

The Art of Time: My Passion for Chronologically Archiving Photos

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Preserving Moments, Telling Stories

There is an undeniable magic in photographs. Each image, frozen in time, holds a whisper of the past—a fleeting smile, a sunlit afternoon, a glance, a triumph, a sorrow, a moment never to be repeated. My passion lies in

honouring these fragments of life by archiving them chronologically—a process that is, for me, both an art and a gentle obsession.

DISCOVERING THE JOY OF ORDER

My journey began not with a camera, but with a shoebox stuffed with fading prints.

Not true. My father was an avid archivist and set up photo albums for everyone in the family. His best friend was a hobby photographer. I bought my first camera for one dollar and photographed my pet cat. Then when we travelled on family camping trips our equipment evolved to an 8mm movie camera.

Old family albums, tucked away in corners, always beckoned with the promise of stories.

Our photo albums were always in their place and Dad embellished each one with details, facts and information.

“As a child, I would spread them out on the living room floor, attempting to form a timeline without knowing the dates or the occasions. There was something deeply satisfying about piecing together the puzzle—watching my parents’ faces change year by year, noting the subtle shifts in fashion, and glimpsing the evolving backdrop of our family home.”

That’s the narrative that “Copilot” gave me when I finally succumbed to its constant plea to me to say what I wanted to write about. I finally succumbed and was so enraptured by the result it was almost shocking. At first I only saw the one paragraph and thought, oh, that’s interesting, I can use that. Then I scrolled up and down and found more and more. Copilot had written a whole blog article for me, over a thousand words. I already had enough to post,

But then, is it from me, or is it AI? Well I put in the prompt so it is from me.

So, now, here I am, separating what Copilot wrote and my own edits. After all, it was my prompt, my idea, my theme, my concept. So is it original? Well, what do you think when it’s written by AI? But then, I thought, well, why not just publish it anyhow because it surely speaks to millions out there. So here we are at a crossroads. I’m posting my blog and at least this time, clearly marking what comes from me, what’s authentic, and what was generated by Copilot. What do you think?

Then as I grew older, technology transformed the way we capture and store memories. Suddenly, thousands of photos could live on a single device, their sheer volume overwhelming yet exhilarating. But digital abundance brought with it a new kind of chaos—snapshots jumbled by random file names or scattered across multiple drives, the narrative thread fraying at the edges. It was this disorder that inspired my commitment to archiving photos chronologically. I wanted to restore that sense of story, to let each image breathe in its rightful place on the timeline of my life.

Now this is me again and it is fascinating to see how technology develops, but it’s probably happening much faster now for those younger than me. We first had black and white prints, tiny photos, which gradually became bigger and bigger. Eventually colour photos were here and then we even ascended to colour slides. The movie camera meant splicing and physically editing film with sticky tape, or a special film glue, on a hand wound film viewer.

THE PROCESS: RITUAL AND REWARD

Archiving photos, for me, is a ritual of reflection. I begin by gathering all images—old prints, slides, negatives, and digital files—from as many sources as I can find. The sorting process is meticulous: scanning photographs, correcting colours, and, most importantly, assigning each image a date. Sometimes the date is recorded on the print; other times, I must become a detective, hunting for context clues within the photo itself—a calendar on a wall, a birthday cake, or even the quality of the light.

Archiving photos was a gradual process for me. It became an addiction which I have only just recently recognized and acknowledged. After inheriting the first childhood album from my father, I started creating physical albums of my own. My first photos from my first camera. My first trip to Europe. My travels on the Eurail Pass.

What to do then with all the negatives?

Once I was no longer staying at home, but also not really settled into my own home, it became even more challenging.

And meticulously sorting, scanning and correcting colours? No. I never had time for that.

My photos are the story of my life. They may not be perfect art works, but they tell my story. They help me to tell my story.

And yes, it's great if you can get a date on photos. There was a time when we were thrilled to have every picture imprinted with a date, until it got in the way and we stopped using that feature. Now I am the custodian of a number of historical photos where I can no longer ask for reference information because the key figures are no longer with us. And exactly this fires up my passion even more, to share the pictures and tell their stories.

Once I have a rough chronology, I arrange the photos year by year, month by month, even day by day when possible. Digital folders mirror this order, each one like a chapter in a sprawling novel. I use metadata, file naming conventions, and sometimes dedicated photo management software to keep everything precise. For older prints, I create digitised albums, supplementing them with captions or voice notes, ensuring that the stories behind the images are never lost.

