

# A family album

When Andrew Sanderson sent us some of the images he has taken of his children over the past decade, we were captivated. From ordinary everyday events he has produced an impressive body of work but, more importantly for his subjects, it's the history of their lives in pictures

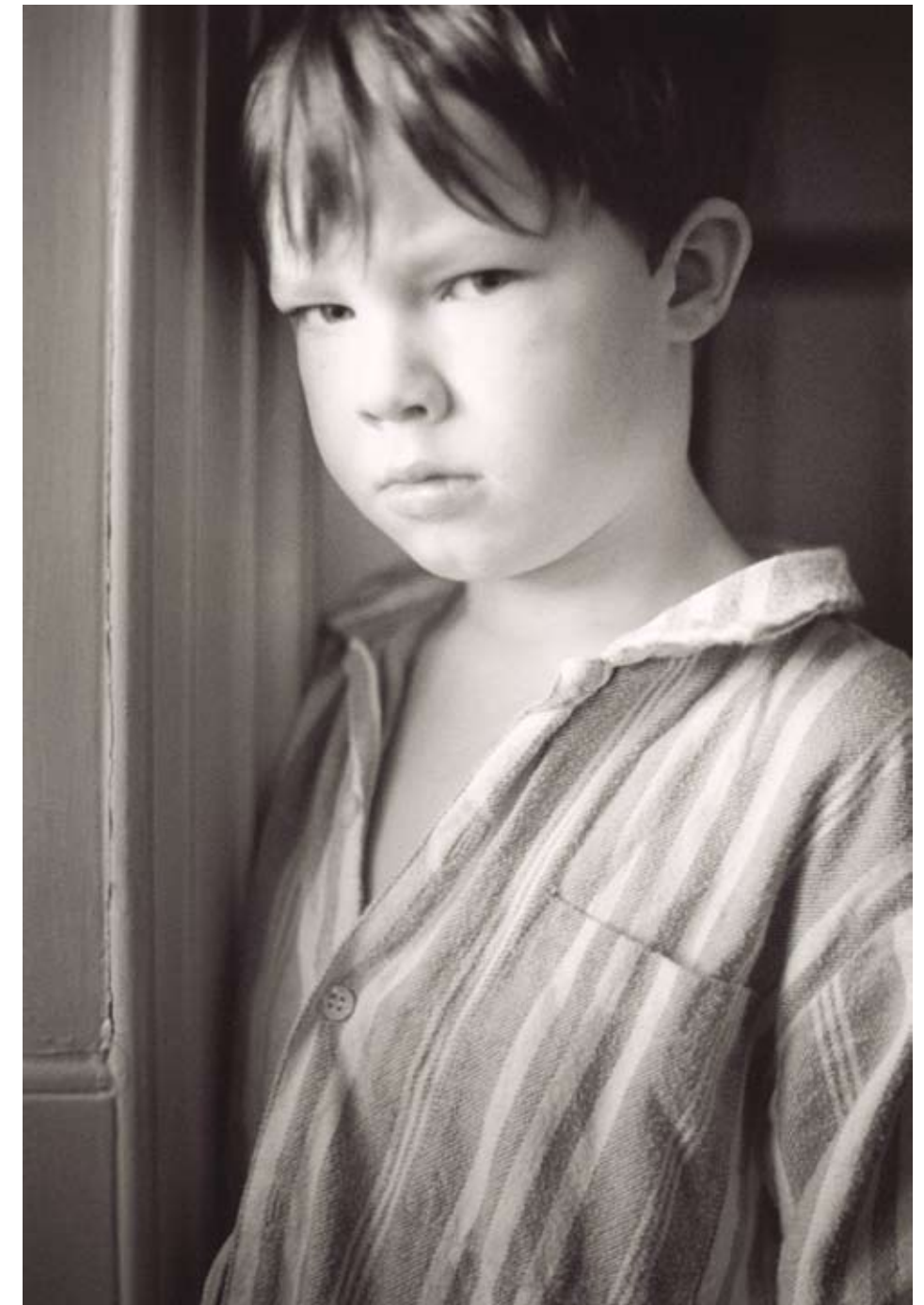
I have been photographing my children since our first child Alice was born in 1994. Three years later Will came along followed two years after that by Lily. All of them have been photographed almost constantly since their arrival and are perfectly comfortable with having a camera pointed at them.

My motivation has always been to create an archive of pictures, which would not only record their progress and growth, but would also rise above the ordinary snapshot. I wanted to introduce a little magic into the family snaps and to leave something that would stand on its own. So many people use their cameras for events such as Christmas, birthdays, holidays, the school play, etc. and those areas are usually well covered. I wanted to catch moments that covered the way they played and behaved day to day. I believe that there is a strange inversion that happens with photography over time; photographs of special events take on an ordinary dullness and pictures of the everyday become special.

*'Shoot the ordinary and everyday – one day it won't be'*

I shoot families once in a while as a job, but I photograph my kids just about every day. I try not to pose them if possible, preferring to look for things that they do, or just observing when various elements of a scene come together and suggest a picture.

