

Photography...“Say Cheese”

Most of us don't like having our picture taken but most of us like looking at photographs. Our photos are a record of our living, often of some of the most important moments in our lives and sometimes our photos are reminders of what we may have forgotten. The phrase “say cheese” has become synonymous with meaning I want you to smile when I take your picture but no one is sure of the origin of the phrase.

Why do you, why do I take pictures? Although this is a rather simple question, the answers to this question are most likely varied and yet there will be common threads to our answers. Recently I asked several colleagues and friends why they take pictures and the following responses were given by most of them:

- Pictures are of people and events that are important
- Pictures are taken of things we want to remember
- Pictures are a permanent recording of a moment in time, preserving it forever
- Pictures are a validation of something done, proof of travels and events
- Pictures can be shared with others and also can be part of our legacy

Only two people stated anything related to artistic expression, creativity or to producing images which would show their talents. However, almost everyone said they would like to know how to take better pictures as only one of the persons I talked with had ever taken a photography class or instructions from a professional photographer.

Film will soon be a thing in our past. In 2004 Kodak ceased production of film cameras and the Photo Marketing Association reports that since 2000 the purchase of film has fallen from a billion rolls per year to under 20 million in 2010...a reduction of 80% in just 10 years. In many ways technology has been the demise of film and film cameras. The history of photography is relatively brief as the first photograph was in 1825 and the first commercially available camera was in 1830. Many other photography milestones may be remembered by some senior citizens as: (1) color film was developed in 1936 (2) the Polaroid camera appeared in the 1940s (3) flashcubes occurred in the 1960s (4) Adobe Photoshop software was release in 1990, and (5) the first camera phone was introduced in Japan in the year 2000. Today the most popular selling cameras are digital whether they be “point and shoot” or SLR/DSLR (single lens reflex system) versions.

Photography can be a lot of fun and it is a great hobby for seniors. If you don't have a digital camera it is likely time to buy one as they have much to offer. The most common mistake people make is not asking enough questions about cameras that are related to their needs and the types of photos they plan to take. Although the differences between “point and shoot” and SLR or DSLR digital cameras has narrowed over the past few years, point and shoot cameras can't match the speed and output quality of SLRs, but neither can SLRs match the convenience and ease of use of some of the best point and shoot cameras. Generally, the point and shoot digital cameras are less expensive, easier to use and less in size and weight. Many of the point and shoot cameras are small enough to fit into your pocket, purse or center console of your car. However, you can change the lenses on the SLR, they take a higher quality photo at faster speeds, and you will have multiple manual options that are effective in more diverse lighting conditions.

If you are just taking occasional photos or in the learning stages of using a digital camera, most people will recommend that you start with a point and shoot model. Although I am not a professional, I have had about 10 years of experience using a digital point and shoot camera and my recommendation would include the purchase of one with these minimum features:

- Look at the optical zoom and ignore digital zoom...10x optical minimum and be sure the camera has image stabilization (helps to minimize blurry photos from camera shake)
- Choose a camera that has both a viewfinder (use it when shooting in bright light outdoors) as well as at least a 3" LCD viewfinder (measured diagonally)
- If you want to upload photos to an internet photo-sharing site, buy a camera with built in WiFi
- Decide whether you want to use AA batteries or rechargeable batteries and regardless of your choice always carry spare batteries
- If you want to have photos larger than 4x6" or you want to crop/edit photos you need a camera over 4 or 5 megapixels
- Choose a camera with some manual settings (portrait, sport mode and "museum" or some non-flash/low light options are minimal)

Taking good pictures is certainly much more than knowing when to tell someone to "say cheese" or knowing when to zoom in on a part of the landscape. If you want to learn photography basics and develop some good techniques you should consider taking a seminar or class from a professional. This fall the Delta College LifeLong Learning department will offer Photography I and II four week sessions. If interested please call (989) 686-9444. Enjoy capturing the moments in your life!

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