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American family slideshows : 1952 - 1967

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AMERICAN FAMILY SLIDESHOWS: 1952 – 1967

by

Jennifer DiCocco

BFA Photography, University of the Arts, 2007

A thesis

presented to Ryerson University and

George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Program of

Photographic Preservation and Collections Management

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2010

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ABSTRACT

American Family Slideshows: 1952 – 1967

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Photographic Preservation and Collections Management

Ryerson University

Vernacular photography has been a popular topic of research within the platforms of the history of photography and sociological studies and, in its print form, has increasingly seen its value rise in the marketplace. However, the family slideshow has been largely excluded from these various sites of attention. This thesis explores the family slideshow as a cultural product of mid-twentieth-century America. The slideshow is analysed in terms of how it was presented to and consumed by families in the 1950s and 1960s. The main section of this thesis provides an analysis of a case study carried out regarding the slideshow. The case study collected oral histories from four individuals on their experiences with producing and viewing slideshows in the mid-twentieth century. The analysis provides qualitative research on the consumption, production, and viewing of the slideshow as a popular medium for family snapshots.

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Most importantly, I would like to thank the participants of my case study: Kenneth Bistline, Joanne Schiller, Alice Galuppo, Ruth Braband, and Richard Smith. Without their time, help, and willingness to share their family photographs with me, this project would not be possible.

CONTENTS

FIGURES	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	5
MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA: FAMILY, LEISURE, & CONSUMERISM	12
REPRESENTATION OF THE SLIDESHOW IN PERIOD ADS & MANUALS	15
DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY	22
CASE STUDY OF THE MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY FAMILY SLIDESHOW	25
CONCLUSION	36
APPENDIX: TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND EXCERPTS	38
BIBLIOGRAPHY	46

FIGURES

1. <i>Vacation Europe With Your Color Camera</i> , Eastman Kodak Company, 1954	14
2. Da-Lite Screen Company, Inc. advertisement, 1950	15
3. Three-Dimension Company advertisement, 1950	17
4. <i>How To Make Good Home Movies</i> , Eastman Kodak Company, 1966	18
5. Kodachrome slide by Kenneth Bistline, September 1960	18
6. Advertisement, 1950	20
7. Nickelodeon Company advertisement, 1955	21
8. Kodachrome slide, collection of Joanne Schiller	25
9. Kodachrome slide, collection of Joanne Schiller	26
10. Kodachrome slide by Kenneth Bistline, April 1960	27
11. Kodachrome slide by Kenneth Bistline, September 1964	28
12. Kodachrome slide by Kenneth Bistline, December 1963	29

INTRODUCTION

Millions of family snapshots exist in the form of slides.¹ The slideshow reached its peak in popularity in the United States as a shift in values, motivated by a period of prosperity following World War II, placed the family and domestic life at the center in the mid-twentieth century. Families reminisced about weekend trips to the beach, high school graduations, birthday parties, and other typically photographed activities while watching slideshows in their homes. The slideshow turned the once-private act of viewing a family album into a group activity.

Studies of vernacular photography have largely taken amateur snapshots and the family albums often containing them as subjects, in both historical and sociological contexts. Within these studies, the use of the slideshow, particularly during its peak in the mid-twentieth century, has been largely ignored. The purpose of this essay is to explore the family slideshow as a cultural product of mid-twentieth-century America, and determine how it was presented, produced and consumed at this time.

The methodology employed for this project includes a case study of the slideshow that consists of interviews with four slide collection owners. The case study explores these individuals' memories of viewing slideshows in the 1950s and 1960s, and their relationship with the collections today. Three of the owners were subjects of the slides, and one was the maker, while all four had experience with viewing slideshows. This qualitative research provides firsthand accounts of individual engagements with the slideshow.

1. It is important to note that the term *slide* is the commonly used vernacular term, while *positive transparency* or *color positive film* are the correct technical terms for the medium.

While the family slideshow mostly occurred throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, this paper focuses on the 1950s and 1960s in order to provide parameters for my research. Following the Great Depression and World War II, the United States experienced a shift in values and a redefinition of family life. Looking at the history of the slideshow, it is also during this time that this cultural phenomenon reached a peak in popularity. To provide readers with a social context, this essay will examine the United States in the mid-twentieth century, specifically looking at the family, leisure activities, and consumerism, as these were common and interconnected snapshot subjects. The slideshow, as it appeared in advertisements and photography manuals, will also be discussed, determining how the slideshow was presented to consumers, and how companies were educating consumers on what and how to photograph.

The earliest example of image projection—the magic lantern show—originated in the seventeenth century, predating photography. Drawings or paintings on glass were projected through a magic lantern—a predecessor of the slide projector—for educational and entertainment purposes. With the advent of photography, slides were soon made using photographic processes. Showmen toured throughout Europe and the United States, exhibiting lantern slides. At the end of the nineteenth century, amateurs were able to create slides from their own negatives using commercially available gelatin dry plates.² The late nineteenth century also saw the earliest moving pictures through magic lantern shows. With shorter exposure times, cameras were able to capture action in a series of

2. Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, 4th ed. (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2007), 196.

frames. By projecting the images, viewers could gain a sense of motion, making the magic lantern show a precursor to cinema.³

Although it was common to hand paint black and white lantern slides, it was not until the Lumière Brothers introduced the autochrome plate, an additive screen process, in 1907 that viewers could fully experience a photographic image in "natural" colour. Autochromes could be projected or viewed using an apparatus produced by the Lumière Company. From the start, autochromes appealed to amateurs with leisure and money. As with lantern slides, makers of autochromes often traveled around Europe and the United States to exhibit them to home audiences for entertainment purposes.

While lantern slides and autochromes offered viewers a slideshow experience, they were not inexpensive, and it took a skilled amateur to produce them. It was not until a few years after the 1935 introduction of Kodak's colour positive film, Kodachrome, invented by Leopold Mannes and Leopold Godowsky, Jr.,⁴ that the slideshow became a medium consumed by the masses. Within a few years of its introduction, Kodachrome was a colour film made to fit standard small-format cameras, and could be exposed at snapshot speeds with available light. It was a film that made colour photography accessible to amateur photographers. Kodachrome also brought colour to both professional and amateur filmmaking as it was actually first introduced as a 16mm movie film a year before its debut for still photography. In February of 1937, Kodak introduced the Kodaslide projector for two-by-two inch glass-mounted slides. Two years later, the

3. Ibid., 253.

4. Mannes and Godowsky, professional musicians and amateur photographers, began experimenting with color photography as a hobby. After gaining interest from C.E. Kenneth Mees, Director of the Kodak Research Laboratories, Mannes and Godowsky were invited to continue and perfect their research with the company.

company announced that the film would be returned to customers in Kodaslide Ready-Mounts, allowing the images to be viewed as soon as they were returned from processing.

One of the earliest and largest advertisements for the slideshow was Kodak's *Cavalcade of Color* at the 1939 World's Fair in New York. In *Kodak at the New York World's Fair*, published by Eastman Kodak Company to memorializing their exhibition, the company stated that the main focus of their display was "the most spectacular showing of colour photography ever arranged... a World's Fair feature which stands out prominently in the minds of all who see it."⁵ On a 22-foot high screen that extended 187 feet around a semicircular room, The *Cavalcade of Color* displayed large colour projections, approximately 50,000 times their slides' original size. Kodak's purpose was to demonstrate to visitors that they, too, could create vivid colour images with the new Kodachrome film, and display them larger than life using Kodak's projectors.

