

The Old Shoebox Newsletter

Adventures in modern technology by Marlo E. Schuldt

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Digital Photography in Family History



**An open letter
to you or your
parents**

Someday all the photos you have taken will become a significant part of your family history.

The images you leave behind will tell a personal story about you. A glimpse into your personality will be revealed in the simple things you liked most, such as the photos of your garden and the flowers around the yard.

We will learn about the things you thought were most important such as your parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren and relatives. The places you visited that were magical, uplifting and rejuvenating to your mind and spirit. Places you hope your posterity will also visit and benefit from.

Through the eye of your camera you will invite us to go on trips with you to exotic places. Other times we may quietly accompany you to a secret fishin' hole, the whereabouts shared only with your most trusted friends. You may inform us that unfortunately the camera jammed or was out of focus as you tried to take a photo of the big one that got away.

We hope you season your photo history with digital proof of your famous homemade salsa and the secret recipes of other family favorites. We will relish viewing photos that punctuate humorous family secrets and events that only family insiders were aware of.



We will enjoy your rare “behind the scenes” photos taken at weddings, birthdays and other special occasions.

And of course, the embarrassing photos that make everyone squirm, create red faces and get the best belly laughs. We know you have some hidden away so come clean and share!

Silent movies passed away years ago. We beg you to leave us more than your silent movies, that is, your photos without stories. We want to know why you took each photo and how you felt about the images you left behind.

If a photo is worth a thousand words could you please share at least 50 of the most descriptive words or a short verbal narrative about each photo?

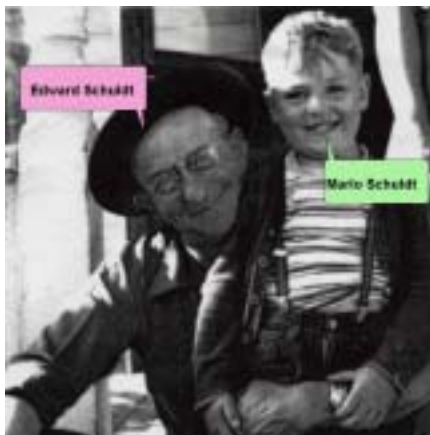
We don't want to see all your photos and hear all your stories, *just the best ones*. Please spoon feed us with a few of the sweetest ones. Soon you'll have your grandchildren begging for more helpings of your photo history each time they visit.

My children cherished visits with their grandmother when she told them stories of the “Olden days.” A few photos tossed in as she told the stories really captivated their attention and stimulated them to ask more questions.

Hopefully I've captured your attention and you are now thinking about all the photos you are holding hostage in hidden computer file folders, rusty old trunks stored away in the attic and photos jailed in dusty old photo albums.

So let's get started with some of the nuts and bolts of using digital photography in family history.

“Carpe diem” (car—pay d—m). *It's time to seize the moment / day and get started.*



Clicking the pink “hot spot” allows us to hear dad sing his favorite German song.



Grandma Velma Schuldt wearing her bother's clothes at age 18 with her foot on her Model-T Ford she and her sister drove to dances.

What to look for when buying a new digital camera.

Buy the best camera you can afford. It's not the name on the camera that counts most or the price. It's what the camera will allow you to do, or its specifications, that are the most important.

The first step is to get unbiased ratings and opinions about a camera BEFORE you get all enamored and impulsive to purchase. Oddly, Amazon.com is the perfect place to get ratings and all kinds of information about cameras and other products before you buy.



Look for a majority of five star ratings with lesser four star ratings. Be careful. High ratings are of little value if there are not many reviews. Read the reviews and search for specific words in the ratings.



The people writing the reviews are like you and I so they offer more real world and honest feedback.

You will find comments in the rating reviews that you will not find anywhere else because the reviewers are not getting paid and have nothing to gain by writing a review except to give their opinion and experience.

Amazon often has the best prices but not always so shop around at other web sites and local stores.

Let's start listing camera features and functions order of importance:

The Lens – *bigger is better.*

Digital cameras usually have slower shutter speeds making it easier to get blurry photos. A big lens collects more light allowing for faster shutter speeds which creates fewer fuzzy photos.



A bigger lens makes it possible to take photos in lower light without using an obtrusive and attention getting flash. Photos are usually more natural if you don't use a flash.

