Why Should a Professional Always Be Hired Over "Uncle Bob"?

How it Begins

You have scouted out and booked your venue, ordered your dresses and tuxes, picked out your flowers and colors, figured out your food and music, but now you have one of the hardest decisions to make: who do you have as a photographer? You have already spent a lot of money on the other elements of your wedding and now you don't know how you can afford a professional. This happens to a lot of couples who are about to get married so if you are in this same boat, it's not uncommon. But what do you do? The right choice would be to talk to a professional and get them to work with you on your budget, but that's not what many in this situation do.

Many people search all over online for professionals but always deem them too expensive. Little do they know that many will work with you if you only phoned them and talked it over, but they are still determined to find the cheapest photographer so they keep looking. Search after search they come up with little to nothing. With the wedding around the corner, frustrations are building. You begin to ask others who they've used and try to brainstorm your way out of hiring someone expensive which usually results in poor decisions.

Like a sudden epiphany you remember Uncle Bob. Last time you were at a family gathering, you noticed that he had been taking pictures with a professional looking camera. This line of thought seems to happen again and again with people. So and so has a nice camera and we could hire them! But what they don't know is that even while they are saving money, they are probably losing memories.

So you've had this epiphany about Uncle Bob. Giving him a call, he tells you that he will do it for...let's say $500. The cheapest professional you could find was $1000 so you jump on the chance to have it cut in half. Immediately saying yes when you hear the price, you sit there thinking of how cleaver you were to think of this idea. Little do you know that right around the corner, a grim outcome is awaiting.

What Happens Behind the Wedding Scenes

It's finally your wedding day and you are so excited when you see Uncle Bob pull up. He's supposed to be taking shots of you getting ready. Now this scenario right here could go in a variety of ways. Uncle Bob could show up late, drunk, or not at all due to a health issue or other reasons he can come up with. He's not a professional so there isn't a guarantee that he will even be there. For the sake of a positive start to this story, let's say he does show up ON TIME and is ready to go.

So there is Uncle Bob and he is very happy to see you on your special day. Not only is he a guest but he is also your photographer! How great is that for him? You give him a hug and say that you're just about ready to have your hair and makeup done and that you want a few pictures of that. As the makeup is being applied, Uncle Bob starts snapping away immediately. You're thinking, great! But in reality, the room is really dark and your uncle hasn't taken this into consideration which is making all the pictures under exposed. As he keeps taking these pictures, the colors are lost in shadows.

As the makeup is almost done, you hear a bit of a grumble from Uncle Bob. Saying he will be right back because he has to get a new battery already, he races to his car where he has forgotten his camera bag. He had forgotten to charge his battery before coming to the wedding, but at least he has another battery

to put in. Being excited to get back to work, he again forgets the camera bag in his car as he races towards the house.

By the time he gets back, he has already missed some funny moments that you and your bridesmaids have had. He still gets in a few more under exposed shots though before you are ready to get into your dress. Getting you to stand close to the window for some natural lighting, let's say that Uncle Bob gets some good shots of this at least; just to keep it a bit more positive before we get further into this story.

So Uncle Bob has taken some pictures of you in your dress and some with your girls and your parents. You think that he is off to an excellent start and from that point on, you basically forget about his work as you begin to make your way to the ceremony. Uncle Bob has his own car so he will be taking that as you get taken there by other means of transportation with your bridesmaids.

You've made it to the ceremony location and you are getting ready to walk up the aisle. A slight nagging at the back of your mind wonders where your uncle is, but your thoughts silence it by saying he's probably at the front waiting to catch some great shots of you walking down the aisle. But as you watch your bridesmaids walk ahead of you, there is no sign of dear Uncle Bob. It's your turn to walk and having a short aisle to walk up, you're already at the front before you see any sign of Uncle Bob. Of course not wanting to think the worst, you may come up with the thought: maybe he got the shots and I just didn't see him because I was watching my fiancé.
Part way through the ceremony, you suddenly start hearing the click of pictures being taken. Inconspicuously looking towards the sound, you see an out of breath uncle with his camera. He had gotten lost and had just arrived, but right now you aren't aware of that so you go about the ceremony. Your uncle realizes that he doesn't have the right lens, but no problem – this time he remembered his bag. Switching to a better lens (which in most cases he wouldn't have one but for the sake of this story we will say he does), Uncle Bob doesn't realize he has a smudge on the lens since he had touched it while putting it on. The rest of the pictures of the ceremony now will be out of focus or not as clear since this smudge will show up.

It's almost time for the first kiss, but Uncle Bob doesn't know this. Seeing a family member that he knows, he begins to wave at them in the exact moment the first kiss occurs. Oh no! But not to worry, Uncle Bob yells for an encore kiss which interrupts the ceremony, but allows him a second chance at catching the kiss. Then the ceremony is over and he starts arranging everyone for group pictures. It's a hot sunny day but he wants to capture the nice imagery behind everyone as well. Not taking into consideration the angle of the sun, everyone appears shadowy since the sun is behind them instead of in front. Such a shame since now these pictures will be useless.