Not only an amateur pastime, slideshows were used for educational purposes, in the workplace, and, as the recent exhibition, *SlideShow*, at the Baltimore Museum of Art explains, by visual artists. While each of the uses is important in the history of this medium, the focus of this paper is strictly on its vernacular use: amateurs using the slideshow format to present their family snapshots.

5. Eastman Kodak Company, *Kodak at the New York World's Fair* (Rochester, NY: Eastman Kodak Company, 1940), 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vernacular photography—specifically family snapshots—has been extensively explored and analysed in recent research and subsequent publications. However, the slideshow, the form in which millions of family snapshots were once viewed, has often been ignored. In order to understand how the family slideshow was made, understood, and consumed as a cultural product of mid-twentieth-century America, my research examines such topics as broad studies of vernacular photography, sociological studies of family photographs and albums, advertisements and manuals of slide projectors and slide film, as well as cultural studies of mid-twentieth-century America.

The catalog from the 1998 exhibition at the SFMOMA, *Snapshots: the Photography of Everyday Life, 1888 to the Present*, begins with an introduction by the show's curator, Douglas R. Nickel. Nickel examines the vernacular photograph within the museological environment, and argues that the snapshot, which tends to be valued using aesthetic standards, defeats any attempts at canonization. He explores common themes throughout the snapshot's history, and what he calls "the collective bourgeois experience."⁶ Most importantly, Nickel's essay provides a place for snapshot photography within the larger history of photography. Geoffrey Batchen's essay, "Vernacular Photographies," argues not that it should be included in the traditional history of photography, but rather a new history should be written that acknowledges that

6. Douglas R. Nickel, "The Snapshot: Some Notes," in *Snapshots: the Photography of Everyday Life, 1888 to the Present* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 13.

the dominant historical use of photography has been for vernacular purposes.⁷ While Batchen's argument is an important consideration in relation to these types of objects, my research is reflective of Nickel's argument that vernacular photography, and specifically the family slideshow, is very much a part of the broader history of photography.

In the introduction to *Family Snaps: the Meanings of Domestic Photography*, Patricia Holland states, "Family photographs are shaped by the public conventions of the image and rely on a public technology which is widely available. They depend on shared understandings."⁸ Holland's argument is a point that is applicable to the slideshow medium. As will be explored and discussed throughout this essay, the use of slides was strongly shaped by public conventions and available technology. Consumers devoured slides because it was presented to them as being the best choice for their family snapshots. This resulted in consumers photographing their families in a way that was suited for slideshow presentations, and entertaining for an audience.

In "Family as Place: Family Photograph Albums and the Domestication of Public and Private Space," Deborah Chambers studies how family albums can represent ideas about spatial identity and belonging. Her methodology included interviewing ten women about photographic albums they made in the 1950s. Although not focused on the slideshow, Chambers' interviewees provide insightful comparisons of family slides to their paper counterparts, discussing that slides did not have "the talismanic qualities of

7. Geoffrey Batchen, "Vernacular Photographies," in *Each Wild Idea* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001).

8. Patricia Holland, "Introduction: History, Memory and the Family Album," in *Family Snaps: the Meaning of Domestic Photography*, ed. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland (London: Virago Press, 1991), 4.

photographs.”⁹ While the women preferred photographic albums and prints, they left the production of slideshows to their husbands. This is an idea that was reinforced through my research of the slide collection owners; three out of the four collections were produced by males.

Gillian Rose’s research methodology, discussed in “‘Everyone’s cuddled up and it just looks really nice’: an emotional geography of some mums and their family photos,” is described as “a small-scale, qualitative research project, which used in-depth, semi-structured interviews,”¹⁰ Rose looked at what a group of mothers did with their family photographs, and the feelings attached to them. Beyond her methods, most interesting was Rose’s observations of the mothers’ need to physically hold and touch the photographs when viewing them. This is an act that is completely lost when viewing photographs in the form of a slideshow. Although my research does not specifically focus on the emotional attachments people have with their photographs, both Rose and Chambers’ essays provided me with a starting point for how to approach the case study.

In “Studying the Home Mode: An Exploration of Family Photography and Visual Culture,” a 1980 article in *Studies in Visual Communication*, Christopher Musello’s research focused on producing a general description of family photography within everyday life, and to examine its properties as a form of documentation and

9. Deborah Chambers, “Family as Place: Family Photograph Albums and the Domestication of Public and Private Space,” in *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*, ed. Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 108.

10. Gillian Rose, “‘Everyone’s cuddled up and it just looks really nice’: an emotional geography of some mums and their family photos,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 5, no. 4 (December 2004): 549.

communication.¹¹ Musello interviewed and observed twelve families to gain a more detailed view of how photography was incorporated into domestic life and experience. The most valuable section of the essay for this project was his observations on “exhibition events,” including any activity in which photographs were shown and viewed, either individually or as a group. His conclusion is that photographs presented to others are typically embedded in an oral context, delineating what should be attended to and what significances are located in the image.¹² This was a point that was observed when conducting the interviews with the slide collection owners.

In *Snapshot Versions of Life*, Richard Chalfen explores both the photographer and viewer’s roles in constructing interpretations of snapshots.¹³ Like Musello’s research in “Studying the Home Mode,” Chalfen discusses the dialogues attached to viewing family photographs. He states, “Visual renditions of life experiences that appear in family albums, slide shows, or home movies are inevitably accompanied by parallel verbal accounts. [They] serve to expand and complement minimal identifications common to other kinds of written captions... These accompanying remarks appear to be as conventional as the imagery itself.”¹⁴

While this project focuses on the slideshow, it is important to consider the related popularity of home movies in the 1950s and 1960s. Like the slideshow, home movies were presented to amateurs as a tool to document a family’s increasing amount of leisure

11. Christopher Musello, “Studying the Home Mode: An Exploration of Family Photography and Visual Communication,” *Studies in Visual Communication* 6 (1980): 23.

12. Ibid, 33-34.

13. Richard Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1987), 119.

14. Ibid, 128-129.

activity. *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film*, by Patricia Zimmermann, provides a historical study of amateur film from 1897 through 1962. Using the sixty-five-year time frame, Zimmermann explores the history of amateur film by looking at the relationship between consumer technology and bourgeois nuclear families. Most useful is the chapter titled, “Do-It-Yourself,” in which the author discusses the postwar shift of viewing movies in theaters to producing and starring in them at home. With this shift, amateurs created home movies that were reflective of a Hollywood narrative.

Zimmermann states, “Just as suburban golfers practiced drives and putts to lower their scores, family filmmaking continually veered toward the illusory adoption of Hollywood professional expertise.”¹⁵ The need to create interesting home movies to entertain an audience is reflective of how people were creating slideshows. Entertainment at the cinema now shifted to family rooms to view slideshows and home movies. Amateur producers were using elements of cinema, such as narrative sequences and titles to create a similar experience in their own living rooms.

To understand the slideshow as a cultural product of mid-twentieth-century America, it was important to examine literature on the social landscape of 1950s and 1960s United States. In *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, historian Elaine Tyler May describes postwar America as one that was focused on family life and the home, and consumer patterns reflected that idea. May states, “Purchasing for the home helped alleviate traditional American uneasiness with consumption: the fear that spending would lead to decadence. Family-centered spending reassured Americans that affluence would strengthen the American way of life. The goods purchased by

15. Patricia Rodden Zimmermann, “Do-It-Yourself 1950-1962,” in *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 122.

middle-class consumers...were intended to foster traditional values.”¹⁶ This is a trend that is reflected in the study of slideshows. As the occurrence of slideshows increased, equipment such as slide projectors and screens became popular domestic appliances.

