A photograph of two babies lying in a bed, covered with a white blanket. The baby on the left has a blue pacifier in its mouth. The baby on the right is looking towards the camera. The background is a light-colored wall.

## *family photos with any camera*

Photos can record special moments in family life. Here at the *Majellan* we're privileged to share some of those moments through the wonderful photos readers send us. In this article John Lamerand offers some tips to help the photographers in your family make their pictures even better.

### **Let's start with the camera.**

You don't need an expensive camera to achieve great results. What you really need is practice. A camera is merely a tool. Get to know yours.

If your camera lets you zoom in, that's to your advantage. An in-built flash is useful, too, but use flash sparingly. Where possible, find a way of taking the photo without resorting to flash equipment. The best way to do this is to use more natural light.

### **What film should I use and when?**

The most important thing on a camera is the lens. The most important thing in a camera is the

film. You probably already know that film comes in different speeds. Some people say that you should always use 400 speed. But 400 does *not* do everything. There are times when you should use 100 speed. If you're shooting on a bright day and you want to enlarge the picture later you should use 100. In fact, if you're keen, the next time you're in a good camera store, ask for some 800 or 1600 speed film. It is more expensive, but it will help you in dim light and with fast-moving subjects – like children.

### **2 secrets for better composition**

(1) Keep the subject off-centre. Our natural inclination is to put a face in the exact middle of a photo.



But the space around them is very important to your composition. And if your photos have the most important feature in the precise centre, then your eye will stay there. This affects the apparent movement in the photo – making the shot much less interesting and lively.



*subject in the centre*



*subject off-centre*

(2) Keep some foreground. Imagine that you are standing on a balcony, looking out over the sea. You're taken by the beauty of the scene, so you grab a camera and shoot a picture of the sea. When the photos come back they look a little

boring. Why? Because the context is lost; the foreground is gone – you've got an horizon running half-way through a shot with two shades of blue. Boring.

Why was the balcony interesting when you were there? Part of the reason is because *you* were on the balcony. Next time, put more of the foreground in the photograph. The photo will seem to have more depth.



*foreground detail adds depth*

### **Some basics for shooting portraits**

If you're familiar with your own camera equipment you will be more relaxed when it comes to taking someone's picture. It is hard to put your subject at ease when you're frustrated with the camera. So get to know your camera!

Now you're in a position to tell some jokes and make light conversation while you are composing the photo. Once the camera is no longer the focus of the



interaction between you and the subject your shots are guaranteed to look more natural.

Your ultimate goal is to have a kind of relaxed indifference about the camera's presence. The camera is not taking the photo – you are!

If you look like you're casually adjusting settings on the camera rather than getting hot under the collar, you can be sure that the subject will be relaxed. When they hear the shutter click they might laugh. Take the second shot straight away. Make a joke about it.

If you look like you're enjoying the experience the person you're photographing might decide to enjoy the experience as well.

On the right you can see some of the many shots I took of this one person. The longer zoom blurred the background nicely; something I was not paying much attention to when I was taking the photographs.

Try taking photos just inside a door. Light will be bouncing from the floor, from the walls and from the roof. The subject will be shaded from direct sunlight – so they won't be squinting at the camera. In the photo shown above, I took one shot after another. The person relaxed

after the sixth click, when he realised that I would just keep shooting and he did not have to worry about posing in the perfect moment.

We laughed about how much film I was using. I told him that I would just keep shooting until he smiled. He obliged. Talking while shooting builds rapport and lowers tension, because after all, you're not thinking about the dreaded camera.

If you're shooting a self-conscious child, consider giving them a favourite toy to play with. Get another family member or friend to join in the conversation.

For most people, if you give them instructions, they will devote most



of their attention to that instruction and become less self-conscious. Ask them to lean on the back of a chair, or tell them to fold their arms, even if you're only taking a photo of their face. Any gentle instruction is good. Remember – activity serves as a distraction. The last thing you



want is for your subject to look like they're standing to attention. Sometimes all it takes is giving them something to do with their hands – like holding some flowers.



