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Should the Truth be Documented? The Fictitious Nature of Photographs and the Family Album.

Matthew Kelly

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Should the Truth be Documented?



National College of Art and Design
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The Fictitious Nature of Photographs and the Family Album

Matthew Kelly

Visual Culture



National College of Art and Design

School of Visual Culture

I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Matthew Kelly'.

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Introduction

Arguably the most important aspect of the human condition is the fact we are able to comprehend love and loss and the fact those feelings are very much real for each and every human. Animals experience these feelings also; we all know the stories of how a wolf will cry a gut-wrenching howl when a companion dies (Bekoff, 2007, p.107). Their way of experiencing love and loss parallels our journey, like the grieving wolves we mourn the loss of our packs. We have funerals dedicated to their life and death. We cry in each other's arms over the loss of life and share memories of our love.

Even in the media we consume the idea of love and loss is showcased, whether it be platonic like that of Frodo and Sam from *Lord of the Rings* or romantic like that of Gatsby and Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*. But where there is love there is always loss. Frodo suffers great loss through his adventure, a loss of self, friends and a loss of the world he once knew. Similarly, Gatsby dies soon after learning Daisy doesn't love him, both of these losses are examples of loss in very different ways, the loss of life and the loss of love. Both can happen. Both can be grieved. Both are usually never shown in a photograph. Where there is love there will always be loss as we cannot experience one without the other. To lose someone and feel that cry within is to know love. In loving someone is to know deep down that one day we will lose them. That is the way of life, birth and death, love and loss.

What is most unusual about the average family photograph is the lack of loss. For something that is so important in life it is rarely showcased in an album. We see love time and time again; we see weddings; we see family outings and friends. But when their love dies, when

their parent is gone, it is never seen. In showing only half of the story, it creates a fiction. The fiction of the album begins with this, it begins with the removal of loss.

Chapter 1 addresses this fiction by exploring what we see in the album and what we should show. By looking into these stories told through the lens of Twine, Zussman and Dong we can gather an idea of how each conveys their own truth. Continuing on, we explore deeper into how the truth can be photographed by looking at the works of Matt Eich and Richard Billingham.

Chapter 2 breaks down the album's contents and how we view it from a domestic and political standpoint. Section 2.2 looks at the context of an album and sees if there's more truth in an album created for a person rather than by them. This follows into section 2.3 which breaks down the concept of the true album and brings an answer to the final question, should the truth be documented?

Throughout this I discovered more about the human condition and the importance of love, loss and choice. This work has greatly impacted both how I think and my own professional practice going forward as I break down what love and loss is further.

Chapter 1: Images of Love & Loss

When looking through family albums it's unlikely to see a moment of sadness or anger, the memories shown force us to believe things are joyous in the owner's world. Death, hate, racism, contrasting ideologies are hidden in a flash of the camera. In a photograph all of the truth is taken away and morphed into a lie that can only be disproved by those in the picture.

1.1 Family Photography: What are we Looking at? What can we Show?

In France Winddance Twine's article we are shown a couple on their wedding day with the bride's parents. We are led to believe this is a joyous occasion but as it turns out it is fictitious. The wedding photos hide all notions of there being any struggle or suffering before the marriage. There are no signs showing the unhappiness of her parents, who were unhappy she was marrying a black man. There is no way to know that the bride, Sharon, was persuaded into getting an abortion by her mother, father and future mother-in-law before the events shown. (2006, p. 499)

Twine speaks about how Sharon's album shows clear evidence of a successful and happy marriage but when told the history behind the photo it is clear how easy it is to be misled. Sharon's story of abortion, abuse and alienation are never seen in the album. Her album shows only "good" moments. The album paints a photo of a happy couple who are supported and accepted by their family however when looked into further it is evident that this is not the case. (2006, p. 499)

Photos are not a straightforward representation of social reality, rather they are, to some extent, staged, selected and assembled images that can convey contested aspects of a family's interior life. Photo albums are 'edited' versions of family life since they rarely represent the total number of photographs that were taken or could have been taken. (Twine, 2006, p. 502)



Fig 1. Sharon, her parents and husband on her wedding day in 1983, a photograph featured in France Twine's article, p. 500.