Print advertisements and manuals of slideshow equipment from the 1950s and 1960s were a valuable source of information for my research, and are discussed in detail in a later section of this thesis. Photography magazines such as *Modern Photography*, *Popular Photography*, and *U.S. Camera* displayed advertisements for slide projectors, slide film, and other slideshow equipment. Amateur photography manuals, published by companies like Kodak, explained the best way to photograph their family for the purpose of entertaining slideshows. The exploration of this material allowed me to understand how the slideshow was presented to consumers in mid-twentieth-century America, and how companies were educating amateur photographers on the use of slideshows and related equipment.

While primarily an object of sociological research, the slideshow was also the topic of a 2005 exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art. The exhibition catalog includes essays by Charles Harrison, Robert Storr, and the show’s curator, Darsie Alexander. The exhibition and subsequent publication examined the slideshow as employed by conceptual artists.¹⁷ Both Alexander and Storr begin their essays with brief cultural histories of the slideshow, commenting on its importance within the photographic

16. Elaine Tyler May, “The Commodity Gap: Consumerism and the Modern Home,” in *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1988), 166.

17. Darsie Alexander, ed., *Slide Show: Projected Images in Contemporary Art* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 3-69.

medium. Although neither Alexander nor Storr delve into the slideshow's use within the family, their essays are some of the few that mention the medium's significance.

MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA: FAMILY, LEISURE, & CONSUMERISM

“Leisure has been democratized,” declared a 1953 *Business Week* article.¹⁸ The article was referring to 40-hour workweeks, two-day weekends, vacation time with pay, and an increase in the national income, which helped to redefine the American middle-class ideal.

Following World War II, Americans were eager to start families. Marriage rates and birthrates skyrocketed. Women, who made up a large part of the work force during the war, returned to the home to care for growing families. A life that focused on family, domesticity, and leisure was encouraged. Cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead discusses this postwar lifestyle change in “The Pattern of Leisure in Contemporary American Culture.” “The Depression brought a slackening of the whole system. When people did not have enough work, no money, and so no symbolic right to play, entertaining was curtailed, movie money was short, dates lacked gaiety, childbearing was postponed... After the war, there came, understandably, a desire to recoup these qualitative perceived losses, to get some joy out of life.”¹⁹

With disposable incomes and increased free time, mid-twentieth-century consumers were quick to spend their money on leisure activities and household goods. *Business Week* estimated that as much as 15 percent of total consumer expenditures—

18. Elliot V. Bell, ed., “The Leisured Masses,” *Business Week*, September 12, 1953, 142.

19. Margaret Mead, “The Pattern of Leisure in Contemporary American Culture,” in *Mass Leisure*, ed. Eric Larrabee and Rolf Meyersohn (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1958), 13.

which was estimated to be \$218 billion in 1954—were spent on leisure.²⁰ As photography became more accessible at this time, it was a consumer good that quickly became a popular hobby and leisure activity for many. In 1953, the Editorial Service Bureau at Kodak produced a report titled, *Photography's Role in the Culture of America*. In a section in which the company reported its findings on the mass consumption of photography by families, Kodak estimated that seventy percent of American families owned one or more cameras. In addition, there was a tremendous growth in the popularity of colour transparencies from 18 million per year in 1941 to 170 million in 1951.²¹

Photography also served to document families' leisure activities. Families began to spend discretionary income on vacations, such as trips across the United States, short weekend trips to state parks or the beach, or travel abroad. Photography was an essential tool to record vacation events. A 1951 survey completed by *U.S. Camera*, as reported by Kodak, estimated that U.S. vacationers spent over \$17 million for still cameras and over \$26 million for still film during their vacation trips.²² Companies educated their consumers on how to photograph while on vacation by publishing a vast library of manuals on the topic (see fig. 1). Eastman Kodak Company presented consumers with such manuals as *Vacation Europe With Your Color Camera*, *Vacation USA With Your Color Camera*, and *Vacation Caribbean With Your Color Camera*. Each manual educated travelers on the best photo ops for each location. Photography fit well into the

20. Elliot V. Bell, ed., "The Leisured Masses," *Business Week*, September 12, 1953, 145.

21. Eastman Kodak Company, *Photography's Role in the Culture of America* (Rochester: Eastman Kodak Company, 1953), 10.

22. Ibid.

new leisure class of American families, serving as both an activity and recorder of such events.



Figure 1. *Vacation Europe With Your Color Camera*, Eastman Kodak Company, 1954.

REPRESENTATION OF THE SLIDESHOW IN PERIOD ADS & MANUALS

In the consumer-driven culture of mid-twentieth-century America, the slideshow was often specifically advertised to families with disposable income as an entertaining leisure activity. Ads filling the pages of such publications as *Modern Photography*, *The Camera*, *U.S. Camera*, and *Popular Photography* called out to consumers to buy the latest and greatest in projectors, screens, and other equipment. Companies published how-to manuals for making the best slideshows. The importance of researching ads and manuals for this project is not to only understand how the slideshow was presented to consumers, but also to gain a sense of the degree of the slideshow's popularity at this time.



Figure 2. Da-Lite Screen Company, Inc. advertisement, “Show Your Vacation Pictures 3 Times Brighter,” printed in *Modern Photography*, October 1950.

Cashing in on the growing prosperity of the new mid-twentieth-century American lifestyle, companies marketed their equipment by showing happy, middle-class, nuclear families. A 1950 advertisement for the Da-Lite Challenger Screen (see fig. 2) displays a young family on the beach while telling consumers to “show their vacation pictures 3 times brighter.”²³ A well-dressed mother in heels carries her Explorer Slide Projector down a busy street—most likely on her way to show friends slides from her family’s latest vacation—in an advertisement by Bell & Howell. Ads for the latest and greatest in slideshow equipment populated the pages of photography magazines. In the August 1955 issue of *Popular Photography*, thirty-three pages of advertisements focused on or included slideshow equipment, such as projectors, screens, and slide film. Even ads for 35mm cameras depicted slides as the end result. A Kodak ad for the Retina Reflex 35mm camera displayed the camera with Kodachrome and Ektachrome slides scattered in the foreground, indicating that slides and slideshows were the medium of choice.²⁴

Advertisements for projectors and screens frequently offered free how-to manuals on producing the best slideshows. As mid-twentieth-century Americans bought the photography equipment that was being marketed to them, literature—often published by photography companies—became key in providing them with do-it-yourself instructions. A 1960 advertisement for an Airequipt Manufacturing Company, Inc. Projector in *Modern Photography*, offered their customers a free booklet titled, *Ways to Improve Slide Shows*. A 1950 ad (see fig. 3) depicting a clown using a slide projector by Three Dimension Company tells customers that with their projectors and how-to book, they

23. Da-Lite Screen Company, Inc., “Show Your Vacation Pictures 3 Times Brighter,” advertisement, *Modern Photography*, October 1950, 78.

24. Eastman Kodak Company, “Master of Every Picture Situation,” *Popular Photography*, October 1958, 136.

could create “the greatest slideshow on earth right in [their] own home starring [their] favorite subjects...”²⁵



Figure 3. Three-Dimension Company advertisement, “The Greatest Slide Show on Earth,” printed in *Modern Photography*, October 1950.

