

Back to the Future---Writing from Family Album Photos

Over 30 years ago, Jon Anderson wrote a poem called "The Photograph of Myself" in which he (the man) is talking to the photo of himself (the boy). He is envying the simplicities of that time, "...But they stand firm/ a terrible simplicity/ which will disappear..." while also reassuring the boy of the kind of man he will grow to be "...here I am, perhaps your best intention/ my hand can hold now your entirely small body/ I can love you..."

Although you are much younger than Mr. Anderson was, I'll bet you have a wealth of memories tucked away in family albums (or perhaps stored digitally or in Facebooks or e-photo albums nowadays) that could be brought to life in writings about the photos. Here is what you can do:

1. Find several pictures of yourself as a baby or as a young child. It is best if the pictures were taken at least 5 or 6 years ago so you can as one student put it, be "gazing back all those years, staring at my own eyes looking up at me out of a playpen." Settle on one picture that evokes the most memory, whether funny, fearful, furious, adorable, whatever – and try to recreate the events of the time and supply thoughts you might have had as a baby or child reacting to the situation. Write from the point of view of the child. Try to remember the situation and how you felt. Include specific and concrete details. Pay attention to diction as you write. Please attach a copy of the photo to your poem. We will share these and try to guess who was who as a child based not only on the photo but also on the poem. Have fun with this.
2. Or, if you prefer, you could write a poem that addresses the baby or child in the picture. Tell him or her what you would like to share from your present perspective. In this, as in all poetry, you may have poetic license, or wiggle room, so to speak, in your writing so you can include the points you wish in the style you wish. In other words, the picture can be a take off point for writing about what you wish you had known as a child – a caution to yourself-- i. e. Back to the Future.

This is another piece that will become part of your Wanna Piece of Me.

I'll attach three poems from students in New York's P.S. 187 to show how some kids approached this assignment.

The first is by Doug Kurtz, a 5th grader, who chose a kindergarten photo of his class being led around the room in train formation.

You all have probably been there; done that.

A Reluctant Game of Choo Choo

Bringing the
kids to their senses
almost
forcing them
to use their imagination
the human
train
being conducted
by Mrs. Hamburg.
I am
the
locomotive
being guided
by the conductor
into the
deepest
depths
of
my
imagination
at
the
same
time
struggling to
pull
the
other kids
in
line

Michelle Ieradi, 6th grade, found a shadowy
shot of herself wrapped in a blanket as an
infant and pulled out this mood piece:

My Baby

I am wrapped up in a shell
And thrust into the world –
Deserted, abandoned
lonely
I hear someone scream
“My baby!”

The two words fill my ears.
My brain shatters like glass.
Something hovers over me –
neither man nor beast.

I want to run,
but my bones feel like oatmeal
It picks me up and
throws me into the sky.
Gravity should pull me
down,
but it's gone –
everything's gone

Blackness shrouds me.

Gina Torres, 7th grade, brought a picture of
herself taken just hours after her birth.

A New-Born Baby

1
Who am I?
What is this place?
Do these strange people know me?
What are they saying?
They look weird.
I'm scared.
I feel alone.
My backside hurts.
Where do I go from here?

2
So innocent.
So small and simple to the eye
And yet so complex,
How she feels is a mystery
to us and to her also.
Is she aware of what's around her?
She will never recall this moment.
If she does, she won't understand.
But are you supposed to?
She's a miracle.