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Photographic Memories

What it means to lose evidence of your past

Marin Rose

Events have conspired lately to remind me of a great loss I suffered two years ago, although I have learned that the loss is not as great as I initially felt it to be. I recently came across Amy Molloy's article in *The Guardian* called, "I lost a decade of photographs." It immediately caught my eye.

I come from a family pretty unconcerned about picture taking. Our family history is documented in just four photo albums covering my grandparents' wedding all the way to about year 2002, when digital took over. We've always been too focused on enjoying the moment to stop and commemorate it. Also, no one ever volunteered to carry the camera when we traveled.

So the volume of my digital library wasn't exceptionally large, but it was carefully organized into seasons of my life between college graduation and my move to Augusta. Though many of my clients boasted vaster photograph collections, it seemed they rarely or never sat down to enjoy them. I, on the other hand, browsed in iPhoto on a weekly, if not daily, basis. It was my preferred diversion, much like Facebook or Candy Crush is for some.

Scrolling through the years, I almost always found myself smiling. Snapshots of wonderful days with friends and family captured the beauty of our shared youth, all the things we experienced together. Even the memories of hard times brought me a sense of pride in endurance and reminded me to be grateful for every good thing.

When my computer crashed in 2013, I wasn't worried. I had meticulously backed up my files. Or so I thought. My financial records, professional documents, lists of potential pet names were still immaculate. But when I opened up iPhoto, only a few, blurry corrupted images remained.

After a few hours of utter panic and furious attempts to make it all come back, I faced facts and crawled into bed for the entire weekend. I cried a lot and spoke not at all. At the time, I felt I'd lost so much that I could never get back. The entirety of my 20s — gone. All that time I'd spent downloading, saving and categorizing — wasted. It felt so unfair.

On Monday morning, I got up and went to work. I stopped taking photos and deleted the iPhoto icon from my desktop so as to avoid the painful reminder.

Last week, I learned that my sister-in-law lost all of her childhood photos in a botched move from New Jersey from Puerto Rico in 1991. She was devastated, especially because her family had since broken.

"I'd comb through my aunts' photos for hours searching for a glimpse from when we were still a family unit under one household," she said. "The pictures transported me, fulfilled unanswered questions and gave life to memories that had been buried deep somewhere."

Whereas my reaction to losing my photos caused me to turn away from them, my sister-in-law later found herself "so obsessed with the idea of photographs that [I] took photography classes and learned to develop [my] own photos." She admits, though, that the experience also taught her "not to measure life by the things I have and not allow myself to be beholden to physical objects." She has a habit of purging unused items from her household every few months.

Molloy suffered the same initial sense of devastating loss when she discovered her hard drive was empty. But in the seven years since, her attitude has evolved. In her article she writes, "As a generation we've been groomed to believe that no event is valid unless there is evidence it took place... Could our need to capture every milestone stop us from living in the moment and ever feeling content?"



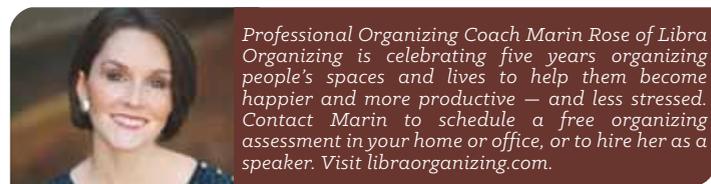
Since my own technological mishap, I've had to come to the conclusion that, though I wish it hadn't happened, I didn't really lose anything when my hard drive ate my digital library. My past is still my past and nothing can change that. Though the photos were one form of evidence of my third decade, I still possess more important evidence of it, including the enduring relationships I nurtured and all the subtle ways in which my experiences have caused me to grow and develop as a person.

I started taking pictures again from time to time but I don't spend much time on them. In the end, a photo is as inaccurate and misleading as our memory. Better to live in the present than to document it.

But, still: back up.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Starting September 1, Marin will offer eight weekly workshops in Augusta. Topics will include letting go of stuff, organizing as a family, paper management and more. Meetings will be held Tuesdays from 5:30-7 p.m. at Whole Foods. Drop-in for \$10 a class or register for all eight and pay \$65. For more information, visit libraorganizing.com.



Professional Organizing Coach Marin Rose of Libra Organizing is celebrating five years organizing people's spaces and lives to help them become happier and more productive — and less stressed. Contact Marin to schedule a free organizing assessment in your home or office, or to hire her as a speaker. Visit libraorganizing.com.