Manuals for amateur photographers advised consumers as to which were the best cameras and film to record summer vacations, baby’s first steps, high school graduations, birthday parties, and more. They also provided tips on how to photograph specific situations. In *How To Make Good Home Movies*, Eastman Kodak Company explained the best way for photographers to capture scenes of their babies (see fig. 4). When viewing slide collections for the case study of this project, I came across a slide that was

25. Three-Dimension Company, “The Greatest Slide Show on Earth,” advertisement, *Modern Photography*, October 1950, 87.

reminiscent of this suggested photo op (see fig. 5). A comparison of the manual's illustration to one of the owner's slides, the influence that companies like Kodak had on consumers is apparent.



Figure 4. *How To Make Good Home Movies*, Eastman Kodak Company, 1966.



Figure 5. Kodachrome slide by Kenneth Bistline (Owner D), September 1960.

What is most significant in these manuals is the heavy presence of the slideshow. Consumers were being taught how to photograph in ways that would allow their images to translate well into the slideshow format, and entertain an audience. Kodak's *How to Make Good Pictures* educates consumers on the importance of sharing slides. The manual states, "[Colour] slides are made to be shown, even shown off. When they are well shown, they can be very effective and provide enjoyable entertainment... Try to select pictures as interesting to others as they are to you. Simple thoughtfulness like this will assure that your friends will look forward to enjoying your slide shows."²⁶ Manuals showed photographers how to technically master the medium, but also showed them what was important to photograph. Consumers were being taught to photograph their families in very specific ways.

The 1960 manual *Clicking with Color*, another Kodak publication, enthusiastically suggested that to entertain an audience, photographs should be visual narratives. "Everybody loves a story! And that includes everyone who sees your pictures. To have more fun taking and showing your pictures, why not arrange them so they tell a story? ...One reason picture stories are such a good idea is that they show people *doing* things, not just standing, staring at the camera."²⁷

"Finishing and Mounting" in Ira B. Current's 1961 publication, *How to Process Color Films at Home*, includes a section on "showmanship," educating amateur photographers on the best way to present their slideshow. Prior to the show, Current suggests a test run to ensure proper lighting and focus. For the performance of the

26. Eastman Kodak Company, "Showing Off Your Slides," in *How to Make Good Pictures*, 33rd ed. (Rochester, NY: Eastman Kodak Company, 1967), 168.

27. Eastman Kodak Company, "Tell a Story," in *Clicking with Color* (Rochester, NY: Eastman Kodak Company, 1960), 27.

slideshow, he states, “Like movies, slides should be edited...Arrange the slides in a good sequence, designed to hold the attention of the audience. If you are going to say something during the showing of the slides, have at least an outline of remarks, and better yet, a script.”²⁸ Current continues by suggesting the use of background music to set the mood. He ends his instructions by stressing that the number of slides should be limited to around 150; anything more will exhaust the audience.

Advertisements and manuals presented the slideshow to families as a leisure activity. They also offered a do-it-yourself cinematic hobby for consumers by presenting them with the opportunity to star in, produce, and present their own shows. Advertisements and manuals stressed the importance of entertaining an audience through promoting elements such as narrative sequences and title slides (see figs. 6 and 7). The exploration of ads and manuals from the mid-twentieth century suggests that the slideshow was the medium of choice for viewing family photographs at this time.



Figure 6. Advertisement, “Lights Out!” printed in *Modern Photography*, December 1950.

28. Ira B. Current, “Finishing and Mounting,” in *How to Process Color Films at Home* (New York: American Photographic Book Publishing Company, Inc., 1961), 106.

"Old Time"
MAGIC LANTERN Novelty SLIDES:

Add "SPICE" and showmanship to your slide programs with these elegantly designed and colored 2x2-inch reproductions of authentic announcement slides used in the Nickelodeons of yesteryear. Humorous...nostalgic. Genuine Kodachromes in ready-mounts to fit all 2 x 2-inch slide projectors. 12 subjects are now available. Send coupon below. ↴ 50c each postpaid.

Ladies
 BEING ANNOYED
 While in this Theatre
 KINDLY NOTIFY
 Special Officer

Watch for NEW SUBJECTS in this space!

NICKELODEON COMPANY NEW FLIEDNER BLDG.
 PORTLAND 5, OREGON

Please send literature about MAGIC LANTERN SLIDES to:

PRINT NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____

Figure 7. Nickelodeon Company advertisement, "'Old Time' Magic Lantern Novelty Slides," printed in *Popular Photography*, August 1955.

DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY

The core methodology for this thesis is the collecting of firsthand accounts to better understand how slideshows were presented to, produced and viewed by families in the mid-twentieth century. To gather this anecdotal information, I sought slide collection owners through a newspaper advertisement.²⁹ My use of this kind of case study was deeply influenced by Gillian Rose's essay, "'Everyone's cuddled up and it just looks really nice': an emotional geography of some mums and their family photos," "a small-scale, qualitative research project, which used in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore what a particular group of mothers were doing with their family photographs."³⁰ While Rose, a British geographer whose research is focused within the field of visual culture, explores how this group of mothers view and feel towards their photographs, the purpose of the case study used in this thesis is only to collect anecdotal information.

For this thesis I interviewed four slide collection owners. It was important to keep the area of research very focused because it is a smaller-scale research project. I established guidelines for myself in identifying appropriate case study participants. I focused specifically on the years 1950 to 1965 because the family slideshow reached a peak in popularity at this time. The mid-twentieth century was also a time when the American family and home was a popular focus, which is reflected in the previous section on mid-twentieth-century American culture.

29. The advertisement ran in the classified section of *the Democrat and Chronicle* from January 30, 2010 through February 5, 2010.

30. Gillian Rose, "'Everyone's Cuddled Up and It Just Looks Really Nice': An Emotional Geography of Some Mums and Their Family Photos," *Studies in Visual Communications* 6, no. 1: 549.

To maintain the focus of this research, I interviewed collection owners from the Rochester area only. As the home of the Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester was a popular place for family slideshows to occur, and proved to be an important area in which to conduct this research. For the purpose of this small-scale research project, it was necessary to meet with only three to four slide collection owners. In addition to living in the Rochester area, the owners' collections had to fall within the parameters of 1950 to 1965. The four participants were chosen as they responded to the newspaper advertisement, as well as for their ability to best meet the criteria described above.

Many slide collections are now owned by descendants of the makers of the slides, which has resulted in the new owners having little to no experience in viewing the slides in the time of their creation. Three out of the four participants had experience in either making the slides or viewing the slides in the mid-twentieth century. However, I chose to interview one woman who was the owner of a slide collection made by her aunt, and had limited experience viewing slideshows in the mid-twentieth century. This alternate perspective of slideshows is one that is becoming more common as slide collections are being passed to younger generations.

During the meetings with the slide collection owners, I asked a series of questions to keep the discussions focused.³¹ The questions focused the participants' experiences with making and viewing slideshows. Participants were also asked about the number of family slides versus the number of photographic prints from the 1950 to 1965 time range to determine the popularity of the slideshow among these four cases. Our meetings ended with discussions about how often participants view their slide collections today, and what

31. The interview questions are listed in the appendix of this thesis.

their future plans are with the collection, providing accounts of the relationship people have today with large collections of slides.

