

Why I Scrapbook the Way I Do: The Photos are the Star

Written by Brenda Rose, My Papercrafting Life

Whenever I sit down at my scrapbook table, I try to remind myself why I'm there in the first place. As scrapbookers, we're surrounded by beautiful products. Every month there are new paper collections, embellishments, punches, laser cuts, stickers, and techniques that inspire us to create. I love them as much as anyone else. In fact, one of my favorite parts of this hobby is discovering new ways to use those products. But somewhere along the way, I think it's easy to lose sight of something important. The products are not the reason we're creating.

Without the photographs, there wouldn't be a story to tell. Everything else exists to support them.

I have photographs that deserve to be more than images stored on a phone or tucked away in a box, and I bet you do as well! Photographs represent real people, real relationships, and moments that have shaped my life. Every page I create is another opportunity to preserve a small piece of mine and my family's history.

The Reason We Started Scrapbooking

Think back to the very first scrapbook you ever made. Why did you start? I started because my son was almost a year old, and I knew I didn't want to lose those memories. Maybe it's the same for you. Some other times people started scrapbooking is their wedding, a special trip, a grandchild, a family reunion. There are so many reasons! What was your motivator?

Usually there is something about those moments that made you think, *"I don't want to lose this."* That desire to preserve a memory is what brings us to scrapbooking. The paper helps us tell the story, and the embellishments help create the mood. The title introduces the page.

But the photographs...

The photographs are the heart.

Every Design Decision Should Support the Photos

One of the questions I ask myself throughout the design process is incredibly simple:

"Does this help my photographs stand out?"

It sounds like a simple question, but it influences nearly every decision I make. It affects the papers I choose, the amount of white space I leave, where I place my embellishment clusters, how much ink I add, and even where I position my title. If a design choice helps draw the eye toward the photographs, it stays. If it competes with them, I know it's time to rethink the page.

I've learned that editing is just as important as creating. **Sometimes the strongest design decision isn't adding one more embellishment—it's choosing not to.** I said something similar last week, and I think it's worth repeating.

I've learned that just because something is beautiful doesn't automatically mean it belongs on the page. Beautiful products can still compete with beautiful memories.

My goal is never to have someone look at one of my layouts and say, *"What gorgeous paper!"*

I would much rather hear, "Look at that smile!" or "I remember that day." Those reactions tell me the scrapbook page accomplished exactly what it was supposed to do.

Let Your Photos Breathe

Last week, I wrote about the importance of white space. This is one of the reasons I love it so much. White space naturally draws attention to the photographs. It creates breathing room around them. Instead of competing with busy backgrounds or layers of embellishments, the photographs have space to be appreciated.

Think of it as a little like placing a treasured photograph in a beautiful frame. The frame isn't there to steal attention. It's there to help us notice what's inside. That's exactly how I want every design element on my scrapbook pages to behave.

Color Can Help—or Compete

Color is one of the strongest tools we have as designers but it also has the power to distract.

Bright, bold patterned papers can be wonderful. But if the paper is louder than the photograph, the page begins telling the wrong story.

I often let my photographs choose my colors. Instead of asking, "What paper do I want to use?"

I ask, "What colors already exist in these photographs?" Then I build my page around them. Sometimes that means using softer papers. Sometimes it means introducing only one bold color. And sometimes it means choosing white so the photographs become the brightest thing on the page.

Your photos should never have to fight for attention. You may notice something in my workshop designs. I try never to have patterned paper as the photo mat unless it is very a very subtle, tonal paper. When I have photos, I put them on a page so that you can imagine what your photos would look like. Over the years I've learned that beautiful paper can accidentally compete with beautiful paper.

Someday, These Photos Will Mean Even More

One of the greatest lessons I've learned through scrapbooking is that photographs become more valuable with time. The pictures that seem ordinary today often become the ones we treasure most tomorrow.

- The photo of everyone gathered around the kitchen table.
- A blurry snapshot from a family camping trip.
- Grandpa laughing at something no one remembers.
- Your child with missing front teeth.
- The dog stretched out on the dock after a long day on the lake.

At the time those photographs were taken, they probably didn't feel extraordinary. In fact, they may have been the ones you almost didn't print because they weren't perfectly posed or technically perfect. But life has a way of changing our perspective.

- Children grow up.
- Parents grow older.
- Grandparents leave us.
- Houses are sold.
- Pets become cherished memories.

Suddenly, those ordinary photographs become priceless because they're the closest thing we have to stepping back into that moment. That's why I never want my scrapbook pages to compete with my photographs. I want someone turning the pages years from now to immediately see the people they loved and remember how those moments felt.

The Legacy We're Leaving

One day, someone will inherit our scrapbook albums. But guess what? They won't know which collection was released in 2026. They won't remember (or care) which border punch was popular. They probably won't notice which embellishments were limited edition.

But they'll recognize Grandma's smile. They'll laugh at Dad's silly hat. They'll see where family traditions began and discover people they've only heard stories about. Our albums become part of our family's history. That's why the photographs deserve center stage. Everything else exists to help tell their story.

I want to to talk about something very important here about legacy because it deserves a place. I've heard people say, "My children probably won't want all of my scrapbook albums someday."

Maybe they're right. I have one adult son. Will he treasure every album I've created? I honestly don't know. I hope he will, but I can't predict what the future holds.

But I've realized that's the wrong question to ask. A better question is this: **Have these albums enriched my life?** Without hesitation, my answer is yes. Every time I pull an album from the shelf, I'm reminded of moments I might have otherwise forgotten. I relive family vacations, quiet

afternoons on the lake, birthdays, holidays, everyday moments that once felt ordinary but have become priceless with time. I smile at faces that have changed, laugh at stories I hadn't thought about in years, and remember details that would have quietly slipped away if they had only lived on my phone.

These albums aren't simply a legacy for someone else. They are a gift to myself. They remind me where I've been, who I've loved, what I've learned, and the beautiful life I've been blessed to live. They allow me to revisit my own story, and I believe that's valuable whether anyone else ever turns another page.

If one day my son, my nieces and nephews, or another member of my family treasures these albums, I will be grateful. But even if they don't, these pages have already fulfilled one of their greatest purposes. They have helped me remember my own life.

My Hope for Every Layout

Every time I finish a scrapbook page, I hope someone opens it years from now and immediately sees the people I loved. I hope they linger over the photographs, notice expressions, and I hope they smile. If they happen to admire the paper or compliment the embellishments, that's wonderful. But if they leave the page remembering the people instead of the products...

Then I know I've done my job. Preserving beautiful memories is why I scrapbook.