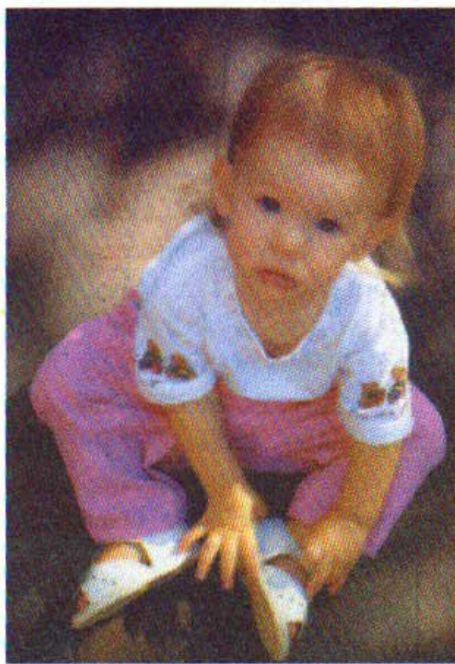
The photo shown above is lively because the body language is helping to build interest. You can see that these sisters have a good relationship, and that they're joking about something. Throughout our session, I called one then the other by name, and they looked directly into the lens. Eye contact is very important as it engages the person who is looking at the printed photo.

And don't underestimate the power of humour to alter uninteresting facial expressions. You might even consider collecting some of the jokes from the pages of the *Majellan* to help you with your photography sessions. With group photos, you could recount a quick one liner instead of calling the tired old phrase "say cheese".

The time at which you're shooting is also quite important. The photo of the two young women was taken very early in the morning. When the sun is

low on the horizon it will illuminate faces more evenly. When the sun is just below the horizon the light is a lovely warm colour. And if you find it hard to get up early, just remember – you'll be glad you did when the photos come back from the lab.

Simplify your backgrounds. Sometimes it will seem that no matter where you stand something will be running through the body of the person you're shooting. In the photo below, dappled light breaks the deck pattern up so that it does not appear to pierce the sitting girl.



Vary your vantage point. Had I knelt to take this photo the end of the deck would have distracted the viewer. Instead, I stood on a chair.



The very act of standing on the chair caught the child's attention. And right at that moment I was ready to shoot – the settings on the camera were already made.

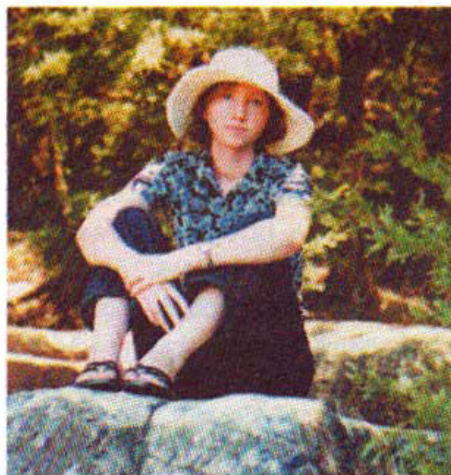
### **Beautiful weather, big shadows**



Don't wait for a sunny day to grab your camera. Though you need light to make photographs, bright sun can actually be a problem. I enjoy shooting portraits outside on overcast days. Why? The light is so soft and even! I put 400 speed or 800 speed film in the camera, go outside and make the most of the soft, even light.

And if it does happen to be sunny, you could ask your subject to wear a wide-brimmed hat. The brim will stop harsh shadows from forming under eyebrows and noses. You will also have fewer photos of people squinting.

Compare the photograph on the left with the one on the right. Both were taken on sunny days. To reduce shadows in the photo on the left I used a large white object to bounce light back into the face. A foam box lid, or a large white card works well.



Get someone else to hold the card at an angle to the face. Or you can do what we did in the photo on the right (buy a hat).

**Finally, about that nasty flash**  
Your camera's flash can startle the person you're shooting. When using flash, stand a reasonable distance from the subject. This is where a zoom lens comes in handy. Also, the light from the flash will be softer the further away you stand.

**Now you are ready to go out and experiment. Keep this article in your camera bag for reference!**