Twine's deep dive into Sharon's life proves just how easy it is to hide the truth by removing context and showing the photo as a success. If it is that easy to do, why wouldn't you show images that give the impression of a life well lived? The question of whether the truth should be documented is put into question. For example, if Sharon herself didn't wish to divulge the truth through the album who are we to do it for her. Is it ethical to showcase the full truth in an album or is it up to the album creator to decide what is true and what to showcase as fiction?

As Robert Zussman mentions, the selectiveness of family photographs and the creation of little fictions can be seen in even the earliest of photoshoots such as that of the 19th century where people would dress in borrowed clothes with backdrops showcasing them in exotic locales. (2006, p.30)

As time went on the fictions become less apparent. Zussman remarks how most of the pictures shown on the mantelpiece tend to be ones showing people in an idealised light. His example is of his family, sitting around the piano. (2006, p.30)



Fig 2. Zussman, Robert. Fictitious photo of the Zussman family around the piano. 1955. Author's personal collection.

Although my mother did play the violin, and my brother took lessons for many years, I took piano lessons for only a few months (much later than 1955), before discovering that I had neither talent nor inclination. My father played neither piano nor violin. I remember no occasions when the four of us sat by the piano, playing, singing, or doing much of anything else. My mother herself was altogether aware of the fictional character of the photo: "It's a farce," she said, as we were looking through her album. But the fictional character of the pose makes the photo no less valuable to her. It is not a picture of my family as it was, but a picture of my family as my mother might have liked it to be, as she would have liked to remember it, as she would like to present it to others and to herself. (Zussman, 2006, p.30)

Creating a fiction for yourself and others can easily be classed as unethical. Not accepting the truth of your family and the truth of your reality. However, there are cases in which creating this fiction can be understood.

In Arthur Dong's 1982 film, *Sewing Woman*, he explores his family's journey from China to America. In the film we learn his mother pretended to be a war bride and said that her and her husband were not in fact already married. In doing this they were not able to say they already had a son, leaving him with relatives while they immigrated to America. As the years went on their plans on returning their son to them slowed and they had other children, American-born children. In their family photographs they would insert an image of their son from China to make the family whole. (Wexler, 1999, cited in Wexler, 2017, p.101)



Fig 3. Still from Arthur Dong's *Sewing Woman* (9:26) showcasing son (second on the right) who was added in.

This fiction is in no way different from Zussman's mother. Both wished for an ideal family situation. One wishing for more culture and the other for their son. The most notable difference is how the photos were created. Zussman's mother chose to create a real scene so

those unaware would believe it whereas Dong's parents added to a photo by merging another with it. This shows the viewer that something is amiss. It allows them to have an idea of what their full family could look like while also not distorting the reality of the situation. Their loss is very much still showcased by the fact that the photo of their son in China slightly differs.

Is it wrong for either parent to show this version of the photograph and if we wish to showcase the truth in what way can we show it? Dong's parent's way of showcasing the truth while also trying to alter it seems to be a good example of how to show the loss while also attempting to make a family image.

1.2. Love and Loss: Photographing the Truth

What is it that makes the images superficial? Is it the lack of loss or is there something deeper? Matt Eich's work, *This Is Not Your Family* showcases the crossovers that occur between photography, reality and memory. Eich's journey in photography began in loss. His career started when his grandmother was dying from Alzheimer's. Seeing this toll on his family made him do photography so that he could preserve memory. (Cronan, 2016)

Eich believes in the preservation of memory through photograph documenting. Francesca Cronan (2016) reports on Eich, explaining how he was intrigued by the idea of regular family memories and how they are almost un-documentable. He understood what is shown in a photograph is only the surface of the memory and that although he tries his best, he cannot show the entirety of a person's character through a photograph. Cronan continues, stating that Eich firmly believes photography can blur the realities of what you see in the picture. The picture nearly encourages selective memory in which when looking at it you can see what you think you remember rather than what happened.

