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Photographic Current Events

A radio reporter from CBS interviewed a woman this morning who had just evacuated her home in Santa Barbara, California. The woman said she had done better than many others in her situation; she'd saved her dog and her photographs. Laurel Smith escaped Hurricane Katrina with her photos, as reported at <http://www.momsminivan.com/article-evacuating.html>.

According to TIME magazine (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1675600,00.html?cnn=yes>), Trudy McCune saved photos of her son; Shervi Balhin brought her family's pictures and books out of the fire; and Karen Lynn Eelma rescued her 2 cats, documents and her photos.

Such is the power of photographs - people actually risk their lives to avoid losing their pictures. This newsletter has talked about preserving and archiving your photos in earlier issues. Time marches on, technologies change, things get taken for granted. Let's look at how an institution like the Library of Congress, the Mormon Church and others preserve their pictures and illustrations ...

In the beginning, there was vellum and paper along with some apparatus for marking it. Paper became so popular, that large factories were made to mass produce paper of many types. Different acids were used to speed the process and bleach the paper to varying degrees of whiteness. Lignin, a natural polymer giving wood its hardness, is also found in papers. These chemicals break down paper over time, starting with turning white paper yellow. Eventually the paper (and anything printed on it) disintegrates.

Some papers, such as high quality water color papers, are both acid and lignin free. These papers

are very soft, but keep their integrity for decades, even centuries. A high count of cotton fibers (as opposed to wood fibers) in a paper aids longevity. Archival quality papers are never glossy or coated. More about papers later.

The advent of digital photography enables images to remain unchanged possibly forever. The digital file which is the "recipe" for a picture is made up in binary codes (strings of 0s and 1s) and when copied is an exact duplicate of the original - nothing lost, nothing gained, nothing changed. These digital files are absolutely stable, unlike film negatives or prints on most photographic papers. No matter how an image was created, once it is digitized it can become truly permanent.

So, an organization such as the Library of Congress will first digitize the image to be preserved. If it was analog (not created digitally) it will be scanned to create a digital file, recording every nuance of the original. Then the real work begins.

Many archives use a threefold method for backing up the "original" file: redundant computer storage, printing, and transferring the file's data to a portable, removable substrate which is unalterable (such as a CD). Please refer to the April, 2006 issue of this newsletter for detailed information on the varying quality of CDs and DVDs. It is available as an Acrobat file at <http://www.madisonphoto.com> and <http://www.photosummit.com>.

In most cases, a copy is also printed, using an acid free, lignin free paper and pigment based inks. These papers are relatively expensive and are made to work with specific inks. Even though there have been huge improvements in dye based ink technology, pigment based inks are still the



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most stable inks ever made.

These prints are then stored lying flat in an acid free container, interleaved between chemically inert sheets of paper or plastic (typically polypropylene or polyethylene). All this is then stored in a controlled environment with constant temperature and humidity. Additionally, copies are stored on computer hard drives at some remote location(s).

Once all this is done, an additional copy of each is stored at two or more remote locations far from the original set. If the original is in Washington, D.C., for example, a remote location could be in a cave in New Mexico and possibly in an outpost in Alaska.

It's not over yet, folks. As technology continues to advance, these digital copies and prints are in turn copied using the latest media available. This is partially done to be certain that ways of retrieving the data do not become obsolete. As an example, movies which were transferred to VHS tape 15 years or so ago must now be transferred to DVD or Blu-Ray because it is already very difficult to find new VHS players. (To preserve these image, all the copies at all the locations are systematically updated in rotation to have the most recent update exist in a location remote from the next most recent copy.)

That's a lot of work and a lot of time to preserve our heritage.

What about your images at home, work, house of worship or other organization? Will they be around for the next generation? Certainly you can't be (and shouldn't be) expected to devote that much time and energy.

There are a few simple and inexpensive things you can do, including:

- If you must keep your images on your hard drive, make a .zip or .rar or .sit file and copy it to any other hard drive, preferably not in the same building, let alone the same computer.