Optical Zoom Lens. Why a Zoom? Because you can save your steps using the zoom lens. It's easier to compose and frame a group photo using the zoom function instead of walking forward and backward until you get the photo properly framed.



It also takes less time to prepare, which is critical when you are shooting a group photo on a hot day with lots of wiggly people in the group.



A manual zoom is preferred because it's easier to control, allowing you to be very precise framing the photo as you zoom in and out.

Framing the Photo. Creating natural frames when taking a photo is easier with a zoom lens. Using a zoom makes it easier to control the photo angle to eliminate distracting background elements such as a fern or tree growing out of the back of someone's head.



The little tractor gets lost in this photo as it competes with the house and tree for our attention.



Zooming in eliminates some of the distractions and makes it easier to see and focus on the tractor.

Paying attention and taking a few extra minutes to frame a photo will make it look more professional and interesting.



The sagebrush is framed by the orange sand, reddish mountains and blue sky. Near St. George Utah.

Taking Candid Photos. Do you have a parent or grandparent that is NOT willing to let you take their photo? You can't sneak up on grandma by putting your camera in her face unless she's asleep with her mouth gaping wide open – not a pretty sight for a photo remembrance!



Mother did not like being photographed. A paper sack conceals her face from my camera in the photo above.



I learned to take photos of her from afar.

The zoom lens captured this lifelike pose of mother when she was having a good laugh and didn't know my camera and I were just waiting for the perfect moment!

Children and teenagers make awful faces which makes it impossible to get a life-like photo of them. The secret of taking natural or candid photos is using a zoom lens so they don't know you are taking a photo of them.



The same photo angle using zoom to see the baby's face.

Angle and Composition. Most photos are taken with an angle of top to bottom or looking down on your subject. Get on the same level with the person or object you are photographing.

This photo (right) was taken with the camera near the ground so the camera was perpendicular or level to the marker.

Some photos are more flattering if you lower the tripod or take the photo at about chest level or a few feet lower instead shooting downward. (below)



Get down on the floor on your poor old sore knees with the grandkids and take photos. It will make a huge difference and *It will be worth the extra effort and pain!*



Optical or Digital Zoom - which is better? First you need to understand that “Optical” zoom uses optics and moves the lens to bring you closer to the subject similar to the way binoculars work.

“Digital” zoom is misnamed since it does not zoom but crops a portion of the photo and then enlarges it. This also results in a loss of image quality.

Digital zoom specifications are of little value – just looks impressive when the optical zoom is multiplied with the digital zoom to accentuate a 48X zoom capability. That usually translates into a 3X optical zoom combined with a 16X digital zoom – not really very impressive and will not add much to photo quality.

The higher the optical zoom number the better.

Image Stabilization. Digital cameras have slower shutter speeds so it’s important to hold very still to avoid excess movement if you are using a zoom lens because the smallest movement is exaggerated when zooming in on distant objects.

Image stabilization compensates for the little hand movements that occur when taking photos so you have a better chance of getting a clearly focused image.



Handheld photo with image stabilization of the moon and hillside at dusk.



This handheld photo of Christmas lights at night would be impossible without image stabilization.

When taking photos, be sure to maintain good, solid footing and a natural stance to help you stand still. Hold your breath when taking a photo so you will not inadvertently move when you press the shutter button. Don’t jerk; when you press the button. Gently press down to get autofocus, then press the rest of the way.

Use a tripod whenever possible if your camera does not have image stabilization. If it’s an important or one-of-a-kind photo opportunity, take at least two or more shots.

Auto Focus vs. Manual Focus. Thankfully new cameras have autofocus. Unfortunately you have very little control over autofocus. A few cameras come with a manual focus option. This is critical when using a zoom lens since autofocus may focus on the wrong thing in the photo. Using a manual focus lets you focus only on the desired object as shown below.



Autofocus on objects behind the toadstool

Manual focus on just the toadstool.

Megapixels. The more pixels or dots in a digital photo translate to higher resolution and better image quality. The number of photo megapixels is very important when printing photos or taking photos of pictures.

High Capacity - Fast SD Card. The size of your camera card is critical if your camera takes photos with 5 or more megapixels.



