend, Rachel, has a beautiful smile, not because she has perfect teeth and not because she has mastered any particular look. Instead, Rachel's thousand-watt grin comes from the inside. Ask her about it and she'll tell you, "It's simple. I try to draw out the purest, most innocent part of myself: my *joie de vivre*."

Rachel is a television professional, so she understands how to romance a camera, but even she has a smile mentor. "I studied photos of Marilyn Monroe," she admits shyly. "She had a special rapport with the public, and I wanted to understand that connection. A smile like Marilyn's is one that can't be faked. It has to be genuine, because your audience can tell the difference."

Portraits actually arrest moments in time. Rachel recommends "smilers" make the most of the opportunity. Look inward and bring your greatest happiness and optimism to the

surface. “Put 100 percent of yourself out there,” she advises. “What you see will be your best self, and the smile will come naturally.”

Anne Lies is a freelance writer and photographer in Minneapolis. She has finally figured out how to smile.