This idea of what we see and what really happened was made very apparent in Twine's article on family photographs and can be showcased in nearly all albums adding to the argument of the fictitious nature of the album as a whole. However, Eich realises this and in his work, *This Is Not Your Family*, wished to change that idea of the idealised family. The title of the book is noted as playful as some shots are staged, the idea being that this, the staged photographed images of your family are not your true family but an ideal version of



Fig 4. Dissolution. Charlottesville, Virginia 2015. *This is Not Your Family*. Photograph © Matt Eich, 2022, online.

them. Eich states to Cronan (2016) “I started to think of photographs, especially things like family albums, as an idealized version of reality. So, with this project I wanted to re-navigate the family document a little bit.”



Fig 5. Hold. Charlottesville, Virginia 2016. *This is Not Your Family*. Photograph © Matt Eich, 2022, online.

Cronan (2016) remarks that the photographs encourage viewers to create their own narratives as they navigate their way through the images. Eich removes the security of memory and family in his work. Instead of doctoring the truth like Zussman's mother or showcasing bad memories in good light like Sharon's album, he plays with the ambiguity of what is staged and what is not by leaving it ambiguous in hopes to allow the viewer to come to their own conclusions on what family is. Unlike the other works, his is devoid of clear love or loss but

instead has the viewer decide what is what, by removing both of these aspects and leaving it up to interpretation he creates a very real fictional work on family and memory.

Another excellent example of taking the idea of the family and twisting it is Richard Billingham's work. His work focused on his alcoholic father and violent mother. His photos showcase a rawness to the life he lived. In an interview with Tim Adams (2019) Billingham states how he has found ways of showcasing the past both in a protective way and in some ways dismissive but whatever the case, whether it is processed or not he at the very least frames it and showcases the rawness.



Fig 6. Richard Billingham, from the Ray's a Laugh, 1993-1995. Photograph © Richard Billingham

The photos are jarringly intimate and like nothing that is usually shown. In his work he shows the truth. Unlike Eich, he is not allowing the viewer to make their own assumptions. Instead, he's showing the scenes as they are. Billingham's work goes against the grain of the regular

family album, which edits family history into only happy memories as if the families never knew strife. As mentioned by the Tate (2001), “Images such as that of Ray passed out drunk by the toilet break traditional taboos about which aspects of family life may be made public. In the photographs an atmosphere of extreme claustrophobia is established...”



Fig 7. Richard Billingham, from the Ray's a Laugh, 1993-1995. Photograph © Richard Billingham

His work breaks the norms, he goes further than Eich and shows what his life in poverty was like. None of his work shocks him as this was his life, he was acquainted to it. There is nothing superficial about his images, this is what gives them such a draw as it is like a voyeur looking through his eyes into what he himself lives with. No poses, no happiness or sadness to be convinced of, just the truth of the moment. Whether it is happy or sad, that's not what he is conveying. He is simply showcasing the situation unfolding in front of him.

Chapter 2: Family Albums

Eich showcased the non-fictional situations that unfolds for the album. This created a certain vagueness to his work were true and false became blurred. Billingham's work showed the true state of his family dynamic, he showed the truth as he saw it and by just looking at his photographs you can gather the context of heavy alcoholism quite quickly. The album's narrative is wholly built on what it contains. Billingham's work contained the alcoholic truth of his dysfunctional family, in doing so he created a true narrative showcasing his parents' lives. Eich's work in contrast contains an extraordinary lack of context. Rather than making his own narrative he decided on blurring lines and allowing the viewer full control over what was contained within.

2.1 What does the Album Contain?

It is agreed upon that that the family album is an emotional attachment for the owner regardless of whether or not the snapshots showcased are staged or not. (Sandbye, 2014, n.p). What is interesting about Sandbye's study is how she views the albums. For years she collected albums from flea markets and public archives from different locales. She is a viewer devoid of context without any guidance from the album's true owners. Speaking on the private narrative Sandbye (2014) asks herself questions on the album and how we should regard it. Whether we should speak on its aesthetics or to look at it with sociological insights or if we should mainly focus on the family narrative that it provides. Sandbye (2014) continues to argue the point that the albums are objects that are heavily personal, social and cultural and that this must be included when analysing said albums. It is a form that is global and due to this it "produces localities."

