

REMEMBER JULIUS CAESAR

Recently I was chatting with Robert Bull* about ancient coins and other artifacts from the time of Julius Caesar. He showed me photographs he had taken of the relics during and subsequent to his excavation at Ceasarea Maritima. They are so detailed that after thousands of years they could be used to identify Caesar if he were alive today. His supporters, obviously, wanted his image to live on through the ages after his demise.

Several days later a customer came into one of our stores carrying a plain manila folder. In the folder was an 8.5 x 11 inkjet print (on copier paper) of a young man. She went on to say this was a photo of her late brother who'd been killed in an accident the day before. She was in need of a frame to show this picture at his wake.

Realizing the photo was not very clear, she asked if we could improve it for the event. She had no negative or digital file - the original was locked somewhere in her smart phone. She ended up buying a frame.

The question must be asked - Considering the technological advances of the past two millennia, why didn't this young woman have more than just a mediocre likeness of her brother in a form unable to stand the test of time?

*Dr. Robert J. Bull, Professor of Church History and Archaeology Emeritus, who brought church history to life for more than three decades of students by leading the excavation at Ceasarea Maritima.

Next question- Are we, collectively or individually, any better?

For centuries artists, writers, photographers, clergy and others did everything they could to communicate using their specialties with the future as well as their contemporaries. Frequently these images were formally sponsored by others - schools, governments, churches. There were informal sponsors as well, such as family, friends and smaller organizations.

All these various forms of expression exist for the same reason: the communication of memories from one person to another and one generation to another and another and so on.

Cultures are little more than the compilation of all the memories of all the people who lived since the beginning of language. It is the way we have gotten to be who we are today - individually and as a culture.

Then came the "digital revolution". For the first time in history, computer memory could record everything happening everywhere in the world. Such memory was available to anyone with a way to access the internet.

About the same time the U.S. and Western Europe experienced the first of several consecutive "ME" generations. The world experienced technological advances at an unprecedented pace. Miniaturization put telephones, computers, cameras, music players, televisions and the internet into the pocket or purse of every man, woman and child. It became easier to personalize these devices to meet the whims of its owner.

Simultaneously digital cameras allowed the photographer to know whether or not the photo "came out"

satisfactorily. The camera also became the repository of the pictures. Inexpensive point and shoots and professional SLRs became digital photo albums as well as photo capture devices.

"It's Mine". "I've got it". "It's there when I want it". "Oops, it's deleted. So?" "No problem! I friended it". "You can see it at www.xxxx.com". "I shared it with so and so".

What happens when all these "I"s are replaced with "We"s? We seem to be moving towards a segregation of knowledge instead of an integration of knowledge. Without this integration it is very difficult for a culture to advance.

Due to these and other factors, are we, as a people, bringing about a kind of cultural dark ages? It is very possible, if not quite probable. A hundred years from now, people will still be able to see the coins from antiquity, but there will probably be no data other than birth and death certificates about the young man spoken of earlier.

Although billions upon billions of pictures and videos are taken yearly by billions of people, an all time low number of them are being preserved in any way. Millions of individual contracts are being executed daily prohibiting photo sharing websites from sharing images when the original uploader has passed away (or just forgotten they were there). The same is true for e-mails.

This is akin to a library which has no books of its own, but just keeps a list of titles of books owned by others. A library which has books, but will not allow them to be read or borrowed isn't any better.

Many photographers operated under the principle that an image was not a photograph until it was printed. As artists they were arguably correct. Culturally they were spot on.

Powerful organizations (governments, ethnic groups, etc.) attempt to deny "undesirable" aspects of the past by eliminating any and all data about them. Atrocities in the past could be "unhappened" to move a balance of power from one culture to another.

The communication between the past, present and future has been vibrant since the first days of oral language. Printed photographs perform this function only when viewed. If they don't exist, they cannot be viewed. The photographers and their subjects are lost to time, the same as if they never existed.

Act responsibly - print more photos. They are your (and our) legacy.

For a wordless essay on this same topic, please visit <http://vimeo.com/68118048>

AND FOR SOME SAD NEWS...

According to thephoblographer.com (6/14/2013)

"Along with all the other problems that Kodak is going through, today the company is ceasing production of their acetate film base. According to the Rochester Homepage, the reasons why are due to the major slaes (sic) drops for film and because the machine needs to be kept on for very long periods of time—and that becomes very resource consuming. Without it, the photosensitive emulsion that goes on top of it is nearly worthless unless one tries to figure out a way to put it on glass plates or something of the sort."

This does NOT say Kodak film will be going away. The materials will be available from other sources and other film bases are used besides the acetate mentioned above. This DOES suggest, however, that film will become more expensive.



A photo such as this may seem trivial to us right now, but will increase in cultural and family value as time goes on...

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