

Happy December, the ultimate month of each year. We all picture people and activities during December for later memories, and those memories will play a part in this month's newsletter, as well as some tips for better holiday pictures.

From time to time as we ride our train of life, a family member stops to get off at an unexpected station along the way. Our family experienced a loved one getting off at his station last month. I don't have to tell you what it's like – it's no fun for anyone. But we learned.

When it came time to clear out the home Lynne had grown up in, emotions became very strong. There were the usual items – china, silverware and other items other family members could use in the future; clothing and other personal items no one else could really use (but still linked to memories of when they were worn). When you have a home full of furniture you really don't need another set. There were snapshots and pictures around the house we'd known about, and a few we didn't remember seeing before. The usual "stuff" ...

When we were cleaning out the attic we found 3 old locked suitcases. Newer suitcases used for traveling were down in the basement. These old suitcases were heavy, and one had no handle. We brought them down into one of the bedrooms we were cleaning and asked Lynne what to do with them. After a while, keys were found, and the first suitcase was opened. Lynne's jaw dropped as she started removing old photographs she had never known existed.

Little by little she started piecing together parts of her family's history. One picture of a single, recognized person helped make sense from a photo of a group of people. These were her prehistory; these were from a life she rarely even had heard about.

No further work got done that day. The power of these pictures subdued us all. We had a deadline for cleaning out the house, but that work remained undone. All eyes and thoughts were concerned with these photographs.

After several hours, we packed the cases into our car and brought the photos home. We looked at them all that night. We went to the stores the following day, and pored over the pictures again that night. One night a cousin came over and we continued looking at and talking about these old photos, with no one to answer our questions "When was..." or "Who was".

Weeks later, we conclude that Lynne's parents never intentionally hid these treasures from her; they had just forgotten about them. They were meaningless to them, but ever so meaningful to Lynne and other family members. These photos were just taken for granted, like a chair or some other belonging.

As we travel along our train ride, we accumulate photos through the years of people, places and events that are important to us at the time. We forget that these pictures become a legacy within our family. We were very lucky that Lynne's folk's photos were processed and stored well. We found some pictures that were so far deteriorated that they are unrecognizable. We all have a ton a pictures at home, in the office, or wherever. The power these pictures hold is absolutely incredible. Don't think your pictures are otherwise. They will only grow in power and importance through the years. Treat them well.

(For those of us using digital cameras, we absolutely must make prints for the future. The creation of visual experiences of life goes back to the cave dwellers. The expression of who we are is innate and undeniable. We are lucky we have pieces of paper to hold these images – It would be difficult to collect pieces of cave walls in our attics.)

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When taking holiday photos with an automatic, point & shoot camera, your camera's best friend is your flash. As long as your subject is within the range of your flash, you are better off using flash in every picture, wherever you are. The flash will stop action and fill in the shadows on peoples' faces, and help prevent underexposure when there is strong lighting behind the subject (backlighting).

Remember that sugar consumption and excitement make red eye more pronounced (and that alcoholic beverages & soft drinks contain a lot of sugar). Take pictures earlier in the day or evening before kids start on candy for more natural candid shots.

When shooting small people, become a small person yourself. If you are photographing your grandchild who is a toddler, or example, bend down to toddler height and then take the photo. When shooting a portrait or semi profile in front of a trimmed Christmas tree, look at the decorations. Avoid shooting at an angle where an ornament looks like the subject's nose, or a light makes an eye look red or yellow.

When you look at your photos, share their importance with others. Turn the paper over and print a description of whom or what is in the picture. Lynne sure wishes her predecessors had done so. It only takes a minute, but can communicate far into the future.

Most of us have a holiday during December, and all of us at Madison PhotoPlus and the Photo Summit wish you and your family a safe and peaceful celebration. With any luck, we'll all be here to celebrate December again in 2004.

Lynne & Jerry