

Preserving Your Family Memories

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Your photos are one of your most priceless possessions and are the starting point of your family's history. Most people say that if a fire happened in their house, they would first make sure all family members were safe, then their pets, and then their photos. Everything else can be replaced – your memories can't.



It is important for you to develop a system to organize, display and care for these priceless memories. Your photos and memories deserve to be shared with others, not kept in a box or computer hard drive until someone finds them and has no idea who or what they are about. (or worse yet, doesn't have a program to open them with!) Have you tried playing a floppy drive lately? Technology changes so fast but you can always look at a printed photograph.

If you have boxes and boxes of photos and memorabilia to organize, you probably keep telling yourself you will get to it "one day". That day is today. Take it one envelope at a time and set a goal for yourself. If you can organize one or two packages of photos each night, you will very soon be organized. Even if you do one envelope a week, you will be much further ahead in a few months than if you did

no envelopes per week. If you wait for that one big chunk of time to get it all done, 5 years from now, you will just be further behind.

Organizing is a skill – a learned skill. There is no right and wrong way, only what works for you. Below are some suggestions as to how you can organize. Pick and choose what works for you and make a commitment to stick to it. If you have years and years of photos to deal with, don't get overwhelmed. Work in small sections and enjoy the process. Reminisce about the events in the photos and enjoy knowing that you are further ahead than most people – you have taken that first step to getting your photos organized and properly cared for. This is valuable and meaningful work that forms a priceless connection between you and future generations. If you can, enlist the help of family members - a special kind of closeness comes to families who work together in documenting their shared family history.

Photo Organization

Step 1: Gather

Gather all the photos in your house into one location –preferably a location you can leave it out for a while. Make it a treasure hunt and enlist family members in your search. Check drawers, desks, attics, closets, files, old albums, the garage, framed pictures etc, and bring them all into one location. Remember to check old letters and cards that may have photos in them. You can also ask relatives for pictures and memorabilia that you would like copies of. Don't worry if you can't find certain photos – this should be an enjoyable process. When you do come across more photos, you will be able to add them into your system.

If you have photos that are in old magnetic albums, remove them from these albums. This is an unsafe environment for your photos because of the adhesive on the page protectors and the acid in the pages. If the photos are stuck, there is a product called Un-Do that easily removes most photos from these albums.



A little bit of dental floss can also be used to pry behind the photos. These old albums are not a safe environment for your photos, so even

if you aren't going to do anything with your photos right away, remove them from the magnetic album and store them in a photo box.

Step 2: Sort

Now comes the fun part. Don't get overwhelmed now; this is the heart of the project. You will need to decide how you want to sort your photos, and then take it in small bits of time. When you pass through the area, sort one or two envelopes of photos. If you can find a whole afternoon to sort, great, but don't wait for that chunk of time as it may not come. You CAN do this! Enjoy the process.

There are different ways to sort your photos and memorabilia. Before you start grouping your pictures and stacking them in piles, you'll need to decide which one will work best for you. Remember that with each new package of photos you bring home, you will want to continue this system so make sure it works for you.

Whichever system you decide upon, label your photos with an acid free photo pen. Don't use a ballpoint pen. It is also a good idea to wash your hands before you sort photos. The natural oils on your hands are not that great for photos. You could also wear light cotton gloves. Also, remove all tape, paper clips, staples etc from the photos. While you are sorting, make notes of photos that need restoration or that you want to make additional copies of. Both services are available at Photo Express.

- **Sort Chronologically** – This is the most popular way to organize photos. You will be able to access a specific event with ease, is straightforward to do and easy to maintain. If you have many years of photos to organize, start with "decade" piles, then work down to years, and then if you want, down to months. If you come across a photo and don't know when it was taken, check to see if there is a date stamp on the photo or the envelope it came in. Guesstimate when it was taken (look at the background, age of people, style of clothes) and put it to the side of that decade pile, and as you sort more photos, you will be able to narrow down the date.
- **Sort by Event or Theme** – You may want to organize photos of a special vacation or Christmas photos from each

year by theme/event. This way it is easy to do up a "Christmas Album" with photos of Christmas on a yearly basis. You may want to start a "Celebration" album and put in birthdays, graduations and other family celebrations. Whatever album you decide you want to have is how this style should be sorted.