CASE STUDY OF THE MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY FAMILY SLIDESHOW

Family snapshots exist in the form of slides for many people who experienced the mid-twentieth century, and their memories of that time often include viewing slideshows. It was necessary to collect oral histories of firsthand experiences to better understand the slideshow as a cultural product of mid-twentieth-century America. This resulted in a case study of people who viewed slides in the 1950s and 1960s, and were either the makers or present keepers of the slides. The case study consisted of qualitative research interviews with four collection owners.³²



Figure 8. Kodachrome slide, collection of Joanne Schiller (Owner A).

Collection owners were sought through a press release, written by Dresden Engle, public relations manager at George Eastman House, and an ad placed in the classified section of Rochester newspaper, *The Democrat and Chronicle*. The ad requested owners of slide collections from the 1950s and 1960s for interviews. It was interesting to learn how willing people were to share their family photos. Responses to the ads poured in

32. Interview questions and transcribed excerpts are listed in the appendix of this thesis.

almost immediately. E-mail and phone discussions helped me to decide on four owners. The criteria for choosing the owners were fairly simple. Their collection needed to contain a significant holding of slides from the 1950s or 1960s. The owners had to be either subjects or makers of their slide collection, and have memories of viewing slideshows.

Throughout the months of February and March, I met with the owners individually. Meetings lasted between one and three hours. Each meeting seemed to follow a routine, beginning with me asking the owners questions, and then viewing their slides. Although our conversations continued while viewing slides, the discussion questions were not directly related to image content, but rather concerned the use of photography within their family and their memories of slideshows. I was interested in their relationships to the slides today and expected that this would become evident as we viewed the slides together.



Figure 9. Kodachrome slide, collection of Joanne Schiller (Owner A).

Each owner brought in one to two hundred slides, most of which came from collections of over five hundred. Owner A inherited the collection from her aunt, the

primary photographer (see figs. 8 and 9). While she has very few memories of viewing the slides, I was interested in her relationship with the slides today. Owner B, a retired Kodak employee, shared slides from family vacations taken by his father throughout Owner B's childhood. The collection of Owner C is comprised of childhood snapshots, taken also by her father. Owner D was the maker of the slide collection. His slides contain images of his wife and four daughters on family vacations, Christmas mornings, first days of school, and other commonly photographed events (see figs. 9, 10, and 11).



Figure 10. Kodachrome slide by Kenneth Bistline (Owner D), April 1960.

The discussion questions began by asking participants to describe the use of photography within their families. I was curious to know if the collection of slides represented the beginning of their family's use of photography. I asked if there was a primary photographer, and during what types of occasions the camera was used. We then discussed the event of the slideshow. The owners informed me of how often their family viewed slideshows, and who made up the viewers besides their immediate family. I asked if there were common dialogues when viewing, if there was a designated narrator, or if

the conversation was kept casual. Our conversation then shifted to their present relationship with the slides. They showed me the containers they house the slides in, discussed how often the slides were viewed today, and what the future holds for the collection of objects. It is important to consider that the number of people that once used the slideshow to view their family snapshots may possibly be higher in the Rochester area because it is the home of Kodak.

Considering the proliferation of advertising regarding slideshows and related equipment, the entertainment qualities made slides an obvious choice for many, including Owner D and his wife. He began photographing his family with a 35mm Kodak camera when his second daughter was born in the early 1950s. While purchasing the camera, the photo dealer offered a choice between colour print film and colour slide film. Owner D and his wife picked the slide film for the simple fact that they thought it would be interesting and fun to view their snapshots that way. For them, a slideshow far exceeded passing around prints. However, they did consider having print copies made of their slides.



Figure 11. Kodachrome slide by Kenneth Bistline (Owner D), September 1964.

Before owning a slide projector, Owner D and his family viewed their slides in a tabletop viewer. Their first slide projector was purchased with S&H Green Stamps, a rewards program popular from the 1930s through the 1980s. After purchasing items at retailers like grocery stores, department stores, and gas stations, customers were rewarded with S&H Green Stamps depending on how much money was spent. Owner D and his family collected the stamps in books, and cashed them after collecting several books-worth. At the redemption center, Owner D was presented with a binder of items to choose from, resulting in the family's first slide projector and screen.



Figure 12. Kodachrome slide by Kenneth Bistline (Owner D), December 1963.

As subjects and viewers of slideshows, Owners B and C described their fathers' use of slides. An avid photographer with a home darkroom, Owner C's father bought his first 35mm camera around 1950. For the next decade or so, slides were his medium of choice. Owner C remembers seeing a few prints of herself as a baby, and a few prints that

were made from slides, but all other snapshots from the 1950s and into the 1960s were slides. For Owner B, his childhood in the 1950s and 1960s was completely documented in slides.

Slides and slideshows were the social norms for the amateur snapshot in the 1950s and 1960s. In *Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography*, Patricia Holland describes family photographs as being dependent upon this. Holland states, “Family photographs are shaped by the public conventions of the image and rely on a public technology which is widely available.”³³ Although Holland’s theory focuses on image content, it is an idea that is applicable to snapshot mediums. People used the technology that was presented and made available to them.

The primary focus of my case study was to better understand the owners’ memories of viewing slideshows. Their descriptions of viewing family snapshots were unique, and void of common themes associated with looking at traditional family albums. Unlike slideshows, the viewing of photographic albums and prints can be experienced in both singular and collective ways, but is more often a solitary experience. Viewers can physically hold the object in their hands. Traditional family albums offer viewers a time to reflect privately on their snapshots. Darsie Alexander describes the slideshow in the exhibition catalogue for the 2005 exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art, *SlideShow*. Alexander writes, “Slides provided something that no other photographic medium offered—a communal experience of showing and receiving large-scale pictures of private life in a [colour]-saturated palette. Family slide shows were a coming-together for

33. Patricia Holland, “Introduction: History, Memory and the Family Album,” in *Family Snaps: the Meaning of Domestic Photography*, ed. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland (London: Virago Press, 1991), 4.

members of a discrete clan, a time to watch and reminisce in the comfort of the living room.”³⁴

Discussing the “communal experience,” which one would think was personalized in accordance with individual families, the owners described events that were typical, and almost standardized. These events were even preceded by similar routines. Upon receiving processed slides, the makers of the slides would write notes on each box, describing the image content. The slides were often organized and placed into slide trays. Owner C described the excitement of seeing the little yellow box of slides—most likely Kodak’s packaging—arrive in the mail. She knew that they would be viewing the slides later that night. For Owners B, C, and D, viewing of new slides was also almost immediate.

Each owner described gathering in a room of their family’s home after dinner to watch slides. Owner B and D’s families gathered in the living room, and Owner C headed upstairs to her father’s “den.” She remembers lying on the floor, while the rest of the family lined up on the couch. For Owners C and D, the audience was primarily their immediate family, with the occasional neighbors or family friends. In addition to immediate family viewing, Owner B’s father would often bring the slides and projector to family gatherings. While slideshows were presenting bigger, brighter, and better versions of family snapshots, this example of portability shows that the medium was accessible like traditional family albums.

Owner C described a mostly quiet viewing experience. The conversation during Owner D’s slideshows were casual, sometimes commenting on things like who’s birthday

34. Darsie Alexander, “Slideshow,” in *SlideShow: Projected Images in Contemporary Art* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 3.

party they were viewing. For Owners C and D, the images were often familiar to the viewers, and explanations were unnecessary. Owner B remembers collective dialogues, everyone chiming in with individual reflections. The images often spurred memories of events that were not necessarily represented in the slides, but happened around the same time.