The album serves as a window into the lives of the family, of their local culture and attitudes. An album from an average American family would showcase life differently to that of a Japanese album. The themes may be similar, the concept of family photography is universal however the way in which the family could be framed and what each album contains would differ from family to family. Each album contains its own context, stories and importance to each individual owner.

As well as insights into the lives of others, the album also shows the state of the world. Each culture's album would have murmurs of its state throughout. Through an album we can see the views and traces of what the government once was. Laura Wexler describes it best as "The family album is a kind of footprint left in the sand, a trace of where the government once has been." (2017, p.100). Wexler continues on to discuss the interweaved links between the domestic life of the family album and the political world. This idea of politics mixing with the domestic can be seen greatly in Dong's family from the previous chapter. Due to the immigration laws set up by the government, his parents were unable to bring their son with them and so they inserted his image into their new American family photos. This government footprint can be seen so clearly within their album, their story of immigration and working with the laws provided by the government are interweaved with their snapshots of family life in America. When we view the album through the eyes of the state, we become more aware of these types of absences that are covered up both in literally and metaphorically. (Wexler, 2017, p.100-101)

This calls into question the content of all albums. The fiction created by the owner weaves the narrative they wish to convey. In Martha Langford's *Suspended Conversations*, she mentions how the album is used as a way to preserve the life story of someone who has died.

She continues on to discuss how the telling of this report is transformed by each new narrator. The album itself is a stationary object, one that's contents can be expanded on as time moves forward until eventually it contains the life of the narrator also. In a way the album becomes a shared memory, one that is passed on and added to with each new owner. (2001, p.63)

2.2 An Informal Conversation on the Album: A Showcase of Death

The creation of the album is something deeply personal. It is your story told by you. But what happens to the narrative we construct when we allow others to piece it together for us? Is there more truth when the bias of our own eyes is removed? With this in mind I sit and have an informal conversation with my interviewee, Sheila (October 5, 2021). Together we revisit her photos and see what truths lay waiting for us. Our main topic of discussion is the context of the photographs and the significance of that context. The first piece Sheila shows me takes me by surprise. As we sit at the table, she pats a birthday card that sits on top of a small album. The card includes many family photos on the front. One image in particular mattered more than all the others. Sheila (2021) quickly explains: "The reason I brought it down is because it's actually the only one I have with a photo of my mam in it."



Fig 8. Rogers, Sheila. The last photograph of Sheila and her mother. 1971.
Author's personal collection.

I later learn this is due to her daughter's ex-husband. He destroyed all of Sheila's photographs that were stored in her daughter's home. In a flash all of her memories had been erased. All moments of the fictional happy narrative removed. The album she laid before me was not one made by her. The images inside are not ones she originally owned but rather her life told through photos others had of her. This brought a question to my mind, is there more truth in this album about someone's memories than one made by that said person themselves?

The album showcased her the best it could. It is her life told through the lens of others. Most photos, images of her younger days or children's birthdays are lost. This album was a mismatch of photos created in love but without any context to what the photos meant. The first thought that Sheila had on the album was that of her mother. "There's none of my Mam,

there's none of my Mam, did nobody have one of her. But that was another lifetime ago."

Now looking at the birthday card in front of us she mentions how sad it is that it is starting to fade, her last image of her mother, fading. She showed me this image of her mother because she didn't want to leave her out. This brings up the interesting point of if she did leave her out, I would never know her story in truth. I would be none the wiser and the fiction would only grow stronger. But by showing me this card accompanying the album, by confiding in me the whys to the state of the album I learn more context, I learn more about the family's truths before we even turn a page.

