Picture This: Cataloging Digital Family Photographs

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Tame your digital family photographs by adding names, dates, and other information to images to make them searchable. This presentation outlines a simple and effective process, from scanning and adding information to images to organizing and backing up your family photographs, so you can do it once and do it right. In this presentation:

1. Tech Terms
2. Scanning and Downloading Master Images
3. Adding Information to Digital Images
4. Organizing Digital Family Photos
5. Ensuring Data Security

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1. Tech Terms

- Pixel – very tiny elements
- PPI – pixels per inch, a measurement of a digital image's size
- Resolution – a measure of a digital image's density
- File format — the container for pixels, usually .tif or .jpg
- Metadata – data about data, or the way to embed information into a digital file

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2. Scanning or Downloading Master Images

The first of five tips in this presentation is to scan a photo or document once at a high resolution, saving in TIFF format. Then store that file as your master image. Reduce the size and resolution of the master to create a low-resolution smaller surrogate file for emailing or uploading.

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3. Adding Information Inside Images

Just as compartments in a TV dinner hold different types of food, virtual compartments in digital image files can hold several types of data — from the tiny pixels that form the image to text you add that identifies and describes the image.

This text is called metadata, or data about data. Metadata is powerful, simple to use, and hidden inside your photo editing software, waiting for you to use it.

Metadata is like a digital version of the back of a photograph, where you are free to write whatever you like. Add multiple forenames and surnames, event names, dates, locations, captions, and any other descriptive terms as tags using IPTC metadata categories.

Photo-editing software usually includes the ability to create albums or collections. Use tags to identify the content of your photos. Use collections as a container for holding similar groups of photos. Photo-editing software examples include Photoshop Elements, XnView, GraphicConverter, BreezeBrowser Pro, or IrFanView.

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4. Organizing Family Images

Create a filing hierarchy, so that your scans of photographs and documents have specific folders on your hard drive, simplifying your storage and making files more accessible. Again, consistency is key to good results. Custom file names for each scanned image are not as important because you can search and find individual photographs using information inside the image.

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5. Data Security

There are two essential elements to any effective backup system. The first is that is it automatic. "Set it and forget" it is an essential component. If you do manual backups, you become the most unreliable part of your system because you're busy and backups don't happen regularly. The second principal is that you use a hybrid approach, mostly because you can never predict what kind of disaster you're going to have.

Additional Resources

Scanners for Genealogy Research
http://bit.ly/38ZYPZy

Calculating Digital Image File Sizes
http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/lrm22/pixels2bytes/calculator.htm