



The Parents' Guide to
Photographing Your
Toddler and Child
from Age One to Ten

your
child
in pictures

ME RA KOH

Author of Your Baby in Pictures



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THE PARENTS' GUIDE TO PHOTOGRAPHING
YOUR TODDLER AND CHILD FROM AGE ONE TO TEN

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For my mama

*The simplest moment of
childhood became the most
magical because you slowed
down and pointed out the
magic you saw in me.*

acknowledgments

To all the readers of *Your Baby in Pictures* who made it their go-to baby-shower gift and asked for more, my heart is overwhelmed. To the contributing moms in these pages, your creative eye inspires us all. To the incredible families within these pages, it's an honor to capture your ever-evolving stories. To our team of certified CONFIDENCE teachers, thank you for carrying the vision of these pages to moms in your local communities. To the past workshop attendees, blog readers, and TV viewers who e-mail me stories, your enthusiasm for learning fuels my passion! To Julie Mazur, my senior editor at Amphoto Books, I love how you always see more books in me—your ever-increasing vision is an incredible gift. To editor Alison Hagge, I'm overwhelmed by your gift for bringing beautiful form and shape to these pages. To Nidhi Berry and Linda Kaplan of Crown's foreign rights department, thank you for championing the translation of this series to reach moms all over the world. To Stephanie Boozer, deep gratitude for the endless details you tied up and the immense joy you brought to this project. To Brian, my incredible husband, for how you hold me up supporting me like no other, so that I can lock myself away to write. To my greatest treasures, Pascaline and Blaze, for the cards and little gifts you made me for every deadline I reached—I'm the most blessed mama in the world! Most of all, I give thanks to my Heavenly Father for restoring my voice so I might help others find theirs.



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preface: my story

Capturing the story of my children's lives has been one of the most rewarding honors of my life.

If you read *Your Baby in Pictures*, you will remember me sharing how I didn't find photography. Photography found me—and then it healed me. I bought my first SLR camera when I was turning thirty years old as an attempt to process the grief of miscarrying Aidan, our second baby. At the time, I was an author and speaking at women's events on the topic of recovering from sexual victimization. My first book, *Beauty Restored*, was based on my recovery and restoration after being date-raped. Photography was nowhere on the map for me, but with the painful loss of Aidan, my heart needed a new creative outlet—a way to process my grief. Little did I know that as I grieved Aidan's death, the birth of a new love would come.

I remember the afternoon it happened. Pascaline was eighteen months old and playing in front of the French doors. The afternoon light spilled into the room and illuminated her in such a magical way. I knew in that moment that even though I couldn't hold on to Aidan's life, Pascaline's life was here—right in front of me—waiting to be captured, cherished. With my new camera in hand, she and I headed out to the garden. As a toddler, Pascaline was always intent on being my little helper. When she reached for the garden hose, instead of trying to keep her from becoming soaked, I stepped back and captured the moment with my camera. I went to the closest one-hour lab with my roll of film, and when I saw the results—her spirit and big eyes looking back at me—I was hooked.

Friends and family started noticing the photos and asked me to photograph their children. Before long, brides were contacting me to shoot their weddings. Within four years of buying my first SLR, I was shooting million-dollar weddings all over the country. My husband, Brian, joined me, and

photography became a vehicle for us to work and grow in creativity together.

As much as I loved shooting high-end weddings, my heart has always been committed to empowering women, especially moms. This is what I spent my time dedicated to before photography, and I knew that this is what I wanted to get back to. A few years later, Brian and I made a decision to shift our photography business from being a boutique wedding business to empowering moms with a camera. Through my daily blog, I began to provide moms with photo tips on how to capture the moments of their children.

In a short period of time, my photography and photo tips were featured on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, VH1, Lifetime television, as well as in the *New York Times* and on exhibit in New York City. Yet I still wanted to reach more moms, to inspire their creative spirits. It was time to return to speaking at engagements, and in the process, my passion for empowering women grew a thousand times stronger.