As we turn the page away from her childhood, we are transported decades into the future, to a holiday only a few years ago. The album has no structure, it has no timeline. There is no chronological order. This disrupts any narrative that could be created as we are never in a gradual incline of watching the people in the memories age up. Instead, we watch as they begin young, then suddenly they're older and then we revert back in a repeating loop. "These are all the photos that they got for me because so many are lost on me." Sheila (2021) explains as to why the album is the way it is. She also remarks on how she likes this layout, how the jumping around in time feels refreshing as you can contrast the past with the present.

We speak on death, on how we don't really show anyone dying in photos. This is not the case in this album however. The looming idea of death can be seen in one particular photo. A simple image of Sheila standing by a grave in Monte Casino. This was one of the first images I'd seen in an album that showed the second half of the human condition, the loss to one's love could be seen. The idea of death that we are all aware of but never seem to mention in albums had been mentioned. Amazed I asked why. Why photograph a grave? I learned it belonged to her grandfather from World War II. The graveyard was a veteran gravesite, he

had died in battle saving two men. In 1994 his grave was found, before then it was unknown and in 2000 Sheila herself went to find her grandfather while on holiday in Italy.



Fig 9. Rogers, Shelia. Photograph of Sheila grandfather's grave in Monte Casino. 2018. Author's personal collection.

Sheila continues to fill me in on the extraordinary context for this single photograph. She had a letter from the war office which told her where he was and how to find him. She remarks to me how sad it was her grandfather was buried so far from home. But this was not the only story told that was sparked from this single image. Before she travelled, a woman asked her about her trip and if she could also find out if her father, who she believed to also be buried in Monte Casino, was there as well. The woman knew nothing of her father besides his name

and that he was Canadian. So as Sheila stared at her grandfather's grave her husband noticed graves with maple leaves, they had found the woman's father. They took photos to bring back for her and told her of the grave to which the woman was overjoyed. The woman two years later rang Sheila, she too had gone to visit the grave thanks to the photos and instructions she had received.

The story is important to her family. It's a huge part of them, it's a huge part of their history. To know this story of the grave being found and how it not only posthumously reunited a grandfather and granddaughter but also a father and daughter would be lost to Sheila's own grandchildren if she never spoke of it. Without the context we only see an image of a grave. The journey of discovery and the importance of that journey for not only Sheila but the woman she helped would be lost if not shared orally. Sheila (2021) explains to me how she gives context to her images.

There are so many photos of everything now, so talking to them, telling them the story is stronger than just looking at a photo. Speaking about it and telling them all about it rather than just a photo where you just scroll and scroll without thinking and orally it stays with them longer. You are creating the picture rather than them being shown a picture. It becomes more real, the story behind the picture. (Sheila, 2021)

Similarly, Langford discusses how the album in itself is a form best suited to oral storytelling. Langford argues that it is the conversations between family members that bring life and context to the images. (2001, p.23). These images are given their context by Sheila orally to those who will carry on her legacy. In this sense she is able to be as truthful as she wants to be when explaining the history of her life. Telling the context orally is one that should continue on, but also having that same information in the album would allow for more truths to be shown.

2.3 The True Album: A Journey into Documentation

As I stare at my family photos, I wonder how I will convey the truth? We have spoken on how the fictions begin, with the removal of loss, something so integral to our lives. Without love and loss, we are nothing. The album as I have known it is one where loss is overlooked, a mere whisper compared to the bombastic showings of love. This is understandable as we have seen, most wish to showcase their life in a good light. We have seen in Twine's (2006) interviews how Sharon showcased her wedding in the album as a happy moment, whereas in truth it was far from it. She told the truth verbally but not contextually. This is the same case with Sheila who orally told the truth, but when we remove her the context is what we see in the image. I remarked on this by looking at how we can show the full picture, by writing a piece to accompany the photo we contextualise the image for those after us who have no context for the events.

Of course, not every image needs this, some photos in the album are exactly what they are. Some however have hidden context that need to be shown the light. Or do they? During this section I wish to discuss the true album, an album that gives context, an album that is as truthful to the family as an unbiased report would be. To do this I delved into my family's history to uncover all the truths I could and during this I came to understand the question I proposed; should the truth be documented?