On a trip or vacation you may fill up your card quickly. Visit a store that makes a CD or DVD of all the images on the card so you can empty the card and continue snapping away. Invest in at least one or two 1 gig or larger SD cards. Before buying more cards, check your camera manual to be sure your camera is compatible with higher capacity cards and the speed of the card. Otherwise you will be wasting your money. SD cards that come with most new cameras are a joke. The capacity of the card is usually so limited you can only take a couple of test photos before filling up the card.

A Good View Finder. On a sunny day you will not be able to see the camera LCD. You will need to use the view finder on the camera. You can also save your camera battery by turning off the camera LCD and using the view finder. Make sure you like the view finder on the camera you are going to purchase.

Use a Tripod. Blurry photos often result from slight movements when pressing the shutter button. Eliminate blurry photos by using a tripod to steady the camera.

Is the photo too big to scan?



1. Make sure the tripod is level and the camera is pointing straight down at the picture (perpendicular) as shown in the adjacent photo (right).

This will prevent the camera photo of the picture from becoming distorted. Wider on one of the sides and more narrow on the opposite side as shown.



narrow on the opposite side as shown.



Note the direction of the light source (blue arrow).

If light is flowing across the photo from one of the sides and not the top of the photo, the legs of the tripod may cast shadows across the photo.

2. The image of the picture in the camera LCD viewer should have an equal amount of space around all four sides of the photo indicating that the camera is pointing down at the correct angle (perpendicular) to the image as shown here.



Shot-to-Shot Photo Lag Time -*The time you must wait between taking each photo.* If you have to wait a long time for the camera to process each photo you will miss many special shots. Check the camera specs to see what the “shot to shot time is. My Lumix FZ50 is 1.25 seconds. If you want to shoot photos more quickly check for a “Burst” mode.

Video / Movie Capability. I've never enjoyed hauling around two camera bags. One for the digital camera and one for the video camera. I take more still shots than video. However, there are some events a still photo cannot capture – baby's first words or steps, singing Happy Birthday and blowing out the candles. One of my all time favorite video clips is of my grandson's first taste of root beer soda. He's so energetic and animated in the video clip. It's very humorous to watch. His arms are flailing in all directions, feet kicking and that little tongue



Video clips capture priceless, one of a kind moments.

going in and out as fast as possible to signal he wanted more – Right NOW! There was no doubt it was love at first taste with a root beer soda.

Photo and Video in One Camera. After years of anticipation, the camera industry has finally given us both options in one unit. Now you can take video clips with the same still photo camera. Large, beautiful 16:9 video clips (30 fps **video** at 848 x 480) with sound and no camera cassettes to buy.

No need to capture or convert the movie. It's all ready to go directly to your computer. You can shoot about 20 minutes of video and audio on a 1 gig SD card with stills interspersed with video. When the card fills up, insert another one and continue on with no worries.

White Balance. Eliminate the greenish and blue tint in photos caused by indoor lighting. Change the white balance setting in your camera. You will need to carry a little white piece of stiff paper in your camera bag so you can use the white paper as a white reference. Set the perfect white balance in the environment where you will be taking photos.



The New 16:9 Wide Angle Format. Have you ever noticed your visual field is not square? Square TVs and square photos are on their way out. Even computer monitors are no longer square. The new wide format is more lifelike especially when setting up and viewing photos. A wide angle format also lets you get in closer.

Accessories

External Flash. Why use a flash in the shade? Some cameras let you control the strength of the flash. Setting the flash intensity to a lower level helps eliminate hot spots on the forehead and terrible reflections of the flash.



Without Flash



With Flash in the Shade



Without Flash



With Flash



This adjustable flash unit with built in light diffuser makes it possible to control where the light bounces off the person or object.



Controlling the intensity of the flash is very helpful and creates professional looking photos.

Lens Hood – makes it possible to take photos almost in direct sunlight. Also protects your lens from being struck with an object coming from the side.



Extra Rechargeable Battery / Car Recharger. Your battery and SD card are your film. A dead battery or full SD card will end your photo taking.

Lens Cleaning Kit. No matter how careful you are, you will touch the lens and it will get dirty. Invest in a good cleaning kit.



Card Reader. Import camera photos from your camera card easier and faster.



