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5 April 1958, three years before I was born. My parents wedding with a smattering of snow on the ground behind them, unusual for April. My brother and I found this photograph while preparing for our mother’s funeral. It struck me that it was an odd photograph and I have spent the last four years with it hanging on the wall of my office wondering what it was that made me so intrigued by it. Is it simply that it is my parents? I don’t like weddings much; all too often they seem to mark the beginning of something you can’t get out of and the amount you pay to have one is astounding. This wedding was undoubtedly simpler than a similar middle (or aspiring upper middle) class couple would have today. The after party was probably tea and sandwiches in my grandparents’ front room and it was definitely something they couldn’t get out of (the marriage I mean).

What is strange about this image is the way it is so different from the kind of wedding photograph that would be taken today. It’s arrangement and the vernacular feel, it has a different kind of drama. The fact that it is in black and white also makes it different from today’s imagery, though in 1958 it would have been the absolute norm. My parents seem incredibly small, thin that is, though maybe their outfits are dwarfing them to some extent; my father’s is hired, my mother’s is specially made. A contemporary wedding photograph takes so long to organise and so many, of all the different groupings, seem to need to be taken, each one painstakingly choreographed. Inevitably the photographer has an assistant who is usually caught up altering the bride’s attire so that she looks her absolute best. A smart book (which looks like a coffee table publication) or an album of the photographs is delivered shortly after the event – it tells the so-called full story.

This is one of only five loose photographs that we have of my parents wedding (though on the back it is marked number 22, so there must have been more) and it has none of the glossy theatricality of a modern day wedding image. It is almost a decisive moment. If my father hadn’t been smiling so broadly it would look more like a Sander portrait than a wedding photograph it is as if they are posing for a historical document, an image to represent a story, that now represents the start of a much bigger story that includes me and my two siblings and several grandchildren. The wedding photographer was from London though the wedding was in the Sussex neighbourhood that both my parents grew up in. My parents worked in London and my father was a very keen amateur photographer who constantly needed to prove himself to his in-laws so I guess he chose the photographer (having a photographer from London would have been so much more impressive than having a local photographer).

The lack of arrangement and direction in this image suggests that nobody in the frame is exactly ready: my father poses stiffly upright yet bears a relaxed grin (his head does not seem to belong to his body); my mother looks surprised, is she about to say something sharp or crack a wise joke? This would not be unusual; her mother behind her, always ready to look glamorous for a photograph; my father’s father to the right of her looking decidedly sombre

(a man with a wild reputation, who I hardly remember); Connie (his wife), an entrepreneur, just noticeable behind him with furtive yet slightly worried eyes; and finally the small boy just behind my mother who seems totally bemused by the photographers’ actions. There is a simplicity to this moment, a pleasing lack of awareness of how to perform for the camera, an unexpected set of expressions, and this is what I think I find unusual. For better or for worse, it feels like a totally different planet.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

**Note**

Anna Fox is Professor of Photography at University for the Creative Arts, Farnham. Fox is an internationally acclaimed photographer who was shortlisted for the prestigious Deutsche Borse prize in 2010. She has recently been awarded and International Network Award from the Leverhulme Trust for the project Fast Forward 2; women in photography.