- With just a little more effort, burn the images to an archival quality CD. In just a couple more minutes and 1 more keystroke you can make an additional, duplicate CD. Keep that CD anywhere in the world other than where the other CD is.

- Print your pictures on an acid and/or lignin free paper whenever possible. Don't just print 1 of each, make an additional copy and give it to someone else (who doesn't keep it where yours is kept).

- Digitize your older photos as soon as possible. Decide whether you want to get them scanned at either screen resolution (enough detail to view your pictures on a monitor, but not enough to make a print) or high resolution (enough detail to make prints and enlargements as well as view them on a monitor). Low or screen resolution scans cost as little as a few cents; high resolution scans will cost a few dollars each.

- Insist that any prints you have made be done on archival rated, acid free papers.

- Label your pictures with some information a subsequent viewer will appreciate, such as who is in the picture and when and where it was taken.

- Do not use any albums or pages made from PVC plastic or peel and stick ("magnetic") pages.

Like anything else, doing these steps little by little is easier than waiting until the task becomes onerous. The hard part is not doing them, but remembering to do them.



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Past Their Prime? We Think Not!

There have been 4 signs in the back window of Madison PhotoPlus for a little over a year. We were going to take them down, figuring nobody would notice them any more. But, they still looked good - so good in fact that we wanted to see just how good they still were. We took some recently printed 4x6 versions of the same signs outdoors and compared them.

We were more than pleasantly surprised. There was extremely little fading or color shift. The small prints were printed on the same printer with the same brand paper using Epson pigment inks. Camper Bull, a long-standing customer and friend, has been a photographer since he was just a little tyke and has a first rate knowledge of photographic quality. He came out of the store and looked at the signs and the samples - again at the signs and back to the samples - and yet again. His initial comment was, "Wow!". He said he was thoroughly impressed with the stability and quality of the printing. It was nice to hear.

So, the signs will be staying up and will continue to be evaluated for fading and color shift at least monthly. If you're in the area, come in and we'll give you a sample set of 4x6s and see what you think.

B.I.P.S.

Eric and Bret are starting to put together our summer and fall photo classes. If you have any topic you'd like to see covered, or a change of when the classes are offered, please email either bret@photosummit.com or kaz@madisonphoto.com.

Thanks!

Graduation and Vacation Idea

For the first time ever, a waterproof, shirt-pocket sized camera is available for well under \$200. The Fuji Finepix 33WP camera with zoom lens, rechargeable battery system and large view screen comes in several colors and takes great photos, a couple of which are below. Yes, it is safe to take to the beach, snorkeling, skiing, snowmobiling, etc. It also takes movies to upload to YouTube, etc.



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Camera Hints

May is a great month for flowers. Before you snap the shutter, decide which picture you want to take:

- a flower
- a bed, bush or flowering shrub
- a person standing with flowers in the picture
- flowers with a person in the picture
- your neighborhood in bloom.

Not all these photos would be taken from the same place. Take the time to compose your photo to best show what you have in mind.

When photographing a graduate, shoot verticals (unless the graduate is lying down). If there are several people in the scene, zoom wider or step back but still shoot vertically because the image size of the graduate will be larger in the picture. Yes, this means you have to work harder to rotate the camera 90°, but the result will be worth it! If the graduate is wearing his or her mortarboard, force the camera to use its flash so that the face won't be lost in shadows.

That's it for May, 2009. Have a great Memorial Day weekend (whichever weekend you choose to celebrate the holiday).

We'll be back in June with our next issue.

Enjoy your pictures.
Enjoy taking pictures.

MadisonPhotoPlus

40 Main St., Madison, NJ 07940

v. 973-966-2900; f. 973-377-1458

www.madisonphoto.com

*Eric, Jerry, Joy, Julie, Marie, Mario,
Rob, Sybil & Vincent*



the Photo Summit

383 Springfield Ave., Summit, NJ 07901

v. 908-273-7427; f. 908-277-0218

www.photosummit.com

*Bret, John P., John T., Lynne,
& Mark*

