

## This Is Why (Janie Scrapbooks)

Written by Liv Esteban  
Monday, 04 May 2009 19:00

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*Why do I scrapbook?*



Those of you who read Liv's article – and those of you who have written your own story – may have come to the same conclusion I did: The answer to this seemingly simple question may not be that simple after all.

In my case, I'll start where I always do ... not with the photos, not with the design, and not with the paper or doodads. I'll start with the story, and this one begins in August of 1991.

At that time, I found myself in Phoenix, Arizona. Paralyzed by 110-plus-degree heat and a broken heart and spirit, I was 34 years old and had \$7 to my name. My situation was not pretty.

Just two weeks before, I had fled my picture-perfect house in southern California. The confrontation that prompted me to do so was the last straw in a short union defined by pain,

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anger, and abuse. I had left with my 10-year-old daughter, my car, what little money I could pull together, our clothes, and a few household goods that didn't even begin to fill the smallest U-Haul trailer.

In Phoenix, I had worked to quickly put our lives back together in some semblance of order. I was numb with shock and fear but understood my daughter needed me to be strong. Luckily, I knew the landscape as we had lived there before moving to California. I found a job, moved us into an apartment and enrolled my daughter in fifth grade. And then I fell apart.

My dismemberment was not visible. I got up every day, made my daughter's lunch, took her to school, and did my best at a job I didn't love but that paid the bills. I kept our apartment spic-and-span clean, did the laundry, did my best. But I was dead inside, empty. I had no spark, no flame, no feelings, no drive. When I called my mother for help, for a small loan to tide me over, I couldn't even feel anger when she told me "no" and advised me to pack up my things, go back home and "try to be good."

As often happens in life when we allow it, I literally ran into my deliverer. In fact I tripped over her purse as she sat in our company's reception area. She was disguised as a temporary administrative assistant who was hired to help me with a large grant-writing project. With three young children and a not-so-great ex-husband, she also was no stranger to tough times and referred me to a counselor who had been helpful to her. Good Samaritan that he was, he kindly agreed to meet with me for what my health insurance would cover.

I won't subject you to the details of how I pulled myself out of the brink of despair and into the life I now live with gusto. But there is one scene so relevant to this discussion that I must share it.

In one of our first meetings, the counselor provided me with a disposable camera and gave me an assignment. I was to use it to document a day in my life. I thought it a strange request – *How would taking photos help me?*

, I wondered – but I was desperate. I did as he asked and brought the prints with me the next time we met.

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For as long as I draw breath, I will never forget his first question to me that day. “*Where are you in your life, Janie?*”

” he asked. For in looking through the photos, he saw what I had failed to see. While my 24 shots included images representing moments in time throughout my day, in not one of them was I present. I had used the camera to capture details (my alarm clock, my lunch, my desk, my daughter after school) but had never handed it to someone else to capture me. Sadly, we both declared me missing-in-action on the battlefield of my own life.

Were this a picture-perfect fairytale, I would share with you that I immediately ran into a scrapbook store and instantaneously healed myself while dabbling in the creative process we all love.

No, that didn’t happen, but what did is almost as magical.

Upon leaving the counselor’s office, I sat in my car, cried until I could cry no longer, then wiped my tears and blew my nose. I decided that never again would I be invisible in my own story. I started living and feeling, and I started taking photos. I learned to find joy both behind and in front of the camera.

Now when I take inventory, my situation is far different from what it was in 1991. In the years since then, I single-handedly raised my daughter in a house of love and healthy self-esteem. Today she is 28, beautiful and self-assured. I went back to school and finished my college degree at age 40. In six years, I quadrupled my income, and today I manage a corporate communications team that is nationally benchmarked. Perhaps most miraculous of all, I learned to trust myself in the realm of personal relationships and married my best friend, Scott. We celebrated our sixth wedding anniversary on New Year’s Eve and have no shortage of plans for fun and adventure.

*What’s all this got to do with scrapbooking?*, you may ask. Well, as happened to most of us, I was introduced to the art by a good friend. She took me to a Creating Keepsakes convention and the rest is history.

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It took many years and a lot of courage to open up the old boxes full of photos hidden under my bed. In doing so, I also opened up the feelings hidden deep inside my heart. As I created scrapbook pages, I worked through issues and healed wounds. I faced my fears and my failures, forgave myself my mistakes, celebrated my accomplishments and became aware of my strengths and talents.

I had the good fortune of stumbling across Jessica's blog and Photoshop Friday. I bought Adobe PSE4 and eagerly jumped into the digi world. It was a short trip over to [jessicasprague.com](http://jessicasprague.com), and I am proud to be a "beta girl," having participated in each of the Divine Miss J's first classes. While due to work and other commitments I am not as active as I'd like to be, I cannot imagine my life without the friendships, learning and camaraderie we all share here.

Today I have a paper and embellishment stash my friends call the "store," and an external hard drive filled with 80GB of sheer digital ecstasy. I've retired my copy of PSE and labor to learn Photoshop CS4. Above the closet in my studio where I store my photos and supplies are these words, stretching six feet across the room:

*"This ain't no dress rehearsal, Janie."* ☐

Those words remind me of all I have been through, and more importantly, what lies before me and within me. Reading them, I strive to be present and brave enough to reach out and embrace both the goodness and the challenge of daily living. When appropriate, I share what I have learned with others who are seeking their own personal peace.

*So why do I scrapbook?* Whether it be paper, digital or hybrid, when I sit down to create, I start with a silent prayer and a fervent desire to tell a story. For it was in telling my story that I found my voice. And in finding my voice, I rekindled my desire and ability to live with purpose and joy. While I'm still shy about being photographed and much prefer to be behind the camera, never again will I be absent in this beautiful journey we call life.