I wish. It is sobering now next day to meticulously read through the generated text and actually tell my own story. Where did Copilot get all these ideas from anyhow? Were they from you? We are all feeding this ever growing mass of information and occasionally, when it regurgitates our own thoughts back, we think we see a mirror.

This process is not always easy; it requires patience, research, and sometimes the humility to accept gaps in the narrative. But the reward is immense. The act of archiving turns an unruly heap of images into a coherent, living history—a visual timeline that can be revisited and shared, not just by me but by future generations.

Blah blah blah blah

WHY CHRONOLOGY MATTERS

Chronological order is more than just a practical system—it is a way of experiencing the passage of time. When photos are arranged in sequence, they reveal patterns and progressions that might otherwise remain invisible: the growth of a child, the change of seasons, the transformation of a city. The continuum of images allows us to trace journeys, witness relationships unfold, and understand the context in which our lives have evolved.

So listen now to what Copilot is saying. All this is okay and I was fairly inspired when I first read all this.

For me, the point of organizing my photos chronologically, is to get them correctly identified. I had five sons, and when you see the baby photos you can hardly tell is it the first, the third or the fifth one.

When you have more than one child, and as a parent you long to express your unconditional love, it doesn't come across so well when you use the wrong name.

There is also a profound emotional resonance in witnessing the flow of time. Looking through a well-ordered archive isn't simply an exercise in nostalgia; it is an act of self-discovery. We see how we have changed, what we have cherished, which moments linger and which have faded into the background. The chronological archive becomes a mirror, reflecting not only events but also the values and emotions that shaped them.

CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS

Archiving photos chronologically is not without its challenges. Sometimes, dates are missing or conflicting. Digital files can become corrupted; old prints can fade or tear. There are technical hurdles—learning new software, managing backups, ensuring that digital formats remain accessible as technology evolves.

But each obstacle only deepens my resolve. I've learned to embrace imperfections, to accept uncertainty when a date cannot be pinned down, and to celebrate the resilience of memories that have survived despite the odds. The process has taught me patience, attention to detail, and the importance of regular maintenance and backups.

Most of all, I have discovered the joy of sharing. A well-organised archive can be a gift to family and friends—a way to relive weddings, holidays, and ordinary days long past. I have watched loved ones laugh and cry as we scroll through years together, each image sparking a cascade of recollections. Sometimes, archiving becomes a collaborative project, with relatives contributing their own photos and stories, deepening our collective history.

Well here I am going to plug our Synology software. Fast forward into the digital age, past the brief decade of photo CDs, on to Google photos and Flickr and whatever else there was. Now I have some photos where I wrote the negative number on the back of the print, I have some (many) digital copies of photos in five different sizes (a legacy of the photo CDs) and now I am editing meta data to try to at least vaguely place the image into a relevant timeslot.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

My passion is sustained by an ever-evolving toolkit. For physical prints, I rely on high-quality scanners, archival storage boxes, and acid-free sleeves. Digital archiving is supported by robust backup strategies—external hard drives, cloud storage, and redundant copies in different locations. I keep abreast of new photo management software, always seeking tools that allow for easy sorting, tagging, and searching.

No, no no! I don't have time to be always seeking. I have a life. But I am grateful that now with Synology I can manage a lot of the accumulated material that has resulted from my many activities.

Metadata is my silent ally. By embedding dates, locations, and descriptions directly into the image files, I ensure that the context of each photo remains intact, even as formats change. I maintain detailed logs and periodically review my archives, updating them as new information or images come to light.

Haha. That's a joke. But maybe in the future. Maybe because I really am fairly meticulous now, today, posterity will thank me and manage to do all that.

A LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

At its heart, my passion for chronologically archiving photos is an act of preservation—not just of images, but of meaning. In a world where moments pass rapidly and memories fade, a well-crafted archive stands as a testament to the lives we have lived. It offers continuity in the face of change, a thread connecting past, present, and future.

When I imagine the generations to come—children and grandchildren leafing through albums or scrolling through digital galleries—I am filled with hope. Perhaps they will see not only faces and places, but also the love and care that went into preserving each memory. Perhaps they will find comfort, inspiration, or simply the pleasure of discovery.

In sharing my passion, I invite others to consider the value of their own stories and the power of order to illuminate them. Archiving photos chronologically is more than a hobby; it is an ongoing dialogue with time itself—a way to honour the intricate, beautiful tapestry of life, one image at a time.

Well, thank you copilot that was an interesting discourse. I can approve of publishing that. But only with you and me together.