- **Sort by Person** – You may want to group all the photos of a specific person together. This works really well for heritage photos or portraits. You may want to have an album for each of your children or an album of their school years. You could also break this down into period of life – for example each child could have a baby book, and elementary age book, a high school age book etc.
- **I Have No Idea Box** – This is where the photos that you can't identify go. When friends or family come over or when you go visit, ask if they can help you figure out who they are or when they were taken. You can also scan them and email them to friends or family to see if they can help uncover the mystery. (This is another good reason to label your photos – so they don't become "mystery photos".)
- **Stacy Julian's Sorting System – 5 Categories:**
 - All About Us – immediate family personality and relationship photos. You could have a section for each immediate family member
 - People We Love – extended family and friends
 - Places We Go – if you go there or just dream of going there, include it. Includes local and far away destinations
 - Things We Do – everyday and every-once-in-a-while things that you and your family does. Work photos, sports, things you just love (like chocolate!)
 - Favourite Photos – a collection of your all time favourites.

- **School Of Life Album:** Include 4-6 pages for each school year of your child's life. Page 1 and 2 could be a Class photo and individual photo (can include signatures also) Page 3 is a Pocket page for artwork, school work, report cards, notes. And then 1-3 pages of photos of events throughout the year both school and nonschool related. Simple and easy to keep up or do in a few sittings if your kids are older.

Step 3: Purge and Select.

You now have organized photos and memorabilia. The hardest part is behind you and you deserve a big congratulation! Now you get the easier job of sorting through the photos to remove duplicates or bad photos (yes, it is ok to throw away pictures that aren't great.) This is best done as a separate step, rather than as you sort. You may discover that the 2 blurry photos of your grandma as a young girl are all that you have. You can share duplicates with family members. You can frame duplicates and display them (better yet enlarge them), or you can create a photo gift with them. You can find lots of options for photo gift ideas at Photo Express.

Step 4: Don't panic

Realize that it is going to get worse before it gets better. You will have photos spread all out over your dining room table, but the end result is more than worth it. If it gets stressful figuring out which year a photo is from, set it aside and go onto another pile, or take a break. You can do it!

Step 5: Maintain

Once you have sorted and organized all your photos and memorabilia, your job is not done. This needs to be an ongoing task. Whenever you bring new photos into your house, label them and put them into your system. This is much easier than having to do a major "sort" every 5 years.

Photo Storage

Now that your photos are sorted, they need to be stored in an archival manner so they can be enjoyed for years to come. Archival products are more expensive than shoe boxes (which are very bad for photos), but think of it as an insurance policy for your memories.

Storage products should be acid-free, archival, lignin-free, and PVC-free. Acids in some papers, cardboards and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) products will literally eat away your photos over time and should be avoided. Photos should also be stored away from humidity and not in direct sunlight.

Depending on what you plan on doing with your photos, and how many photos you have, you may have more than one storage system.

The most common type of storage system is a photo album, which can be a traditional pocket album, or a scrapbook album. A scrapbook doesn't have to be fancy with lots of fancy papers and embellishments – it can be as simple as photos on a page with photo corners and a little bit of journaling or it can be elaborate. The choice is yours. An album is the easiest way to share your photos with others. You will find a great selection of albums at Photo Express and the knowledgeable staff to help you choose the right one for you.

Photo Boxes are another great option for storage, especially if you want to do something with the photos at a later date but can't get to that right now. Make sure to label the outside of the box so you know what is inside. Choose archival boxes made for photo storage. Actual shoeboxes usually have a lot of lignin in them, which will deteriorate your photo, and acid that will eat away at your photos.

Large file boxes are great for storing larger photos or memorabilia. Again remember to make sure that they are safe for your photos. When you store larger memorabilia away from the photos they relate to, post a note with the photo as to where you can find the item. If you have larger items such as children's artwork, you can reduce the size by making a colour copy (make sure the paper and toner is acid free like at Photo Express) or by scanning them and printing a smaller version from the computer. This also works for bulky items or you can take a photo of the bulky item.

Archival envelopes come in many sizes and are a convenient method of storage especially for those larger items. They can be used to store papers, certificates or photos.

Negative Storage

As you are sorting through your photos, you have two options to sort your negatives. Deal with them as you deal with the photos, or set them aside to deal with later.

The most effective system for storing negatives is to place them in PVC-free plastic negative sleeves and store them chronologically in a 3 ring binder. This protects them from dirt, scratches, and the oil on your fingers. Most sleeves also have an area at the top to label the subject and the date. Photo Express also provides an index print with each order that shows a colour copy of all the photos on the negatives. You can attach this to the top of the negative sleeve to make it easy to locate a photo.

