

A THOUSAND WORDS

What story does your photo tell?

by Orange Blossom Co-Editor
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THE BOOK IS DONE. YOUR DARK VAMPIRE STORY IS SURE TO BE A bestseller. Now all that's left is for you to get a professional photo. So you put on your Easter best, decorate your face with bright lipstick, curl your hair up big and ask your uncle to take a snapshot of you.

What's wrong with this picture (literally)?

The problem is that readers of a dark vampire story are likely to be thrown by the cheerleader image that your photo projects.

Further, today's multi-media world demands more than a snapshot. Websites. Blogs. Newspapers and magazines. An author's photo is no longer relegated to the inside back cover of a book. Your photo is the key visual element of your public relations plan because it projects your image and tells the story of you.

"Writers should remember that their photos might be the first point of contact with readers and industry professionals, as well as the media," says Carlos Puma (www.pumaimages.com), a longtime friend of Orange Blossom Co-Editor Louise Knott Ahern and the photographer of her professional shots. "That contact might be through a website, newspaper, or magazine."

How do you find the right photographer for you? And how do you make certain you and your personality shine through when taking publicity photos?

DO YOUR RESEARCH.

Get recommendations from other writers, and then do your research. How does one do that? Check out the websites of different photographers and view their portfolios to get a good idea of what kind of pictures they prefer to take. Do you like their style? Do they prefer black and white photography or color? Do they prefer photos outside in different settings or in the studio? Just as you do your research for your stories, be sure to do your homework when selecting a photographer, too.

Find one who will work with you and who knows what he is doing. What do you want your image to convey? A good photographer will help you make the right impression.

LOOK YOUR BEST.

Now is not the time to try purple lipstick. Here are some tips to look your best in your photo:

Hairstyle. Don't get a new hairstyle before your photo shoot. You may not like your new look and your photo shoot will reflect that. In addition, you won't have time to





AN AUTHOR'S FIRST introduction to the world is often through her photo. Today's multi-media world demands a professional shot that tells a story. Here, Orange Blossom Co-Editor Michele Cwiertny asks the experts – including her own husband, a photographer – on what makes the perfect author photo.

grow into your new style, and very likely, you won't be able to duplicate the style you had when you left the salon.

Cosmetics. Lips and eyes are the two trouble spots when photographing women. If you don't usually wear color on your lips, you will need to add some lip-gloss to make your lips stand out. And if you do wear lip color, make sure it's not a bright color, like red; otherwise, the major focus of the photo will be your lips. Also, if you have thin eyelashes, try adding mascara before the shoot.

But remember not to wear more makeup than you normally do. The camera doesn't lie, so you won't look like yourself, and you probably won't like the result. Although there is a fine line between too little and too much makeup, just keep in mind that the key is to look like yourself.

Wardrobe. Unless you have perfectly toned arms or you're a model, steer clear of spaghetti straps and sleeveless shirts and blouses. The photographer will be worried about how to make your arms less visible and will have a difficult time focusing on other important areas, such as the angle of your head.

"When you pick out your wardrobe, try to stick with solid colors," says Eric Cwiertny, Creative Director at Marshall Advertising and Design, as well as a photographer.

And keep in mind that darker colors minimize while lighter colors emphasize body size. Bold patterns and bright colors draw attention away from your face, so think about saving the stronger colors and patterns for your scarves and neckties.

Which neckline complements you? A scoop or v-neck is best if your neck is short and your face is full. A high-necked item of clothing is more flattering if your neck is longer and your face is slender.

Lighting. Tell your photographer what time of day you're most awake. Is it in the morning or late afternoon? And if it's high noon, make certain the photo is taken in the shade where the light is even.

TELL A STORY.

"Have a clear picture of who's going to see the photos," says Puma.

Are you targeting the publishing industry or do you want to look like you're ready for a night on the town? You dress differently then, so let your photos reflect that.

But remember that where you take the photos is more important than dressing a part to look like you write a certain genre. For example, you might write vampire novels and decide to have your photo taken in a cemetery, but that doesn't mean you need to dress like a Goth—unless, of course, that is your normal attire.

JUST RELAX.

You need to feel comfortable with the photographer before you can relax and reveal your personality. This is one advantage of going with a photographer outside of a studio. In the different settings, shot after shot can be taken until you are comfortable enough to relax.

Puma and Eric Cwiertny both say it's not unusual for them to take between 400 and 500 shots, and then edit them down to a manageable 60 in order to decide which images work best for their clients.

UPDATE YOUR PHOTOS.

People often stick with the photo they'd taken 10 to 15 years ago because, hey, they were younger, thinner, and had a full head of gray-free hair. But it's time to let go of that picture. It isn't a clear representation of who you are now. You've changed and so has your writing—let your updated image reflect that.

Puma suggests that authors get new photos every two to three years. For some of you, that might be about the amount of time in between a release of a new book. When your new book comes out, think about getting new photos taken. Now, that may not be feasible for those writers who have several books released a year, but the key here is a variety of shots during the photo shoot.

As writers, we want more than just one photo (one pose) ready for the different media outlets available now that weren't 10 to 15 years ago. A variety of shots means the photographer should take head and shoulder shots, 3/4 body shots, and full body scenery shots; thus, you'll be prepared to provide different pictures when necessary.

"If someone keeps seeing the same photo of you over and over again," says Puma, "they're going to get the impression that it's old, even if you just had it taken six months ago."

He also suggests that if you have a website, look into having your photo refresh every few minutes or so. That way when people return, even a few minutes later, they'll see a new image of you. Or if you don't have that capability on your site, change out the photo every three or four months to give the impression that it has been updated.

Try to think of it as your public relations campaign. Keep it evolving and exciting.

"In advertising," says Eric Cwiertny, "Photos change with every ad in a campaign because the product changes—just as people change. The wider shots tell stories in settings and the closer ones tell intimate stories. But the point is, even though they change, they must still tell a story."

HIGH RESOLUTION IS A MUST.

And finally, what determines the resolution of the photo? The pixel dimensions per inch. The denser the pixel dimension, the sharper the jpeg. For example, to be considered for the cover of Orange Blossom, we need a professional quality "head and shoulder shot" that is above 2 megapixels (today's digital cameras shoot 3 to 4 megapixels or more). At the very least, the jpeg must have the pixel dimensions of 1300x1700 pixels at 72 pixels per inch. And the higher the pixel dimensions, the better. This way, even a tiny image will stay sharp when sized to an 8x10.

Orange Blossom Co-Editor MICHELE CWIERTNY writes contemporary and historical romance. She is also a contributor to The Writer's Vibe (www.writersvibe.typepad.com), a blog for professional writers. To find out more about her and her writing, please visit her website: www.michelecwiertny.com

