

Picture Perfect

By Debra VanDeventer

After years of shutdowns, it may be possible to venture out into the world again. In order to prepare, I needed to update my passport, which meant of course, I had to get a new picture. It's a shame. The photo on my current passport was nice, as official photos go. It was a good hair day, my expression was pleasant, the bright blue shirt complimented my skin tone... and I was younger. The original photo was so good, in fact. I sent a copy of it along with my renewal forms, reasoning I could be young for another ten years. In my version of time-travel, I would never age. *Perhaps the passport czars won't catch on to my scheme*, I rationalized as I mailed in my paperwork. Six weeks later I received the following notice: "Please submit a color photo, *taken in last 6 months.*" Busted.

It shouldn't have been a big deal, but I didn't want a repeat of the mug-shot that appears on my driver's license. In an effort to put my best face forward, I did some research on how to take the perfect passport photo. Here are some tips from the professionals:

Avoid wearing white or you will blend in with the background. Wear something bright, but not gaudy. Also, wearing a strapless top is an obvious faux pas, the article said, because when they crop the picture, it will appear that you aren't wearing clothes. While this might work in some circumstances, a floating head or a naked woman was not the look I was going for. I choose a plain purple top with an appropriately high neckline.

Master a natural facial expression. The State Department's website reads travelers should "have a natural facial expression, with both eyes open." The article said that to avoid a "toothy smile" you should think of something pleasant or mouth a word that ends in _uh, like mocha. I practiced in the mirror, "mocha, mocha, mocha." It made my mouth gap open like a carp gasping for air and, opening my eyes wide gave me a Lucille Ball expression. Neither of these expressions looked natural.

Strike a pose. Don't forget to lengthen your neck and extend your chin a bit, the experts say. This part that can feel awkward, but in photos, it supposedly gives the appearance of a long neck. I liked that idea, but now I looked like a cross between a fish out of water and a giraffe named Lucille.

In the end, I decided I would just have to do my best. I put on my appropriate purple top and practiced my neutral face all the way to CVS. My anxiety mounted as

the attendant at the photo counter pulled down the white screen and adjusted the pocket-sized camera. For \$15.99, you don't get a professional model session. When the time came, I tried to neutralize my facial expression, stick out my chin, and lengthen my neck. After the camera clicked, I went to the kiosk, where I had my choice of two photos. *Surprisingly, not too bad*, I thought as I picked out the best one. Once home, I trimmed it to the official size, stapled it as directed to my renewal form, and sent it off to the passport processing center. My vanity satisfied, I wait.

But I wonder if having a perfect passport picture is realistic. This thought has inspired me to write my own guide:

- Pack some luggage and set it in the hallway by your front door.
- Put on your most comfortable clothes and sit in a reclining chair in your living room.
- Eat dinner on a tray and be sure to spill something on yourself.
- Sleep in the recliner for at least 6 hours.
- Get up early, when it still dark outside if possible, and use the smallest bathroom in your home. Do not brush your teeth, shave, fix your hair, or touch-up yesterday's make-up.
- Put your luggage in the car and drive to the nearest photo place.
- Park 3 blocks away grab, your suitcase, run through the door, and dash to the photo counter. If there is a long line ahead of you, all the better.
- When it's your turn, stand in front of the white screen and glare until the attendant snaps your photo.

Forget the purple top, long neck, and neutral face. *This* is the face the customs officer will see when I arrive at my destination.