

## life lessons



### Sarah Hall, 54, photographer from Hildersham

■ I didn't take photographs as a child – we couldn't afford a camera – so I started in my teens. I just took snaps of everything around really. I wouldn't have said I was particularly good at it in the early days, but I kept practising.

■ After about 28 albums-full, and when my children were old enough, I thought I ought learn how to do it properly. I did an evening course at Long Road, and just knew that life in the dark room was the life for me. I then spent five years doing a City and Guilds national diploma and then an HND.

■ I loved every minute of it. Just being out in the real world again after all those years of being with children: I've got three – Rose is 23, Florence is 21 and Charlie's 18.

■ I then did a lot of youth theatre photography. My middle daughter used to be in the Young Actors Company in Cambridge, so for the past seven years I've been taking most of their production photos.

■ Children are a lot easier to photograph than adults. They're not shy, they don't suddenly say: "Ooh no, you don't want that".

■ I've always enjoyed doing portraits of people. My albums are full of the children, family holidays, friends... I'm not big on landscapes.

■ I came across Operation Smile (a charity that offers free reconstructive surgery to people with facial deformities in the developing world) through my husband, who is a cleft lip and palate surgeon at Addenbrooke's. He was very keen to go on a mission, and it turned out they'd just started training people from Britain to be medical photographers.

■ I thought: "Wow, this is just what I want" – although I'm very squeamish about blood! It was very exciting because it meant my husband and I could start doing things together. Being a hospital doctor, we spend many hours apart. In fact for the first 10 years of our marriage I hardly ever saw him.

■ We went to Ethiopia. The hospital was less than basic and very dirty, and electricity came and went. Some of the patients had walked two days to get to us, and were just operated on in all their grime. I just thought: "Go for it" and shut my eyes and took a

■ For me, it was far more moving to photograph the grown-ups than the children. These people had lived with their face for sometimes up to 40 or 50 years, and now they had a new one. They stared at themselves in the mirror afterwards, almost unable to comprehend what they could see. One person said: "This is fantastic, now I can have my first kiss."

■ What I really loved about it was being part of a team. Having been a housewife, you're often on your own or just with children, so it made me feel important again. It was so exciting.

■ And being in Ethiopia was such an eye-opener into how half the world lives. It was very good for me to see it. And by my second trip – I went to Jordan earlier this year, where they were doing burns and hand malformations as well – I'd overcome the smell of blood.

■ I wouldn't do weddings – I'd be terrified of making a mess of it. I'm quite happy just doing portraits, theatres and Operation Smile.

■ I met my husband at a punting party in Grantchester Meadows. I was living in London and he was here as a medical student at the time. He fell in love with me when I fell in the water later that day. We've been married for 25 years this year.

■ If your children have flown the nest and you feel like doing something different, just do it, because you never know what it might lead to. The photography has given me the opportunity to explore cultures and lands that I might never have gone to otherwise.

■ For more information, contact Sarah at [sarah.hall55@btinternet.com](mailto:sarah.hall55@btinternet.com)

Interview by Emma Higginbotham