

The Old Shoebox Newsletter

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The Preservation Paradox

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Photo by Marlo E. Schuldt

A Historical Review of Preservation

The advent of copiers and low cost toner based printers have raised some red flags for me. Over the years I have asked a variety of experts about the stability of toner since I know it's waxed-based so it can be fixed and melted into paper with heat. I've seen the toner transfer to plastic inserts and covers when using pages in a three ring binder. I fear that over time black and white facing pages will stick together in a book.

Inkjet ink is improving and may last longer since it sinks into the paper but that makes the print less vivid and not as readable. Special coated papers designed for inkjet printer are expensive and don't last.

What's the best archival paper? We all realize it should be acid free. We know the direction of the paper grain is critical for a bound book. However, deterioration, fire, water, mold, insects

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and children will eventually destroy most all paper based documents. The only solution is to store and protect paper records in a perfect archival, climate controlled environment. Problem solved but accessing the records may be difficult and probably quite expensive. Defeated again.

Nothing is forever except words etched into stone or engraved into rust proof, corrosive resistant metals such as gold, copper, brass or stainless steel. This option will be too expensive for most of us. The remaining option is words sandblasted into a granite tombstone. How much can you write on your burial marker that will be informative or beneficial to posterity? Not much. Will our posterity take the time or make the effort to visit our interment site? Few if any will because they won't be able to find it in some weed infested and forgotten cemetery plot full of other long term residents with no room for growth.



How about modern high technology? We thought CDs would last a hundred years. I've had high quality CDs go bad in 18 months. So we get to try and become chemists to learn about the most critical part of the CD/DVD – the type and



composition of the dye used to make CD/DVDs. Next we discover the reflective coating of the CD/DVD is even more important since this medium will be rendered useless by the oxidation of the aluminum or silver used in the reflective coating. The answer is to use “Gold Archival” CD/DVDs that will last a hundred years. However, DVDs will soon be outdated by the new Blu-Ray DVD. It holds so much more. However, what will come after the Blu-Ray? I still have some great old 8-track tapes in my garage. I'm lucky because I also have an 8-track player. I'm not so lucky with the reels of magnetic tape recordings since I don't have a good reel-to-reel tape recorder or player.

So the challenge of using any kind of archival technology – paper or electronics – presents three impossible challenges:

1. Will it last more than 25 or even 50 years?
2. Will it be usable? Will we have a mechanism to read, edit, view, or hear it?
3. Trying to divine what kind of technology and storage medium will be in use in 50 years is impossible unless you can see into the future.

The Low Tech Solution

I've always said, “The best solution to a high tech problem is a low tech solution.” You will be surprised at how simple and inexpensive my archival solution is and not one you need to worry about or invest a lot of time or money.

The answer literally comes from a brief review of history. Who was Shakespeare? What did he write? Isaac Newton had some important things to say. Michelangelo shared inventive ideas before his time. So how were the works and words of these great people preserved? Did these guys pay big bucks to have their works recorded and preserved? I don't think so. They didn't even worry much about it. However, other

interested people paid great sums of money and spent thousands of hours carefully copying, printing, binding and circulating their books to libraries all over the world.

It was beyond the monetary and physical means of these great men to effectively preserve their histories and information. Relatives, colleagues and people interested in their accomplishments had the wisdom to do the serious work of preservation over many generations.



The secret to preservation is not in any kind of technology or mechanical process. The secret will be found in three places freely available to everyone:

1. Your fingers – what you write and type.
2. Your camera – the photos and movie histories you share.
3. Your voice – the oral information shared in your own words spiced up with your personal vocal inflections.



Remember, it's up to you to get this sharing process started!

The Final Piece in the Preservation Paradox

In the short term the best way to preserve and protect your history is to share it with several people in many different locations.



Let others worry about the best storage mechanisms, processes and technologies of the future.

Your history will be carefully preserved and handed down to future generations if it is accurate and interesting. That is, it must contain core values embedded in the firsthand experiences of you, your children and relatives. This will make your history precious and of value so others will take the time and invest the resources to preserve and communicate it to others.

No one will be interested in paying any attention to a perfectly preserved book or digital document unless there is a compelling reason to look beyond the table of contents or preface.

In the short term, use Heritage Collector to make and share gift CD/DVDs with your children and relatives.

Start sharing the important stories and events in your life.

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