In listening to the owners describe their experiences, the influence of cinema on slideshows was obvious. The owners consistently used the term *watch* in reference to viewing slides. A bowl of popcorn, a movie-watching staple, was often present for Owner D's slideshows. He stressed that the slideshow was a form of entertainment for his family, especially in the winter. They did not own a television at the time, so the slideshow provided them with an at-home viewing activity. Considering the basics of experiencing slideshows—sitting in the dark, looking at a screen brightly lit by projected images—the comparison to watching movies is obvious.

Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film, by Patricia Zimmermann, examines the cinematic influence on mid-twentieth-century home movies, specifically in their production. She states, “By the 1950s photography and family-magazine writers inscribed technical manipulation and a slavish conformity to Hollywood visual logic as the goal of amateur production. Hollywood style...inoculated home movies, protecting them from chaos... Subject choice, style, continuity, editing, audience reaction, and theories of film aesthetics homogenized amateur film...”³⁵ Like home movies, consumers were encouraged to adopt cinematic styles to entertain their audiences. This was evident in the examination of the slideshow in ads and manuals, presented earlier in this essay.

35. Patricia R. Zimmermann, “Do-It-Yourself,” in *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 122.

The Hollywood method also translates to the viewing experiences of slideshows.

Families were presenting their snapshots in often titled narrative sequences, and viewing them in the dark on a screen upon which was a projected image, much like going to the movies. The owners were entertained by *watching* their family snapshots.

The relationships the owners have today with their slide collections are fairly similar. Owner A has an interesting—but not entirely unique—relationship with her slide collection. When she recently inherited the collection from her aunt, it was the first time she was viewing many of the slides. Except for the labels her aunt placed on the slides, she has only her own family memories to organize and date the images. She took on the task of choosing the ones she found most interesting, digitizing them, putting them onto a DVD, and handing them out to family members. The inheritance of unfamiliar slide collections is something that will continue to occur as the era of the slideshow falls further into the past.

Like Owner A, Owners B, C, and D are more concerned with the image content rather than the physical slides. They, too, have started or completed the digitization of their slide collections. Rather than scanning his slides, Owner B projects the images onto a white wall, and then digitally photographs them, capturing the images as they were intended to be viewed. He believes that once there is a digital file for each image in the collection, the slides will be discarded. To retain the notes that his father wrote on the slides' boxes, he will copy them into a Microsoft Word document. For Owner B, making

digital versions of his slides will make them more accessible, and he is hoping to pass them on to younger generations.³⁶

Like Owner B, Owner C is capturing digital files of her slides by digitally photographing their projections because she feels the slide versions are inaccessible. She dislikes the fact that her childhood snapshots exist in slide form. This has made her adamant about creating photo albums with prints for her own children and grandchildren. Her dislike of slideshows is due to their controlled viewing system. She prefers the self-pacing and spontaneity she can experience when looking through photo albums or prints by herself. Owner A also has a similar reaction to slides, and prefers looking at photo albums rather than slides.

Deborah Chambers addresses this adverse reaction to slideshows—often by female viewers—in her “Family as Place” essay. Chambers interviewed women about albums they made in the 1950s. In their discussion about slides, the women preferred photographic prints. “Slides did not have the talismanic qualities of photographs... [They] were less tactile, less treasurable, and less treasured. When projected, their secret properties were briefly exposed and quickly lost to a ‘mass’ audience, being viewed by a group rather than intimately by one or two individuals in private.”³⁷

36. During our conversation, the issue of image stability was raised by Owner B. After a long time had passed since he and his wife had viewed the slides—he estimates between forty and fifty years—he was surprised at the great condition of his slides, most of which were recorded on Kodachrome film. A few slides, purchased by his family as souvenirs at various tourist destinations, were recorded on Ektachrome film. He noticed that the souvenir slides had suffered dramatic color shifts, and was disappointed in losing those images. While Kodachrome is known for its color stability, slide film such as Ektachrome typically experiences severe color shifts, resulting in owners scanning their collections to color correct the images, rendering the physical slides useless.

37. Deborah Chambers, “Family as Place: Family Photograph Albums and the Domestication of Public and Private Space,” in *Picturing Place: Photography and the*

Gillian Rose also addresses the tactile qualities of photographic prints in her essay, “‘Everyone’s cuddled up and it just looks really nice’: an emotional geography of some mums and their family photos.” Rose’s small-scale qualitative research project interviewed mothers with young children about their relationships with their family photographs. Rose stated that as her interviewees showed her their family photographs, they picked up and held the frames or albums as they talked about them. Rose concluded, “There is a tactility to looking at family photos which is also about enacting a corporeal closeness between the viewer and the person pictured. This suggests that, as with so many kinds of visibility, looking at photographs is not only visual.”³⁸ This aspect of viewing family photographs is completely lost with the slideshow.

During our discussion, Owner C made a valuable point about the slideshow. Mid-twentieth-century American families spent more time at home together, and that’s why the slideshow became so popular. She feels that the slideshow is a medium that families would be incapable of using today. Her point is obvious when considering the owners’ digitization projects. The four owners from my case study exhibit no regard for their slides as original snapshots. Their digitization projects place an emphasis on the importance of preserving the image content, leaving the physical slides to become throw-away objects. The slideshow fit the social conventions of mid-twentieth-century America, but is no longer relevant to more current lifestyles.

Geographical Imagination, ed. Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 108.

38. Gillian Rose, “‘Everyone’s cuddled up and it just looks really nice’: an emotional geography of some mums and their family photos,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 5, no. 4 (December 2004): 549.

CONCLUSION

With the advent of more recent digital technologies, the traditional, analog-based family slideshow has been replaced by a virtual version. Photo-sharing websites like Flickr, Photobucket, and Snapfish offer users modernized, more "convenient" versions of the slideshow. Computer programs such as iPhoto and Windows Photo Gallery allow people to create slideshows as screensavers for their computers. Most recently, with the use of such hand-held devices as iPhones, iPods, and iPads, the slideshow is able to be shared among viewers, and is not dependant on a static computer screen. This evolutionary and hybrid form of the slideshow suggests future viewing situations that may result in the slideshow becoming more like the family album again, with snapshots being produced for the purpose of portable presentation. In "A Life More Photographic: Mapping the networked image," Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis discuss this phenomenon of shared images in the digital age. They state, "Whilst an invitation to someone else's slide night of holiday snaps has been something to be avoided at all costs, the photo-sharing environment encourages a prolonged engagement with the image, where the act of viewing other people's images online becomes a form of leisure and a social activity."³⁹

Owners of slide collections, like the ones discussed in this case study, have chosen to use the aforementioned computer programs and websites to store the image content of their slides. Such digitization of slide collections has presented owners with the dilemma of preserving the physical objects or discarding them. Some may throw them in the trash, while others sometimes sell their collections on eBay or at garage sales, confirming that any value that traditional slideshows may currently have no longer resides in their original use. A recent search on eBay for "family slides" found sixty-six results, ranging from a single

39. Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis, "A Life More Photographic: Mapping the networked image," *Photographies* 1, no. 1 (March 2008): 18.

slide of a family at the beach to a lot of over eight hundred family slides.⁴⁰ While the large collections for sale may have out-of-focus or less pristine images, the single slides for sale contain more ideal images. Families are uniformly smiling and everything is in its correct position, suggesting that a slide's worth is now based on the novelty of its image.

