



Please enjoy this sneak peek of four essays from the new book, "Snippets: Mostly True Tales from the Lighter Side of Scrapbooking"

Introduction: A Need-to-Know Basis

by Lain Ehmann

The first thing you should know about me is that I'm one of you. I take more pictures of my kids than I know what to do with, I hide bags from the scrapbook store under the dirty diapers in the garbage can so my husband won't find them, and I could wallpaper my house—and several other people's houses—with my stash of Bazzill cardstock. In a word, I'm a scrapbooker.

I started scrapping, as many of us do, when my first child was born in 1997. I attended one of those home-based consultant demos, and I dropped \$100 on my own "personal cutting system," even though at that point in time I didn't know an eyelet from a hole in the ground. After diligently creating a few layouts (that in retrospect could easily qualify for the "before" layout in any makeover article), I stuffed it all in a drawer and forgot about it—almost.

Every so often, I'd flip through a roll of recently developed prints and stick them in a Buster Brown shoebox. A twinge of guilt would shoot through me as I saw them there, wrapped in their little white paper shrouds. "I should *do* something with these!" I'd say to myself. But then I'd have to go put in another Barney video or fix another batch of macaroni and cheese, or do something really self-indulgent like take a shower or brush my teeth. Scrapbooking just didn't fit in my busy new-mom life—I thought—and I'd push the idea over to the little corner of my brain earmarked "Someday."

Little did I know how soon "Someday" would come, and how much it would change my life. Today, more than a decade after my first date with scrapbooking, my life basically revolves around it (*and* my endless search for cute, mom-friendly shoes, but that's another story). Now, when I'm not actually creating layouts, I'm usually involved in some sort of peripheral scrapbooking activity—reading about it, writing articles about it for *Simple Scrapbooks* magazine, talking about it, blogging about it, teaching classes about it, looking at other people's scrapbook layouts, shopping for scrapbook supplies, or organizing my stash of stuff. I suppose it's sort of like being obsessed with golf—but a lot cheaper. At least, most of the time.

Call it a hobby, a passion, an addiction, or an obsession—the result is the same: I spend a lot more time and money on this activity than I ever thought possible. But I try not to question my motives too much. After all, there are many things in life that defy logic (like slip-on sneakers with laces, the popularity of thong underwear, and Britney Spears). So those close to me will just have to accept this little personality quirk of mine. I make no attempt to explain it, other than to say, "I'm a scrapbooker, and I'm proud." Now, about those bags hidden in the trash can...



Making Time

A common struggle in the scrapbooking arena is how to find time to actually sit down and get some good work done, with all the other demands in our frantic lives. We seem to be so busy living that we don't have time to document that life. Funny how that works, eh?

Time management experts recommend taking advantage of “dead” space, those unoccupied snippets of your day that are wasted on time-sucking tasks. These “experts” obviously haven't seen my schedule, as the only “dead” time available is the 30 seconds of reflection I have while I'm stopped at the red light at the corner of our street. In fact, I don't know of any female who has “spare” time. A woman's every waking moment is filled with tasks related to kids, jobs, spouses, or housework—not to mention the personal hygiene requirements that we need to fit in.

It seems that the average productivity expert is out of touch with the needs of the modern scrapbooking female. As a result, I have created this little list of strategies to fit more scrapbooking time into your daily allotment of 24 hours:

1. Break it up. Did you actually think your family would willingly let you out of their sight for hours on end? After all, you are the household's heart and soul—especially when you want some time to yourself. So drop your unrealistic expectations of long afternoons of uninterrupted playtime and get real. A stretch of 10 or 15 minutes is about all you can hope for, so use that time wisely by sketching layout ideas, choosing products for your next masterpiece, placing finishing touches on an almost-done design, or ordering photo prints. Sure, you aren't going to complete gift albums for both sets of grandparents in one sitting, but let's face it: your creativity wouldn't last that long anyway.

2. Lie. I know, I know, honesty is the best policy and all. But desperate times call for desperate measures. Do you really think your kids will be irreparably damaged because you told them “Mommy has a headache” before disappearing into your bedroom to crop for 30 minutes? Remember, husbands have been stretching the truth for generations (what do you think they're *really* doing behind

the locked bathroom door for an hour at a time?) Which is worse—losing it completely and eating your way through the Häagen-Dazs in your freezer, or telling your kids a little fib and maintaining your sanity? You be the judge.