It is also best to store your negatives in a separate location from your photos – not together. For example, store your photos at your house, and your negatives at a friend or family member's house. Hopefully, if a catastrophe happens in one location, the other location will still be safe and you will be left with either photos or negatives, but won't lose both. The other option is a safe deposit box. The fire safes for homes will usually not protect your negatives.

Digital Storage

The ease of taking pictures with a digital camera means that most people are taking way more pictures than they did with a traditional film camera. It has also created a backlog of photos that need to be dealt with.

The first step is to move your digital photos from your camera's storage card or disk to your computer. Choose only one computer to do this process on, so all of your photos are in one spot. You will usually find it easiest to find a photo if you store them in chronological order.

Create a folder called "Photos" somewhere on your data drive. Create a folder for each year within your Photos folder-for example a folder for "2004," "2005," "2006." Depending on how many photos you take,

you may also want to create a folder for each month within each of these yearly folders. You can also go one step further and create a folder within each month for each day or event. Again, use whatever system works for you and will make it easiest to locate a photo.

Now you can go through each folder and delete any photos that you won't use – too blurry, or dark. You may also want to take some time and jot down some journaling notes in a text file for each photo group so that you remember what was happening when you come to put your photos into an album.

An excellent program to categorize your photos in your computer is Adobe Photoshop Elements. This has an organizing feature that allows you to tag each photo to easily find it later. For example you can say I want all photos on my computer of Aunt Sue, or all photos at Christmas etc. How you tag it is how you can find it. A good free program is Picassa.

You also must archive your digital images. Hard drives can crash and you don't want to lose all your priceless memories. You want to make sure to have a backup copy (or two) on a CD-R disc (stands for Compact Disc – Recordable.) Watch the type of CD that you use to store your images on. There is a big difference in the quality and longevity of the CD's. The typical big box CD where you get 50-100 for \$30 will last around 1-2 years. Silver CD's (typically cost about \$1 per CD) will last 70-100 years. The best option is a Gold CD that has actual gold in it. Typical cost of a Gold CD is \$5-\$6, and they will last 200-300 years.

These little storage devices are great because they take up less space than negatives and you can archive several hundred images on a single CD. Again, it is a good idea to store at least one of your CD's offsite. Gold DVD's are also available for backup and will store the equivalent of 6-7 CD's.

Make sure to make regular backups of your digital library as you will lose everything since your last backup (for some of you that means EVERYTHING) if your computer crashes. Here are some tips to make your CD-R's last longer. Store them in a cool, dry, dark place as heat, humidity and sunlight can cause damage. Store CD-R's in their cases, upright like books. Use only water-based or alcohol-based felt markers (usually marked "non-toxic"). **DO NOT** use ballpoint pens, touch the bottom of CD-R's with your fingers or bend them too much. You may

be surprised to hear it, but archival-quality prints are the best way to preserve your digital files.

Prints made on archival paper will last at least as long as a CD-R and are easier to display! Use archival inks (not dye-based) for inkjet prints, or better yet get your prints done on photo paper just like you used to from negatives. You can come into Photo Express and use the in-store kiosk to print your photos or use our free online program that allows you to order prints from the comfort of your home in your pj's! www.photoexpressions.fotodepot.ca Both options provide you with excellent quality prints on photo.

Again as with negatives and photos, it is important to maintain your system once you have it started.

Online storage is another option and is available at Photo Express. This storage is FREE and you can store an unlimited amount of photos on the system. It will make it easy to share photos with others (by giving them a password) and print your photos at Photo Express (again the ultimate archival storage).

Slides

You can store your slides in plastic PVC free pages made for slides and place them in a 3 ring binder. Any marking you do, should be done with a photo pen. Another option for slides is to make photos of them so everyone can enjoy them.

8mm movie film and video

The old 8mm films are becoming very brittle and can easily break when viewed. You can have these transferred to video or better yet, transferred to DVD. The same goes for all of your home videos. Photo Express offers this service.

Newspaper and Other Paper Articles

Newspaper has a very high lignin content in it, which is why it becomes yellow so fast, and gets brittle. If you want to save newspaper articles, you can copy them on a machine that uses acid free paper and archival toner (as at Photo Express). You can also "wash" older newspaper articles. Place the article in a pan with distilled water, and wash, and then dry. This will strengthen the article.