Sometimes posing is necessary, such as when shooting on large format, but this is really not much more than the usual approach, with me asking them to hold it for a longer period of time. Occasionally I have a particular shot in my head and need to press gang a family member into sitting, but



LEFT Horse chestnut ABOVE Moody





**[FEATURE]**

I try to get them to see it as fun. I really don't want to order them about, or make them feel pressured. If there is any reluctance, I leave it for another day. It doesn't take many bad posing experiences to turn a kid off for life, so I don't push it, the shot can wait.

I never use flash, always available light, and using a range of films allows me the freedom to shoot in a variety of lighting situations.

I have shot on all formats, from half frame right through to 10x8 (and digital), but I suppose medium format is the most used. For years I only had a battered old Mamiya RB67 and a Yashicamat, both with waist level viewfinders. For those of you unfamiliar with these cameras, you look down into the viewfinder and see a reversed image on the focusing screen, so if you are chasing a kid round the room and (s)he disappears out of the left of the frame, you have to move to the right!



Waiter

*'I believe that there is a strange inversion that happens with photography over time; Photographs of special events take on an ordinary dullness and pictures of the everyday become special'*



Rollei lenscaps

### Make a print!

All the images I have printed up are 10x8 inches. Personally, I love this size; they look big enough to step in to, but don't take up lots of space. I don't like small enprints; they are too fiddly. Very large prints would be lovely, but impractical. We already have a big drawer packed full of 10x8 boxes, the same number of 20x16 prints would take over the house!

I have no idea what my family think of this archive; I've never asked them. I expect my kids think that this is normal and nothing special. Although they are OK about being photographed, they don't express much interest in the prints. When they are older and arguing about my estate, they may attach more importance to them.

I often photograph other children when they come to play and give a copy of the print to the parents at a later date. Because it's so different from what they are used to, they love a nicely printed black & white and I get some very complimentary remarks.

One of the great things about medium format negs such as 6x6cm, is that the quality is so good that you can crop the negative at the printing stage without a noticeable loss in detail, or an increase in grain. A shot can easily be missed if you are turning the camera around or worrying about the composition, so I eliminate this by using a large square negative and cropping later.

The slowness and weight of medium format, combined with the limited number of frames, might make this type of camera seem less than ideal to many photographers, but the look that this method gives far outweighs the disadvantages.

The inherent quality of a nicely printed black & white fibre based print, from a negative of this size, makes a simple situation into a thing of beauty. All I need to do is point the medium format camera at the kids, do a half decent fibre based print and I have something special. Using medium format (most of the time) means that the negatives are simple to print, have a lovely tonality and can be packed with detail if needed.

I prefer to shoot at wide apertures to bring the subject out from the background or to draw attention to the eyes. I don't think it is always necessary to have everything sharp from foreground to infinity, especially for a portrait. I really like to see portraits with critically sharp detail combined with very shallow depth of field. I prefer shooting by natural light, so this gives me the convenience of working with fast(ish) shutter speeds most of the time, but the focus needs to be bang-on. With subjects that rarely keep still, this is tricky.



Will watching



Gazing out

### Does working in digital mean making fewer prints?

With the advent of digital, I believe that most people shoot far more images, but don't print them out, they keep the family pictures on the computer, or at best have them backed up on a hard drive. But what is going to happen to these images in 50 or 100 years? Assuming that the media is still readable by then, is anyone going to trawl through hundreds of files, some hidden inside other files looking for things of interest? When your grandchildren are clearing your effects the computer will go in the skip – no one is going to spend hours looking through all your files to find your images. Worse still, if you don't have any immediate family, do you think that your computer is going to turn up at a car boot sale, only to be bought by some nerd? Will they look through everything? Will they care? Chances are, if your stuff isn't printed, it's likely that it's not going to contribute to social history.

Whichever medium you work in, I believe you should print out at the very least the best ones, and if you can, also the ones which will take your children back to events which were important to them – not just to you.





Splinter



Black eyes



Under legs

### Andrew's film choice

Printing to 10x8 from a medium format negative means virtually invisible grain, even with fast films. In summer I use a medium speed film, less sunny days get HP5 and in winter I shoot on Ilford Delta 3200, but I rate it at ISO 1600 (I give it nine and half minutes in ID11 at 20°C. This gives results almost as good as HP5 and at 10x8 I would challenge anyone to tell the difference).

*'I try to get them to see it as fun. I really don't want to order them about, or make them feel pressured. If there is any reluctance, I leave it for another day'*

### Andrew's 7 top tips for photographing children

- 1 Try to use medium format; it is a magical way to shoot. You can't help getting great shots from 6x6 or 6x7 negatives. In medium format, even very fast films such as Delta 3200 produce 10x8 prints with barely perceptible grain and this means that you can still shoot hand held, even indoors.
- 2 Avoid auto focus – use your eyes and decide which areas are important.
- 3 Focus once on the important part – usually the eyes – and then don't move it! Instead, mimic the movement of the child. If (s)he moves back a bit, you move forward a bit. This way, you don't miss a shot by turning the focus ring the wrong way at the critical moment.
- 4 Don't be too bossy, keep it fun and let them lead you into a situation where a great picture will happen.
- 5 Avoid on-camera flash, it is the worst kind of lighting and has no mood.
- 6 Don't do long shoots. Children have a totally different sense of time and will experience them as interminable. I shoot for five minutes, and then move away. I have another go when something has changed.
- 7 Shoot the ordinary and everyday – one day it won't be.

B&W