Wireless Shutter

Release. Include yourself into the photo using a wireless camera release. See newsletter, "The Search for the Missing Person," for more details.

Camera Bag. Get a bag large enough to fit all your accessories yet small enough to carry comfortably. It should be padded enough to survive a fall off the top of your car with the camera inside.

Lens Cap and Filter. Prevent damage to your lens. A replacement lens may cost more than a new camera.

Index Your Photos With GPS Coordinates. Taking a photo of your GPS unit right after snapping a photo will make it easier to enter and associate coordinates with photos later. Put the coordinates into Google Earth, do a screen capture and then import the capture into a collection with the photos taken at that location.



Garmin Nuvee 200 works for both car navigation and to get GPS coordinates of grave markers and other landmarks

Get the Bird's Eye View – make a panorama.

How do you take a photo of the Grand Canyon? Or the Blue Mountains in Australia? Show a 360 degree view of the old farm. The secret is to use a panorama and anyone, even you can make one.

All that is required is to take about 10 photos as you turn the camera in a circle. The trick is to overlap each photo so when you can easily stitch all the photos together in a panorama software program.

You can make two kinds of panoramas.

1. One very wide photo containing all the photos.
2. 360 degree panorama that allows you to actually view the photo as though you were turning your head and body in a circle while viewing the terrain.

Inexpensive software can be purchased to make it easier to make panoramas. There are many fun and interesting things you should consider turning into a panorama.

- Inside a room.
- In front of your home.
- Scenery at a National Park.
- Grandpa's farm house.
- Off the top of a tall building.
- Farm where you grew up.
- View of the top of a mountain.
- Waterfall.
- Overlook on a hike.
- National Parks.
- Family history site.
- Grandpa's farm house.



One of the 10 photos in the 360° panorama



7 of the 10 photos that were taken to create the 360° panoramic movie.

Tips for Making a Good Panorama

Always use a tripod. Panoramas will turn out better and be more professional looking if you use a tripod.

Do a test pan of 360 degrees to ensure the tripod is level. If the tripod is not level, each photo will be ascending or descending so the that last photo in the sequence will not line up with the first photo in the sequence or loop.

Use manual camera settings so all the images will have the same look i.e., color, contrast, exposure settings etc. However, this may not always be possible. In this example below left, the old home was in the shade on a very bright day. Later the photo needed to be enhanced and lightened so you could see the old home in the ins the shadow.

Overlap each photo 10 - 15%.

Taken From chapter four in the Digital Family History Guidebook.

Beware of the JPG Format



Most digital cameras create JPG image files.

“Warning: Every time you change, and re-save a JPG you recompress data, losing image information. Make a copy of your file before doing any editing, or save it to a non-rewritable CD, so you'll always have your original file.” *From National Geographic - Guide to Digital Photography. 2006 p. 33*

Your Photos are Important to Your Family

Remember, your photos are a witness to the experiences and stories of your life, so take lots of photos. Throw away the bad ones and keep the best ones to share with us and your future posterity. You will add enrichment to the lives of those you share your photos and stories with in the future.



West Entrance to Yellowstone



Jacob, Teresa, Leanna, David, Todd, Mary and Sarah



Ethan, Earl, Daran, and McCrene



Kathleen and Kate



Grande Schult




It's a Family Tradition


The Olsen and Schult families have been traveling to Yellowstone Park for the past 100 years by horse, wagon and family car.






The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone

Joe, Kate and Mary Jane Olsen visit the Upper Falls between the years of 1897 - 1898.




David, Leanna and Jacob 2004 Upper Falls in the background.






Some places in the canyon are over 1,800 feet down to the Yellowstone river. Water just before it crashes over the Falls. All the colors of the rainbow appear in the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone.


History of the Martin Flat Dry Farm



Harvesting on the Martin Flat began about 1910. The first harvester was pulled by 33 horses and was one of the largest in the intermountain area.



The Olsen Brothers joined the Martin Flat Dry Farm Company and used stock to purchase the harvesters.



Kyle's Grandpa was the driver of the harvester. The photo was one of the first of a season that propagated out over the country.



The Martin Flat Dry Farm Company also combined harvesting which helped the Olsen's share with their neighbors in harvest that year.



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