Documents such as birth certificates, programs, and report cards may or may not be printed on acid free paper. There is a spray called Archival Mist, which can be sprayed on the front and back of the paper article. This will deacidify it so that it is safe to put in your album.

Photo Restorations

You will most likely come across some precious photos that are damaged. You can bring them into Photo Express to have them restored. Each photo is handled individually and doesn't leave our store so you can rest easy, knowing your photo is being handled with care.

Here is an example of a photo before and after restoration.



Floods and Water Damage

Though everyone hopes this never happens, sometimes it does. If your photos have suffered water damage, the first rule is to not panic. Here are some steps to help salvage your photos from www.canadianphoto restoration.com

1. Don't let the photos dry out! As your photographs dry, they will stick to each other and any other materials they may be in contact with. You'll find it impossible to pull them apart without causing potentially irreparable damage.
2. Get to work as soon as possible. Your photographs shouldn't stay wet for more than two or three days.
3. While you're working on your photos, store them in a container full of cold, clean tap water. The colder the better. Don't add chlorine to the water, but change the water every day. The chlorine in tap water is enough to prevent the growth of fungi and other biological threats.
4. Rinse your photos in a container of cold, clear running water. Don't run the water directly onto the photos, because that could damage the chemical emulsion, causing permanent damage. Keep rinsing them until the run-off water is clear.
5. Carefully remove your photographs or negatives from the water, taking the smallest quantity possible. Pull them out of their wrappers and gently separate them. **DO NOT FORCE THEM APART.** Separate as many as possible before returning them to the cold water and starting on another batch. Repeat the separate-soak cycle as many times as necessary. However, sometimes you may not be able to separate materials without forcing the issue. In those cases you will probably have to just accept the corresponding damage.
6. Once your materials are separated, store them in water until you can wash them individually, using cold, clean running water. Use cotton balls, a soft cotton cloth or a soft foam rubber brush to remove foreign objects if needed. Rinse your photographs or negatives one more time after cleaning is complete.
7. Hang-dry prints and negatives from a clothesline. Make sure they will not be exposed to dust. As an option, special solutions are available that facilitate uniform, spot-free drying when applied to negatives and slides. These solutions can be purchased from your local retail photo lab or dealer.
8. If your prints curl while drying, wet the paper side (NOT the emulsion!) with a moist sponge and place each one between two

pieces of acid-free paper or photo blotters, and leave them under a flat, heavy object for a day or two.

Unfortunately, dye-based ink jet images are almost always destroyed after short immersions times in water. This is another reason to trust your memories to a professional photofinisher like Photo Express.

If you have too many wet prints to deal with within a day or two, then place them in plastic bags and in your freezer. This will prevent the growth of mould. The prints can be stored safely in your freezer until they can be properly washed and dried. Remove photos from page protectors before placing in a plastic bag in your freezer.

Presentation of your Photos

There are many ways to present your photos. The most common would be in a photo album. This can be a regular pocket type album or a scrapbook. A scrapbook can be as simple as photos on a page with some journaling, or very elaborate with patterned papers and embellishments, or somewhere in between. The journaling is almost as important as the photos. This is where you get to tell your story – who the pictures are about, what they were doing, or thinking or feeling, funny anecdotes, or your thoughts. These are the words that connect this generation and future generations. Instead of just a box of photos with no story, you end up with a beautiful storybook to be enjoyed by everyone.

Photos can also be framed and hung on a wall. Remember that when exposed to light, they will fade over time; so if you are framing a one of a kind priceless photo, have a copy made first so that you have a backup. You will find lots of ready-made frames at Photo Express and full custom framing is also available.

Home décor items have also become a very popular way to display photos. A great way to do this is to put a photo on canvas or on tile coasters to display in your home.

Photobooks are a great way to showcase your photos and story. You can design one yourself on our kiosks or do it online from home www.photoexpressions.fotodepot.ca The books are professionally bound with a standard or custom cover. Makes a great gift idea also.

Create a DVD slide show featuring a series of photos set to music. Great for parties too.

There are also numerous items to place your photos on including mugs, t-shirts, blankets, puzzles, aprons, Christmas ornaments, Calendars, greeting cards, bookmarks, iphone covers, and more. All of these and more are available at Photo Express.

Conclusion

Your photos are a precious link between you and future generations. They are too important to let sit in a drawer and become nameless pieces of paper. Make the time to properly and safely preserve all your priceless family Memories.

If you have any questions at all, please feel free to ask any of us at Photo Express. We have the knowledge and supplies to help you created treasured Family Keepsakes.