When I began my research into the family album and whether the truth should be documented I believed it should be fully truthful. However, as I constructed the "true album" and learned more as to the reasons people don't show the truth I came to a conclusion to my questions. I will encase three photographs from my family's history as well as speak on the creation of the album and my journey to my own answer to the questions I've asked.

I compiled my family's history through photographs, letters and other pieces of work that was historic and contextual in nature. These photos spanned from 1900s to modern day. At first, I found it very easy to tell the whole truth while constructing the album. An example of this would be a photo of my grandfather as a child with his own father and siblings. There are very few photos around this time, this is due in part to my grandfather's brother drowning. My grandfather blamed himself for this death and shortly after his father passed on too.



Fig 10. Kelly, Matthew. Photograph of Joseph O'Byrne and his children. 1935. Author's personal collection.

A lot of the context is missing from this time as everyone has passed on. While doing my best to gather context from other relatives who may know I learned of the hardships of their lives. This is when the dilemma of telling the whole truth appears. Giving information on their history is easy to write about. However, information like the death of my grandfather's brother is harder to give context to due to how heavy a topic it is. However, it is still more

manageable to speak on than more recent events due to it being so far removed from my own life.

The next photograph is from 1974. This is a photo taken on one of my mother's many family holidays down to Arklow as a child. As I mentioned before, when the context becomes closer to your own life the choice to tell the full truth becomes a more daunting task. Let's first examine it without context, how when I first looked at it, I believed life to be swell for them. So many of their photos showcased holidays. It seemingly was all joyful. That is the fiction. Now I do believe there was happiness in these moments but it is not so black and white. A dysfunctional family can still have moments of joy. As I delved deeper into my mother's family, I learned the traumas she grew up around. I learned of the abuse she watched from a young age, her father beating her mother and her mother's crippling addiction to alcohol. I learned of bullying and abuse, of running away and torments. None of these are shown in photographs.



Fig 11. Kelly, Matthew. Photograph of Mother's holiday to Arklow. 1974. Author's personal collection.

As I worked on my “true album”, I had unwittingly forced my mother to relive her childhood traumas. This is the danger of no context. If I had known the truth, I would not have opened her up to the photos and to her memories. This is when I began my heel turn in my ideals. It is truly only when it becomes closer to your own life that you realise the effect the full truth can cause. It is not easy to be unbiased when it comes to your own family history. If I began

to write on the true context of my mother's upbringings it would hurt her as well as her siblings. These are their collective traumas; it is their choice on whether or not they wish for it to be showcased in an album. It would be unethical to tell someone else's story that they would rather have left in the past. It is now clear as to why we showcase the good in photos and only make mention orally of the truth. We want to believe in the good of our families, of our lives. We want to remember our happiest rather than the trauma that hurt us. But not all bad memories are ones that should be forgotten.

The idea of death being removed from most albums is still one I disagree with; death is the natural ending and should not be removed from our life story. If the album is one that is used to show the lives of all our family then death is a part of that story and should also be discussed. A good example of this can be seen in my "true album." In 2012 my father was diagnosed with a grade 4 brain tumour. He later died in 2013. But by looking at the photos there is no way in knowing he dies. There are no funeral photos as why would there be? It is a tragic event meant to be lived and grieved rather than frozen in a snapshot. But even without this context it is evident that something is off. Take these photos of him set a few months apart for example:



Fig 12. Kelly, Matthew. Photograph of Michael Kelly during his brain tumour. 2012. Author's personal collection.



Fig 13. Kelly, Matthew. Photograph of Michael Kelly celebrating his son's confirmation. 2013. Author's personal collection.

Without context it is evident that something is taking place. The viewer can figure out that the man they have seen up until this point has transformed into another. What is interesting about the photo from 2013 is that it is technically a happy memory drenched in sadness. It is an image from my confirmation, a moment of celebration with my family, it is also an image showcasing a dying man soon to pass. Some images are able to be both happy and sad, as humans our emotions are complex and this complexity can easily be transferred to a physical photo.