3. Contract a debilitating disease. Sure, it *sounds* a bit extreme, but just think! Hours of bed rest, no chores, and—if you manage to become hospitalized—catered meals, an adjustable bed, and a cute little tray that's the perfect size for 8 x 8 pages! Of course, there are drawbacks to this strategy, namely, possible death and disfigurement, so choose your illness wisely. Good: viral meningitis, strep, and sprained ankles. Bad: ebola, broken wrists, and pregnancy (yes, getting knocked up may sound good at the time, but at the end of nine months you'll be left with *more* on your plate, not less).

4. Pull a Houdini. No matter how small your house is, there have to be little hidey-holes where you can sequester yourself for a few minutes of free time. Good spots to try: in the bathtub (lock the bathroom door and turn the sink faucet on to further the deception, but try to stay dry), under the bed, and in the car. (Note: if you keep the motor running, make sure to leave the garage door open, lest you asphyxiate yourself inadvertently.) You'll have to get creative to actually accomplish anything in these tight spots, so forget the guillotine trimmers and Cricut die-cutting machines—instead think mini-albums and tags.

5. Use the trump card. In our house, everyone's in my face 24/7—that is, until I need them to finish their homework or help me with chores. Make this work for you: convert your laundry room into a joint utility/scrap space. Pull out the detergent, make a round through the rooms with the laundry basket, and announce loudly that you'd like to spend Saturday morning “working on the house.” Watch the rest of the family scatter to parts unknown. Retire to your “laundry room” for an hour or two of undisturbed scrapbooking. Breathe deeply. Smile.





A Room of One's Own

I've got a shameful secret. It involves spending long hours cruising the Web, looking at enticing photos that cause my heart to race and my breath to quicken. Fortunately, this habit doesn't require a valid credit card number or a parental warning on the computer screen. All the same, it's a bit embarrassing. But, we're friends, right? So here it is: I'm addicted to other people's scrap rooms.

The level of my dedication is nothing short of scary. I can spend hours breathlessly clicking through link after link, drooling while I bookmark sites and save particularly provocative photos to my hard drive. Forget about Internet romances; I'm having an emotional affair with a Pottery Barn desk-and-bookshelf combo I saw online last week.

The idea that some scrapbookers have perfectly organized workspaces—complete with matching furniture and coordinated storage containers—is as far from my reality as my waistline is from Nicole Richie's. It's astonishing to me that people have scrap rooms large enough to host a dozen friends and their Cropper Hoppers, with room left over for a few full-spectrum floor lamps.

Okay, so I'm jealous. I live in Northern California, land of the silicon computer chip and the million-dollar "starter" home. Real estate is at a premium, and the price tag on my ideal scrapping space would have as many zeroes as a college tuition bill. And while I'd gladly trade my kids' future for a room of my own, my husband has me on a tight leash.

As a result, my scrap room is more of a "scrap broom," as in "broom closet." Exactly how diminutive is my room? Let me put it this way—the previous occupant of our home used this space for handbag storage. And the only way I could host a friend for a crop night would be to suspend us both from the ceiling in hammocks, Gilligan-and-the-Skipper style. Not only would that be a tad bit uncomfortable, it would also make it really hard to set an eyelet without cracking someone's coconut.

I'm not complaining, though. I know some women who are forced to house all of their scrapping paraphernalia inside a single armoire. Now, an armoire may *sound* fancy, but it's really just a French word meaning: "place to shove

all your junk to keep it out of sight." The idea of having to pull everything out and put it back again each time I want to scrap is enough to keep me using magnetic photo albums for the rest of my natural-born life.

Maybe someday I'll have that dream room, the one with the cute white furniture and 12 x 12 file drawers. In the meantime, I'll stick to my voyeuristic tendencies, envying other women's floor space and wondering how they keep their desktops so clean. Seriously, how can you scrap without generating the least bit of clutter? You know, I bet they stash away those itty-bitty paper slivers, hole-punch chads, and unsorted products just long enough to take a nice picture—kind of like how I suck in my stomach and lift my head for the camera, and then let my chin rejoin my neck after the flash.