The reception begins but Uncle Bob is tired so he just sits down for most of it. He's done a lot of great work already – or so he thinks. Being the great uncle that he is though, he does get up and take some pictures of the major events of cake cutting and dances, but he doesn't like to use his flash so all the images are too dark. Noticing his mistake, he tries different ways to correct this. First he uses his flash but it's too harsh since he doesn't have a diffuser or external flash so he decides to manually up the ISO which looks better, but little does he know that it will be grainy once they are uploaded to the computer. The major events are done and Uncle Bob wants to visit. He misses some other nice moments but at least he shot the important ones, he tells himself at least.

The Aftermath

After the wedding is over, Uncle Bob uploads all of the images and doesn't even think of editing them. Not being a professional, he doesn't have any editing programs and doesn't have any way to show the newlyweds the pictures other than by giving them a dvd. He doesn't even bother to go through the images since he's just too excited to see their faces when they see his great work. Uncle Bob puts them on the disk right away and delivers it to them – thankfully they aren't home when he does.

So you're the newlywed and you get a call from Uncle Bob saying that he had dropped off the dvd – again he is too excited to wait. But you and your new husband are just as excited to see them so you get home early and gather around the computer as you pop it in. What comes next are horrified looks as you and your husband see the massacre of your wedding. All your memories are blurry, under exposed, over exposed, or just shot horribly. There are a few that are good and a few more that could be salvaged but you and your husband are just too upset to even think of that right now. All you can think about was how this could happen and how you should have spent that extra money on a professional.

But why did this happen? Uncle Bob had a nice camera and should have been able to do the job that a professional could. Unfortunately that isn't the case. Just because Uncle Bob had a camera, it doesn't mean he had the experience or the knowledge to work it. The answer to the devastating question of "why" can be contributed to the following:

1. Poor Uncle Bob thought he knew what he was doing – but he just didn't have the experience needed. Experience would have helped a lot in all of the situations he found himself in such as knowing the right exposure, being able to get the right angles or position for people, and by knowing how to operate his camera better. It also would be helpful for repositioning and changing settings. A photographer only has a few seconds to work with in their windows of opportunity and so having experience helps to make their response time faster so nothing is missed.
2. Uncle Bob got distracted but this could have been combated by having a second shooter with him. Often times if one photographer misses something, the other can capture it instead. Also, with a second shooter, more pictures of the same thing are being taken. This allows for any mistakes to be missed. Twice the photographer, twice the area covered. But even if you don't have a second shooter, you should still take multiple pictures in case blinks or other unknown things happen.
3. Uncle Bob had forgotten his camera bag in the car and forgot to charge one of his batteries. Professionals should always make sure that their batteries are all fully charged the night before so that they will have the maximum potential for the long shoot of the wedding. They should also keep their bag with them at all times so everything is within reach and no moments are being lost as you try to go get what you need.
4. Knowledge is also key for a photographer. Knowing how your camera operates, knowing to come before the wedding to scope out the area so you know where to position yourself and others, and knowing which settings and when things happen are important. If you have done a lot of weddings, you can guess when a kiss is going to occur and be ready for it so that it isn't missed. With more knowledge of your camera, the more you can use different more advanced settings to get those images you're looking for.
5. Energy and knowing how to pace yourself is important as well. Uncle Bob was tired by the time the reception came around, but being a professional doesn't allow room for much rest. But when needed, resting during unimportant parts of the wedding is helpful, just as long as you have your camera close in case there is a moment that you have to be fast on your feet.

What to Conclude

Although this story is fictitious, it is still something that happens to a lot of couples. Many just want to save money and don`t think of the consequences until they see the results in their pictures. Paying more gives you quality and a chance to capture those important moments. Even when paying more at the time isn`t an option, negotiating can be a great tool. Photographers can always work with you so you stay within budget. By taking out things you can get later, such as prints or albums, you can still get great pictures and have the ability to order more things when your finances allow it. Even asking if payment options are available can give you more room to manoeuvre.

Another thing to consider when booking a photographer is how much experience have they really had? Just because someone says they have had a certain amount of years working as a photographer, how many shoots of weddings have they done? It's important to be able to ask these questions so that you know who you are working with. Uncle Bob may have had a nice camera, but he didn't have the knowledge to go with it. Asking questions could save you from having the same experience that many couples fall victim to.

In conclusion, going professional may cost more but in the end it will be worth it. Having great pictures and holding off on other products is better than having no pictures to work with at all. You can't redo a wedding shoot so be careful who you are letting take your pictures. Check portfolios and ask questions. Read reviews and talk to people who have used the photographer before. Save yourself and most of all – save your memories.