With family and domestic life at the center, mid-twentieth-century American lifestyles involved shared activities such as the slideshow. Companies presented products that made colour photography accessible, and the viewing of family snapshots more entertaining. Offering families the capacity to view their snapshots together in their home, the very form of the slideshow and its required communality represented a postwar, mid-twentieth-century American ideal of familial intimacy and togetherness. As technology shifts towards more individualized viewing situations, with devices such as iPads, we must consider whether an event like the traditional slideshow will ever be relevant again in viewing family photographs. It is also interesting to note that while viewing of these images may occur individually, Internet programs like Flickr are sharing once-private family images with a large audience, often consisting of strangers. This individual, yet entirely public, viewing represents a major change in the way people choose to present their family photographs and albums.

40. eBay, "Family Slides," eBay Inc., http://collectibles.shop.ebay.com/Photographic-Images-/14277/i.html?_trkparms=65%253A12%257C66%253A2%257C39%253A1%257C72%253A3479&rt=nc&_nkw=family+slides&_catref=1&_dmpt=Art_Photo_Images&_sticky=1&_trksid=p3286.c0.m14&_sop=15&_sc=1 (accessed August 15, 2010).

APPENDIX: TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND EXCERPTS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following list is a standard set of questions asked during each interview:

Can you describe the use of photography within your family?

Was it common for events to be photographed, or was the camera only used on special occasions (e.g. birthdays, holidays, graduation, etc.)?

Was there a primary photographer? If so, who?

Does your collection of slides represent the beginning of your family photographs or were a comparable number of prints taken prior to the slides?

Is there a significant amount of slides taken in the 1950s and 60s compared to the amount of photographic prints? Why were slides your chosen medium?

As the owner, do you have a stronger emotional attachment to your slides or prints?

How often did a slideshow occur?

Who were the viewers/audience members?

Was there a common dialogue attached to the viewing? Was there a narrator or was it mostly general conversation?

Can you describe the physical environment in which the slides are kept today? Are they sorted in a specific order like a traditional photo album?

How often are the slides viewed today? How often have they been viewed in the last five to ten years?

INTERVIEW EXCEPRTS

OWNER A

Interview took place on February 16, 2010

Do you have any memories of viewing these slides?

I don't, and that's why they were really a surprise. I mean I'm sure we did. A lot of these [my aunt] labeled, and that's why I know. I was able to figure out other [dates] from [the ones that were labeled].

This was [my aunt's] house which was two houses down from ours – their first home, which I believe my grandfather, who was a bricklayer, built... That must be the new car.

Looking at these slides, do you have any memories of when they were taken? Or because you were so young, are these new views of your childhood?

I don't know. Some of them I've seen before in print form. I don't remember all of the specifics from each picture, but looking back I think, "oh yeah, that's how it was."

This is one of my aunts at a high school event; she was a senior that year I think. There are slides of a couple of different weddings, her wedding, and a few others. And there's the car again.

Are there younger generations that have shown any interest in looking at these pictures?

I gave out a DVD to my aunts, and I have one cousin that would be very interested. Other than myself and my sisters, I don't really think there are too many people in my family that are alive that would be interested.

Is the reason because you need a projector to view them?

Maybe. It could also be because they aren't in the pictures. I'm the oldest grandchild, and that's why I have them. When I was choosing ones to [digitize and] put onto a DVD, I used a handheld viewer rather than a projector. I'm more interested in retaining the images than the actual slides. I couldn't put all of them because I could only fit a certain number onto one DVD. I ended up pulling out a lot of them, but tried to put something on there that would be interesting to everyone. I took the slides to Wal-mart, and they put them onto a DVD for me.

Is there a medium that you prefer for these images—the slides, the prints, the DVD?

I think I like prints just because I've always dealt with prints myself. I like being able to just sit and take a book out and sit and look at it.

What are your future plans for the actual slides?

I don't know, but I don't want someone to take them and have something happen to them. I really enjoy studying my family's genealogy, and the slides are just an extension of that.

OWNER B

Interview took place on February 18, 2010

When your father received the slides back from the developer, was there a routine that he followed? Did he immediately put them into trays, or organize them in a certain way? You mentioned that he wrote notes on the boxes about the images.

He did. He bought those circular trays, and before that, the rectangular ones. Very quickly he would sit down, and he would write on the slide itself, and then also wrote information on the boxes, assigned them a number, so that it could be easily found because we had boxes and boxes of slides. I was able to put all of these slides into chronological order. He was really very organized in that way.

Having taken the switch to being completely digital, it seems that all of your photographs now live on your computer or online. Do you have a strong emotional attachment to the actual slides? Or is it just the image, and you don't care as much about the object?

I don't care about the images as much. I'm actually surprised—pleasantly surprised—at the quality they are in. I expected that we would open them up forty, fifty years later and they would be a mess. Curiously, the slides that were bought as souvenirs in gift shops, not taken by my family, virtually all of those are terrible. They have become magenta, washed out. It is a disappointment that those special shots are almost completely useless. Everything that we shot is fine.

I don't have any really; it will be a decision. I think it will come to, "we have all of these in digital files; we don't really need the actual slides," and we'll throw them out. It would be the message, the image, the stories that are important; not the actual slides.

And would you be documenting the notes written on the slides and boxes as well?

We would. What we're going to do is, after I finish [digitizing the slides], I'll go back and create a Word document of all of [my father's] notes. That will be the only way to make sense of the images.

In terms of digitizing the slides, I am hoping to capture them just as they are. They are dirty, and that's just the way they are. I'm not going to sit at my computer and airbrush every single slide.

I'd like to talk about the actual event of slideshows with your family. In terms of frequency, did slideshows take place when a special event such as a vacation or birthday occurred, or was it as soon as they returned from being processed?

Well, it's a curve. We'd be very interested in them when they first came back. When Dad had them all organized, we'd sit down to see them. We'd finish dinner, and gather around the living room to watch them. We might look at them two or three times in a month. It's remarkable how little we actually used them. If we were going to go some place, and we were not the type of family that went to the same place over and over, we might bring them out to refresh [our memories] if we wanted to go to a specific area. Twenty years later, we'd bring them out, show them to our kids, grandkids. They would certainly be

brought out for special family reunion-type events. And I expect many versions of that to happen now that we have them all on DVD, a more convenient format. You don't have to wait until nighttime; you don't have to drag out the screen.

Were the viewers only family members, or did friends and neighbors join you?

If they were in the slides, we would invite friends and neighbors. If extended family were in the pictures, we would share it with them. Occasionally, we had some dear friends, and we would schlep the equipment over to their house. And that's one of the things about slides versus prints. At least prints were easy to get at. With slides, it's a big deal.

Was there a common dialogue attached to the viewing of the slideshows, and even now with looking at the images on the DVD?

It was a generally collective conversation. We're not the type of family that sort of sits quietly. We would each have our own reflections. A lot of times it would be about things not in the picture. The picture would kick off something, a memory. We would remember, "Oh that's where I slipped and fell. That's where we got ice cream all over the back of the car." Things like that. Not just the mainstream picture, but the experience that surrounded it. That's why people would be able to sit down and contribute.

The slides had been moved in boxes around everywhere. My parents moved to a retirement community. [The boxes of slides] had been up in the attic; they were here, there. But, they weren't looked at for the longest time. Every once in awhile, when we were visiting my parents, most often for a holiday, we would pull the slides out and just look at them at random.