Honestly, you never really get a good look at the rest of the house in these photos, do you? All you ever see is the "scrap room." For all we know, they have all seven of their children piled into one bedroom, clothes bulging from the closets, the older kids sleeping under the beds, while the little ones doze in the dresser drawers.

Actually, that's not a bad idea. My three kids don't need all that space—after all, the only thing they do in their rooms is sleep. And now that I think about it, why do we need a living room *and* a family room? If we just consolidated a little, I'd have more scrapping room than I'd know what to do with. My husband won't mind if I use his half of the closet, either. If he needs someplace to put his clothes, I can always get him an armoire.





All in the Family

The best thing in the world happened yesterday. Nope, I didn't win the *Creating Keepsakes'* Scrapbooker of the Year contest. I didn't get selected for the BasicGrey design team or receive an all-expenses-paid trip for two to the Scroppin' on Maui retreat. What happened was better: my sister spent the day scrapbooking with me.

Now, that may not sound very momentous. After all, according to the industry statistics, millions of people are scrapbooking at any given moment (and if they aren't scrapbooking, they're probably online looking at scrapbooking layouts).

The noteworthy thing about scrapbooking with my sister is that IT WAS HER IDEA.

Let me back up a minute. My baby sister has never expressed the slightest interest in things glue-and-ephemera related. While I was cutting and pasting photos of Harrison Ford and Shawn Cassidy into my teeny-bopper scrapbooks, she was busy shooting hoops and practicing her overhand volleyball serve. In high school, while I was perfecting my calligraphy and bubble letters, Mindy was heading out to see Iggy Pop in concert at the Warfield in San Francisco.

Over the years, when I'd show her my latest creations, she'd express polite interest, but I was more likely to get her to commit to attending a vacation time-share presentation than to accompany me to a craft night.

That is, until she had a child.

Suddenly, Mindy and her husband owned more cameras than George Lucas. The pictures began pouring into their household, their cute white paper envelopes stacking up on end tables and kitchen counters. Something had to be done to save this young family from a lifetime of unscrapped memories.

As a responsible big sister—and a wily scrapbooker—I knew an opportunity when I saw one. Far be it from me to let a member of my own flesh and blood file her precious baby photos away in shoeboxes! I mapped out my strategy and moved in.

First, I began showing her the adorable mini-albums I made for my own family. "And it only took an hour!"

I'd chirp, noting the wrinkle that appeared between her eyebrows. I'd bring an assortment of my favorite projects to family gatherings and leave them scattered on the coffee table. I would catch her surreptitiously leafing through the pages with an unmistakable cloud of mommy-guilt hanging in the air above her head. It was working.

I think the turning point came when, at our family Christmas celebration, my husband opened his gift from me—a small album containing a year's worth of pictures of the kids. Tears started to well up in his eyes as he turned to me and said, "This is the best present ever." I saw my sister watching, so I whispered, "That only took an afternoon to make." The look in her eyes told me the trap had been set, baited, and sprung.

My hunch was confirmed when Mindy began to ask where I buy my supplies, what size of album I like the best, and where I get my pictures developed. Although I projected a calm, disinterested demeanor, I was mentally rubbing my hands together and cackling with glee. She was sunk.

The next time I taught at my local scrapbook store, I called her. "I'm not sure we have enough people to keep the class on the schedule," I told her, a little catch in my voice. "They may cancel it if I don't come up with some more students. Do you think you could come? Please?" She agreed, provided that I show her the difference between a scoring and a cutting blade. "No problem," I said.

The rest, as they say, is history. For Christmas I compiled a scrapbooking care package for her, complete with her own Fiskars trimmer and a subscription to *Simple Scrapbooks* magazine. So I wasn't too shocked when she called me and told me we needed to schedule some scrapbooking time. I did, however, almost choke on my latte when she said she needed to get "caught up." Apparently, I left a few things out of my covert Intro to Scrapbooking Class. Like the fact that you never, ever (EVER!) get "caught up."

Oh well. There are some things a scrapper needs to find out on her own.