Capturing the everyday moments of Pascaline was a way for me to heal and cherish the simple beauty of her life—right here, right now.

In 2009, the *Nate Berkus Show* on NBC invited me to be its guest photo expert for two years to inspire its millions of daily viewers. Sony invited me to be its first female sponsored wedding and portrait photographer. Brian and I wrote the award-winning instructional DVDs *Refuse to Say Cheese* and *Beyond the Green Box* for moms who want to learn how to capture their kids. We also continued teaching—for more than five years we have sold out our CONFIDENCE photography workshops to an audience of women nationwide. We now have a team of certified women to teach our CONFIDENCE Workshops to their own local communities—growing confidence in one mom at a time. And in 2012, Disney approached us with an opportunity to host my own show *Capture the Story with Me Ra Koh*. But the best part of all is that during this time, we were blessed with the birth of Blaze, our baby boy.

All of these honors and gifts have been amazing, because I never imagined I'd be a photographer. I didn't go to photography school, and in fact, I did horribly in school struggling with several learning disabilities to only get a C+, at that. On top of feeling inferior at school, I had a painful childhood. Nothing has ever come easily for me, and photography is no exception. But sometimes, when life pushes us so hard, we surprise ourselves and push back just as hard, achieving more than we ever expected.



As women, we battle so many voices that tell us we aren't good enough, creative enough, even worthy enough. One of my greatest joys is to speak to the hearts of women, empowering them in their creativity and confidence, as at this keynote address to an audience of twelve hundred women. Photo by Joy Neville.

I remember feeling lost when I tried to read my camera manual. When I visited the local camera shop for guidance, the man behind the counter made me feel even more inferior, and yet I was determined to find a way, because capturing my children in pictures was (and is) that important to me. So I created explanations that made sense to me. And, after meeting thousands of women during the last ten years, I know that I'm not the only one who sees things this way. That is why I wrote the first book in this series, *Your Baby in Pictures*. The tremendous response to this book, from real moms trying to figure out how to capture their babies, got me thinking about the next stage in parenting. *Your Child in Pictures* is the result.

As with the first book, you will read many "Me Ra-style" explanations intended to demystify the technical side of photography, along with all the camera settings I used to create the images you see here. If you are like me, you want to know the camera settings for every photo until you feel comfortable

creating your own. My intent for this book series is not to wow you with my abilities. Rather, these books are about empowering you to capture your child's life, regardless of what type of camera you have. In this second book, I'm honored to share not only my photos but photos from other moms who have come to our workshops (some of whom have gone on to become our certified teachers), watched our DVDs, seen my photo tips on TV, or followed along in my daily blog. As you will see, each of us has our own unique eye for capturing the unfolding story of our children's lives. Each of us has inspiration to share.



At our CONFIDENCE Workshops, women find that their eye for the world around them is not only beautiful but incredibly powerful.

A creative process works itself out through stages; some stages come easily, and some are just plain tough. Photography is the same. Some stages involve a lot of hard work and commitment to simply not give up, like capturing a busy toddler who may run away every time you pull out the camera. Other stages feel easy and delightful, like collaborating with your seven-year-old on a photo that captures her current hobbies and

loves. Regardless of what stage your child is in, the end result is worth it all. Your children watch you develop a passion that feeds your creative spirit. They, in turn, start to develop their own creative voice. What once started as a simple hobby is now enriching the family on multiple levels.

Imagine the fun you will have when your child is grown and you have a collection of stories—not simply photos, but rich visual stories—to share that chronicle his growth as well as your own creative growth. Talk about inspiring! And to think it all began with your determination not to be intimidated or to feel afraid that you weren't creative enough to capture beautiful photos. If I can pick up a camera and teach myself how to capture my children, you can, too. Prepare to find hundreds of photo secrets I have learned along the way as well as easy explanations, written from one parent to another. You can do this! It's not about whether you have a fancy or cheap camera; it's about your passion to capture the fleeting stories that evolve in your child's life with each new stage of childhood.