I think the idea of making them digital will make them much more accessible. What we really want to do, in addition to giving them to people that are in the pictures, is pass them along to younger generations: our kids and their kids. It's memory sharing more than anything else. When viewing them with our kids, they would ask questions that would start a conversation about something or someone. It's more than just pictures. You said before the idea of interaction. It's clearly a family activity, more than just going to a movie theater or something.

OWNER C

Interview took place on February 23, 2010

I'm interested in knowing how your family used photography. Was it something that occurred often? Was there a designated photographer?

Well, our dad was quite into photography. He used to have his own darkroom, develop his own film, so he was the picture taker from early on. I would say about 1950 he got his slide camera, and that was just a continuation on of what he had been doing. And he

would take pictures of everything, the neighbors, holidays, family gatherings. His side of our extended family got together three or four times a year, and he was the official photographer. It would sort of be, "Oh here comes Uncle Edward," but what he has done has really been treasured.

So your dad was the sole photographer?

Yes, absolutely.

In comparison of prints to slides, are there more slides from the 50s and 60s than prints?

Definitely. I would say he was one step away from exclusively using slides. There are baby pictures of us that are prints, but all of our years that we were growing up, it's all slides, except for an occasional print that was made from a slide. Then years later, he went back to using roll film. That is one of the reasons my sister and I went through the slides because to have them as slides at this point, they're inaccessible.

Are the digital versions you made only on the CD or did you make any prints from the files?

At a summer get together, I showed a print of our grandmother, and all of our first cousins just loved the picture, so I went and had a print made up for all of them.

Are these all digitized now?

No, and I don't think they ever will be. We went through and selected ones. *That* was a fun project, to have the time to sit down and look through them years later with my sister. You saw them when they were first developed, but then they got put away, and you were more focused on the newer ones.

What are your feelings about having your childhood memories in slide form rather than an actual album that you can flip through?

I have strong feelings about that. I really think there is something to be said about having a print. I have grandchildren, and with each grandchild I started an album. I've kept them all up-to-date. They're all teenagers or in college now, but they'll come over, and just want to look through them with me. That's not something that can be done with slides or even a CD.

Even when you sit down to look at the slides, do you feel that you are missing that tactile experience of holding the album in your hands? Is there a difference for you between the two?

Yes, I can't just pull them out to look at them like we do with my grandchildren's albums, but [slides] were all the rage back in those days.

When we got slides back, there was an excitement about having the little yellow box arrive. After dinner, we'd go over to see the slides. And that was fun, but even as a little kid, I remember thinking, "Please, can't we just get through this?" because there would be a lot of conversation around each slide. There wasn't a spontaneity or self-pacing you have with looking at albums or prints by yourself; [looking at albums or prints] didn't have to be an event. After growing up with slides, I was adamant about having photo albums for my kids to look at. If you're running Windows, the screen saver is a slideshow; that has almost supplanted it. But, boy, I did not want to have slides.

It seems like in this day and age it might be hard to look at your pictures in the same way. Back then, everyone was home in the evening, and now it might be difficult to find that same kind of time.

Another note about our dad, not only did he photograph all big events, but at Christmas he would audibly record when we opened up presents. He was sort of our family historian.

When we lived on Long Island, we had family that lived up in the Finger Lakes. We'd go up there for a couple of weeks every summer, so he'd take a lot of pictures, and then the next summer, he'd bring them up to show them... He would just show them the next time everyone got together, just kind of standard procedure.

When your dad received them back, did he have a routine—put them into trays, etc.?

They were in the little yellow boxes, and he would label those, and they pretty much stayed in them. The first slide projector he had was a manual one-slide-at-a-time thing.

Can we talk a little about the actual event of the slideshow?

I did enjoy it, but it was the controlled environment that I disliked. Actually seeing them was great though. Our dad had "the den"—which was upstairs—and it had a couch, and the first TV in the neighborhood. He was really into hi-fi, and this was sort of a techno guy's den. That's where he would set up the slide projector, and after dinner I can remember going upstairs. I lied on the floor and people were lined up on the couch. We'd look at slides and talk about what we were seeing.

In terms of the frequency, was it just when a box came back from a processor?

For our family, it was mostly as soon as they came back. When we saw that little yellow box come in the mail, I remember thinking, "Oh, we're going to watch them after dinner!"

Was the group of viewers consistent?

It was mostly our family, except, like I said before, if we were visiting our family. Our parents weren't terribly social in the sense that there would be a dozen neighbors coming

over to see them. It was primarily family, and my dad worked with a guy that was also in to the same sorts of hobbies; he and his wife would come over, or a playmate of ours that happened to be around that night.

Do you have any recollection of the dialogue that occurred during the slideshow?

I can remember the sort of classic cringe, but basically we were all there when the picture was taken so no explanation was really needed.

Owner D

Interview took place on March 12, 2010

When did you start photographing your family? Did you take photographs before you started taking slides?

I don't think so. I think what happened is we started to have babies running around the house, and decided we needed some pictures. I didn't want a box camera, so I went to a photo store and they showed me a Kodak 35mm camera. At the time, the camera was pretty basic. One of the features was that in the back of the camera there was a pocket that you put a card in, and, depending on what kind of film you were using, told you what exposure settings to use for different light settings, such as overcast, bright sun, indoors. At the time [that I purchased the camera], [the photo dealer] introduced me to different kinds of film: 35mm print or slide film. We thought that slides might be kind of interesting, so that's the kind of film we bought.

We had a little viewer that you put the slides in and hold it up to the light. It seemed more real than just looking at a print. We started to collect slides, and bought metal trays to store them in. We took a lot of pictures of the family and things we did. Then, there was an innovation that came about. Stores today are always looking for some kind of gimmick. At that time, we got S&H Green Stamps at our grocery store; if you buy so much in groceries, then they give you so much in stamps. You had a book that you pasted the stamps in, and when you had a couple of books, you went to an S&H Green Stamp Redemption Center, and they showed you a catalog of what you could get. We discovered that if you had so many stamps you could get a slide projector and a screen.

As we collected slides, on Sunday afternoons we'd make a bowl of popcorn, set up the screen and slide projector, and we had fun.

Can you elaborate on the event of the slideshow?

We didn't view many of them in the summer time, but Sunday afternoons in the winter, maybe once a month we'd get the slide projector out to look at pictures. It was about the basic entertainment we had. We didn't have television, but it was fun looking at our pictures. There was something about the slides that made the pictures more real.

Was it just your immediate family?

When people would stop into visit, we'd get the slides out. They were a captive audience, and we just wanted to show them our pictures.

When you showed the slides, was there a common dialogue?

It was pretty casual. There weren't travel pictures that you had to describe what you were seeing. We knew what and who we were looking at. We maybe commented on who's birthday it was or something like that.

At some point, my second oldest daughter became the keeper of the slides. She went through them and chose a tray-full of slides. That tray I took to a media house, and they put them on a VHS tape, and put background music to it. Since then, I've scanned them and put them onto my computer.

Did you make any prints from the digital files?

No, we never made any prints.

We thought after we started making slides that that was a great way to go because they were much better than passing around pictures. We never even considered having any prints made from them.

Did you view a lot of the same slides again and again?

Oh yeah, many times over. Each time, the stories would get a little crazier, too—more exaggerated. Anytime we'd get a new box back, we'd get out the projector to look at them along with the old slides.

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