

The New York Times

Pogue’s Posts

The Latest in Technology From David Pogue

NOVEMBER 13, 2008, 1:04 PM

Why We Shoot Home Videos

By [DAVID POGUE](#)

Two weeks ago, writing about Apple’s new flagship laptop, the MacBook, I noted with dismay that Apple appears intent on eliminating the FireWire jack. FireWire is a connector, originally developed and promoted by Apple itself, that lets you import video from a tape camcorder for easy editing. It was a cornerstone of Apple’s “anyone can edit video” revolution.

Over 400 of you responded, by e-mail or on the Pogue’s Posts feedback forum. Most of you were equally alarmed; many of you have stacks of MiniDV tapes, as I do, that, in a post-FireWire world, you’ll have no way to transfer to a computer for editing.

But one e-mail response stopped me cold:

“What makes you think you’ll have any grandchildren with the time and inclination to sit through more than a few minutes of your home videos?”

“The movies an uncle shot of me and my siblings a few decades ago were projected for about 30 minutes a decade ago, and have not been looked at again by anybody.

“Home movies require a captive audience, for long periods. How many hours could you bestow on your children right now? How many hours would you expect them to sit still for them? And unlike photographs, home movies can’t really be dipped into, flipped through.

“I’m not against home movies. I just question whether the people amassing them at great length have much idea of what they require of the people in them, or who inherit them.

“Kind regards, good luck. I respect your affection for your family.”

I did a lot of thinking about this.

Why do I film every vacation, every schoolyear highlight, every birthday party? Why am I so upset that format loss (including the FireWire jack) might make all of my videos unwatchable?

Clearly, I’m not alone; the crazy-fast sales of digital cameras, year after year, teach us that recording our lives is a fundamental human instinct.

But why, exactly, do we spend hundreds of dollars on equipment to film and store our pictures and videos, without any assurance that anyone will ever want to view them?

In short: why do we shoot?

Maybe it’s just ego. Maybe we record our lives as a hedge against mortality, hoping that some scrap of our lives will live on after us.

And maybe my correspondent is right. Maybe we’re fooling ourselves. Maybe, to some extent, home video and amateur photography are mass delusions on a global scale—a gigantic expenditure of money, time and expertise to create a visual record that, ultimately, nobody will ever see.

But then I considered my own motives, and I have an answer to “Why I shoot.” Lots of them, actually.

First of all, I object to the “captive audience” notion. The whole *point* of transferring video to your computer is so that you can edit it down.

In the early days of fatherhood, when I was a little less busy than I am now, I routinely created five- or six-minute videos: distilled, funny, entertaining highlight reels of our life. And visiting neighbors actually *asked* to see them. (Search YouTube for “Pogue Extreme Baby” to see an example.)

But anyway, here are some of the reasons why I shoot video.

1. For our older selves. Life is fleeting, especially when our children are cute and innocent and still dependent on us. Video and photos are the best way we’ve got to revisit these chaotic, happy days years from now, when they’re grown up and moved away.
2. For our descendants. My correspondent may be right; it’s not clear how interested our descendants will be in watching our ancient videos—if, indeed, our recordings don’t get lost to changing hardware and software

standards.

But you never know. Your kid may become famous, or infamous, and the 2025 edition of “Entertainment Tonight” or “60 Minutes” might consider those old movies a gold mine. O.K., it’s not likely, but it could happen.

Furthermore, your descendants just **might** be interested in your life. I, for one, would love to see videos of my own ancestors. My grandfather spent ten years compiling a great big self-published Pogue genealogy, filled with carefully researched facts—but that’s all. Names, dates, places. I’d find it much more interesting to know about their personalities, foibles, facial expressions and accents—to know the people, not just their stats.

3. For pleasure. Getting into photography or video is fun. They can be artistic endeavors, satisfying just to participate. I love trying to improve my shooting, my composition, my technique. It’s a hobby.

(And by the way, “home movies” isn’t always the same as “amateur movies.” Not all amateur movies are intended to document family life, as some of the better YouTube bits clearly demonstrate.)

4. For historians. The home videos of today might become a valuable archive for historians of the future. Remember: an enormous percentage of today’s videos are going to disappear, as their tapes crumble and video players become obsolete. So if 2 percent of it survives, we’ll be lucky. Therefore, the more we film today, the better.

5. For posterity. Finally, suppose that my correspondent is correct that thousands of people shoot video because they believe, mistakenly, that their descendants will give a darn. Suppose that much, or even most, of what we photograph and film will, in fact, never be seen by anyone.

You know what? Fine. We admit it: We’re shooting on faith. Believing that somebody **might** someday be interested in your videos inspires and drives us.

Look, we do all kinds of things based on faith. People expend all kinds of effort now because they hope, without any guarantees, that it will pay off down the line: get married, worship, drink a glass of wine every day. It’s human nature.

And it’s human to want to record our lives, too.

And that’s why I shoot.

Copyright 2008 The New York Times Company | [Privacy Policy](#) |
NYTimes.com 620 Eighth Avenue New York, NY 10018