

Happy New Year!
Happy New Millennium!

Last winter was very brown. It should have been white. It was sort of warm. It should have been very cold. I'm willing to bet that many of us missed a great opportunity: one that would have benefited our descendents for generations to come. We could have, but probably didn't, organize our photos.

In this wonderful season of staying indoors, lacking daylight, and fighting cabin fever, organizing photos is a great activity. It's also a great time to learn from our mistakes. I've saved my mistakes for years. It's how I learn. (I don't think any of us learn from success.) When I view my images when organizing them, I am forced to look at the not very good shots I've taken and remind myself of what I did wrong. Sometimes it's composition; sometimes it's exposure, or depth of field, or camera shake. It's my opportunity to learn.

Storing slides is the easiest; I either store them in slide files, notebook pages, or in slide trays. I don't project my slides as often as I'd like to, so I've been favoring the slide files. I try to avoid all metal files, because of the rust factor. I look for slide files with rigid plastic inserts. These come in two configurations – compartments that hold about a roll's worth of slides, or slots that hold one or two cardboard or plastic mounted slides. I favor the group type file, because I think it takes me less time to find a slide when I'm searching for it. I'm sure I'll be spending several evenings poring over my lightbox with loupe in hand, an assortment of felt tip pens and some music. Last year I got one of the new lightboxes that are the same light source as a notebook computer monitor and I look forward to using it again. Sorting and rearranging without eyestrain is great. The light is so cool and even that I can work much longer without fatigue. I just have to keep the cat away.

I place all of a roll in the slide file, with horizontals and verticals all top side up. Then I color the top edges of the slides with a color, or stripes of colors, or different width stripes of a color to sort one roll differently from all the others. I then remove the slides and line them up on the light box, culling out the worst of them (and learning from them). I'll then gradually pick out what I consider to be the best one(s) and place them (either by subject or timeline in polyethylene or polypropylene pages. The other keepers go back into the slide file, and the file box is labeled to describe the roll by date, subject and film type. The pages then go into an acid free or inert plastic binder for long-term storage.

Working with prints takes longer, because of treating the negatives and the prints differently. Working with the prints first is easiest, because they're simpler to see, and less fragile than negatives. I usually sort my prints into 4 main categories: prints worth enlarging, prints for albums, prints for keeping, and just plain bad pictures. I learn what I can from the bad ones, and then pitch them. The next, and unfortunately smallest batch is the ones I want to enlarge. I write

the photo finishing bag number on the back of each print I'm going to save and (for the time being) leave the negs in the finishing bag. Then, I go through the prints a second time, culling out the album shots from the not so greats. Again, I write the finishing bag number on the backs. Gradually, I compile the prints I wish to display in albums in front of me. After shooing away the cat, who loves to lick the prints, I start to plan the album. It could be arranged by topic, location, chronology, season, event, or any other categorization that seems plausible. I put the prints in rough sets to try to get some order of placement in the book.

Experience now tells me it's time to get up, get something to drink, walk around and act civilized. I tend to hermit myself when I do this project – it's not committee work.

Upon returning, I work with the negatives for a while. I pick up one envelope, and take the negative strips out. I then insert them into a 3 ring binder page of polyethylene or polypropylene. I label the page with the photo finishing bag number, and the date on that bag. I also write a title on the page. Then after I've written, I insert the negs into the page for long-term storage. Never write on the bag once the negs are inside! I then put the pages into an acid free binder (usually a SafeKeeper brand binder). After this diversion, it's back to the prints.

I mull over the groupings I previously compiled, and either like what I had done, or scrap the concept and restart. Then I fine tune the groupings and try to sequence the pictures. I group them on a page-to-page scheme. Now comes the decision of which album to use. Not an easy decision!

I will NOT use, and do NOT recommend magnetic albums. They will ruin each and every photo stored in them. Prints need to "breathe", and the magnetic pages prohibit this. Most magnetic pages are not acid free, and will eventually discolor and trap the prints permanently. I therefore use pocket pages or old style scrapbook pages. I usually prefer the pockets because I don't like to label, annotate, title or do anything else to the shots, which should be able to explain why they are there on their own strength. If a message is needed, I either write something in the margin or slip a piece of acid free paper with a note on it behind the picture, but inside the pocket.

Watching customers and others look at picture in their own albums, I am very conscious of how to mix verticals and horizontals. Most people do not like to have to turn the album to correctly view the verticals. Instead, they skip by them as if they were not there. I prefer, therefore, albums that allow me to mix horizontals and verticals on the same page without having to rotate the album. Several styles by Pioneer, MBI and Parker now permit this.

If the album is about a particular event or time span, I'm getting to appreciate Parker albums (which are available in Madison only at this time). These are bound volumes which limit the number of pages and therefore photos. I can,

however, use entirely different format pages at will, to match my sequencing of pictures. These make beautiful coffee table albums.

Whatever prints are now left in the original finishing bags I store in a box that allows air to circulate, and lose them in some cranny at home, as back up memories.

Eventually (I can dream, can't I?) I plan to scan each of my ClearFile negative pages and print out an inkjet proof sheet to place in my SafeKeepers behind each roll of negs. At the same time, I'll scan the negs into my computer and burn them onto CD-ROMs.

I've written all this not to get you to do as I do, but to consider doing this project at all. As I've mentioned before, I believe that our photos will be more valuable for generations to come than they are to us. How we present them is part of our individual legacy. I know how important my ancestors' pictures are to me.

Many of you received photo gifts for the holidays. Please visit us with them and we will go over how to use them to get better pictures. Don't feel embarrassed to ask what you're afraid is a "stupid question", as these questions are usually very important. The goal is to get you the best pictures you've ever taken – consistently!

There is a new service we are offering via Kodak Royal Premier Processing Photographic prints from digital files

in 4x6, 5x7, 8x10, and 8x12 sizes. Pricing is the same as from 35mm negatives and turnaround time is 3 days. Files must be in .jpg, .tif, .pcd, or .fpx formats only. Some cropping may occur to accommodate your image shapes to meet standard paper sizes.

Also during January, 2001, we are repeating our popular reprint special. Order 5 reprints, pay for only 4. Only reprints from color 35mm or APS negatives, 35mm color slides, or digital files qualify for this offer.

Speaking for our staff, we thank you for your patronage during the past year. We realize that there are many places you could shop for the items we sell, and are gratified you select our stores. We hope to serve you even better this coming year, and wish you a healthy and prosperous 2001.

Lynne & Jerry

