



NEAT FREAK NEWS: May 2010

May has been a big month for me. I had a birthday (a significant one...) and I've been celebrating for at least 40 days. May is also a busy month for family and friends as the school year winds down and everyone starts planning for summer travel, camps and less structured time. Capturing memories from these fun-filled days typically means taking pictures. And pictures have been on my mind a lot lately as I've helped several clients sort out a lifetime of images. I thought I'd share some of my favorite organizational tips for taming photos and honoring the memories without feeling like you're drowning in them.

First, a confession. I am not a scrap booker. Never have been. Never will be. For those of you who are, I kneel down before with great respect and admiration. I love the end result of a well-done scrap book, but I just can't bring myself to create one. You see, I am missing the "crafty" gene so I have to solve my photo issues in other ways. For croppers and non-croppers alike, I share with you these thoughts:

Before you start a photo sorting project, have a little heart to heart with yourself. What do your photos mean to you? How do you most enjoy them? Do you want them in albums? Okay with them in boxes? Prefer to have them on a computer for quick viewing? Do you like to share them with family or friends? Determining how you best interact with the memories captured in your photos will help you determine how best to organize them.

Start with the backlog of prints by gathering up photos from all hiding spots (stuffed in drawers, in bins under beds, in boxes up in closets, in frames you no longer display, etc.) and give yourself a dedicated space. This task will likely take a while, so try to find a spot where you can work for a few weeks without having to put everything away. A few must-have tools to help this project run smoothly include:

- 3x5 note cards
- Sticky notes
- Acid-free photo safe pen or pencil (available at craft stores)
- Fine point Sharpies for taking notes—just because I always LOVE a Sharpie
- Matching boxes or albums depending on your preference. Having a set means the end result will look nicer and fit together on a shelf.
- A trash can, because even though they all seemed precious at the time, lets face it, there are some blurry, embarrassing, or just downright awful pictures in there. Let 'em go!
- Envelopes for photos/negatives you want to reprint or enlarge or for those you want to give away to others

Now start to sort. The method for sorting depends on your own preferences and what you intend to do with photos. You might simply sort by year (or even decade!), by family member, by vacation, by location, etc. This is up to you. I recommend starting big and only getting more specific as needed. Sometimes we get caught up in the perfection of a project and then it just never happens. Done is better than perfect!

Photos you love and treasure deserve to be treated with respect—frame them, place them in a special

album, or make copies to share. Others that are important but not the best of the best can go in boxes with labeled tabbed dividers or in albums based on your categories. Be ruthless—if you can't remember the people in the shot, have no memory (or at least no fond ones!) of the event, or if you printed doubles, get rid of them. Less than flattering photos? Trash them...please!

Digital photos can still cause a dilemma. Huge hard drives and inexpensive back up drives make it pretty easy to store every single digital photo we take with no real rhyme or reason. Get in the habit of downloading the photos off of your camera at least once a month, immediately deleting the bad shots, rotating images and correcting red eyes, and labeling your photos by month and year, and more specifically for special events. Software such as iPhoto and Picasa make this relatively simple. If you still like to print photos or want to store them in another location online, consider services such as Shutterfly or Snapfish. Digital images should be treated just like physical prints—get in the habit of handling them regularly so they don't pile up. And always make sure you've backed them up so you don't lose the last 10 years of photographic evidence!

If you enjoy having your photos on your computer to share and peruse, you might consider scanning in all of your older print photos. Services such as ScanMyPhotos.com and ScanCafe.com offer digital scanning services for as little as \$.05 per scan. If you have boxes and boxes of loose photos or photos in old albums with sticky, magnetic pages, you might consider having them scanned so they'll be preserved and take up less space.

Even as a non-scrap booker, I truly value and appreciate photos. While they can't replace your memory of a moment, they can still give you goosebumps, bring a tear to your eye or make you laugh till your sides hurt. No one says how important photo memories are better than Don Draper in this scene (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2bLNkCqpuY>) from *Mad Men*. So go, take care of your memories so they'll last a lifetime and beyond.

Signed,
The Neat Freak