Roll up your sleeves, and let's dive in. We've got stories to capture!

Much love,
Me Ra



The soul is healed by being with children.

—EMMA GOLDMAN, *Mother Earth*, APRIL 1913

introduction: capturing the magic of childhood

b

eing a parent in today's world is not for the faint of heart. Many of us manage the demands of parenting while at the same time working demanding jobs. Being pulled in several directions at once, we look for ways to savor every moment with our children. But somehow time moves too quickly. We find ourselves wishing we could make time stand still and hold on to the days when our little ones held our hands on walks or ran into our arms when they fell down.

As a mother and then a professional photographer, the camera has been my vehicle for slowing down, taking in the beauty of the moment at hand, and savoring the magic of childhood in my own kids as well as those of my clients. But for many of you, this may not yet be the case. There are so many incredible moments to capture in a child's life, it can be difficult to know what to focus on. Instead, you may find yourself trying to capture *it all*. The result? Three hundred photos of your child's third birthday but not one print hanging on the wall. My sense is that many of us have a deep desire to slow down, exhale, and take in one moment—the single story of an unfolding, developmental milestone that documents our child's life.

Your Child in Pictures will help you do just that. A response to so many of you who enjoyed my first book, *Your Baby in Pictures*, this second book continues the journey, pointing out key developmental moments so you, too, can slow down and capture the incredible, evolving change that is happening in your child.

As your children grow, so also must your approach to photographing them. This is why I've broken up this book by age-group: one to two years, three to four years, five to seven

years, and eight to ten years. Each chapter features five quick tips for photographing that age-group and then ten photo “recipes” to try with your child. Get ready to learn not only the ingredients for taking each picture but all the secrets and steps behind the photos, too.

Each photo recipe walks you through the following:

- When to take it
- How to prep for the shot
- What settings to use for a point-and-shoot or DSLR camera
- Composition and framing tips
- Where to focus before shooting
- And everyone’s favorite, the exact DSLR settings used for the photo shown, including the aperture, shutter speed, and ISO. In fact, you’ll start to discover the consistency within the camera settings I use so that you can branch off into your own experimentation. You may only have a point-and-shoot or camera phone now, but this book will grow with you when you are ready to upgrade to a DSLR.

All forty photo recipes can be followed with either a point-and-shoot or a DSLR camera. However, point-and-shoots can be incredibly limiting, and if you are sitting on the fence about upgrading to a DSLR, I encourage you to read [chapter 1](#) to help you make your purchase decision.

Tucked within the pages of this book, you will find inspiring moments captured by moms, just like you, who have attended my CONFIDENCE Workshop, watched my instructional DVDs, or followed the photo tips on my blog. Each of us sees the world in a unique way, and I am honored to let their images enrich this book for you that much more. The goal is not to shoot photo

that look like mine but to find joy in discovering your own eye.

In the appendix, you will also find tips on how to capture child with special needs. Over the years I have met many parents who feel uncomfortable hiring a photographer for fear that their child will not be understood or appreciated. These resilient, dynamic children must be approached in a different way from many of their peers. With the help of moms who know this field intimately, I am excited to empower and encourage you in capturing the story of your beautiful child.

For those who demand perfection of yourselves from the get go, I must tell you: photography takes practice. The goal of this book is not to capture perfection but the beauty of your child's everyday life. So take a break from the never-ending demands of home and work, and come with me to a quiet place where you can exhale. The reward is twofold. You will become empowered with tricks and techniques to chronicle your child's life, while at the same time growing in your own creativity. In return for your dedication, photography will become an exciting vehicle for you and your child to experience together. Enjoy!



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gearing up

sample content of Your Child in Pictures: The Parents' Guide to Photographing Your Toddler and Child from Age One to Ten

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