I can speak truthfully on the 2013 photo as it is my life, it is my truth and it is a death that impacted me. If I removed that death from my memory, I would not be me. Something so important to the shaping of who you are should be shown if you are willing to show it. An argument can be made that my mother's family also shaped her into who she is, the difference of the two is willingness to remember. If the person does not want to remember, if they would rather forget than that is that. The "true album" as I call it can and should only showcase the truths when ethically shown. It should not showcase the memories unwillingly. A family album is for the family, it is to remember the family. It should showcase the love of that family and the life and deaths they've had. These losses are of equal importance as the loves.

When I began my work on the "true album" I believed in theory that I could be unbiased. In truth there is no real way to be unbiased when it comes to your own family. By creating and failing to be wholly truthful I found my answer to my question. "Should the truth be documented?" At first when I began, I believed wholeheartedly that yes, the truth for better or worse should be documented. But the situation is complex. Yes, death should be documented, death as I have stated is an important part of life and should not be forgotten.

For those reading the album they should see that importance of what is left after we're gone. But then the question arose of trauma, I believed France Twine's interview with Sharon created a fiction but in reality, she told half-truths. She was married and the photos showcase that wedding. She spoke orally of the trauma behind the scenes and although that context is not shown in the album itself that is her right. Like my informal conversation with Sheila, Sharon chose to tell her stories orally rather than as text beside the photo. By doing this she allows a choice. You can see the memory as happy without knowing the behind-the-scenes truths or you can be told the sadness that's underneath. But once the speaker is dead that choice is removed, it is no longer her story to tell but rather those who now hold the album. Do they have the right to tell someone else's story?

What we choose to showcase is our decision. I believe in the truth in some regard but I also know the value of leaving things in the past. The aim of an album is not to hurt or harm. The aim of the album is to show memories, to show families. By adding a contextual line about abuse to a family holiday photo does nothing to the scene, it gives context to the family's lives behind closed doors but in terms of the album it just brings forth those traumatic moments to the minds of those who were there rather than letting them gloss over it. The choice for them is removed. The context for trauma should only be given when the person from that memory wishes to speak on it. Otherwise, their personal space has been invaded and forced on display. The choice to tell the truth is not something that can be made into a blanket statement. It is a case-by-case basis, each album creator decides how much truth to document. It is up to them on whether traumas should be brought up or whether only the happiness of holidays should be shown. It is up to them whether they wish to give context in the written word or orally. It is their decision on whether they want to show both love and loss or create a fiction where loss never happens.

Conclusion

In conclusion the fictitious nature of the family album is apparent in all albums. The removal of loss is what I believe creates the fiction. By showing loss, a valuable aspect of life I believe it tells a better truth. It showcases the importance of life and family rather than the narrative where death is in the shadows and never seen. But not all truth should be documented, whether it is due to the unethical nature of telling another's truth or the personal preference of the creator looking at their own memories. The truth is a choice and that choice can only be made by those people.

I believe historic fact should be willingly shown, giving subtext to images and explaining lives to preserve memories but when it comes to more traumatic truths it is less black and white and becomes out of our hands.

In cases of trauma, orally reciting the story can be the best way to allow for context as this allows for a choice both in the person telling the story and the person viewing the image. There is no "true album."

As people we protect those we love, in some cases a true album can harm those we love and due to this most would avoid attempting it. All images in some way showcase the truth, Sharon's wedding shows her marriage, Dong's parent's altered photos show their whole family, Sheila's graveyard photo shows her grandfather, my confirmation dinner shows our celebration.

There is truth in all of these images at surface level, of course, there is more truth underneath but that is up to each of those individuals to decide on what that is. Some may tell the truth of the image orally, some, like me, may give some context textually and some may leave the image as it is as a moment lost to time. Whatever the case it is a question each individual has to ask themselves when looking at the state of their own album, should our truths be documented?

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