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Readers React to 'Why We Shoot Home Videos'

By DAVID POGUE

Last week in this space, I wrote “Why We Shoot Home Videos”: an essay on the reasons that I document my life with photos and video. (It was in response to a reader’s suggestion that it’s all a waste of time and money, because nobody, realistically, will ever want to see it all.)

Your feedback, by e-mail and at nytimes.com/pogue, was deeply moving. Something about this subject taps into the deepest wellsprings of emotion, hope and mortality—not topics that come up every day in a gadget-review column. Here’s a sampling.

“This one made me cry. You summed up, in poignant prose, the not-so-mysterious reasons we document our lives. It is as natural to our natures as breathing and our need for love.

“I grew up in a family that had no such ambitions. Neither my mother or father had the slightest interest in preserving a memory of our existence. My mother had one faded photograph of herself in high school. My father, who hated his family and never spoke of them, had nothing to say to me about his history.

“What I would give to be able to re-live that part of my life, and to hold in my hands pictures of my friends at play, my

parents at work in their victory garden, the beautiful old buildings of my beautiful old town!”

“Your reader is in the minority. I know that if I found 10 hours of video of my ancestors, I would sit and watch all 10 hours. I might use the fast-forward button quite a bit, but I would watch it all. I find it fascinating to see what they would think is worth saving for others to see. I would also be interested in seeing what they were like and if I inherited any of their traits.”

“I have only a smattering of video in which my younger son was the subject. He died in an accident on July 3. He was 5 years old. What little I have on video is all I will ever have to remind me of the precocious, life-loving boy who was—and forever will be—my son.

“So video away, David. You never know how precious those few moments of tape or disc space will be.”

“Were it not for the video shown to me on our first date, I probably would not be in this 22-year-old marriage of mine. When we sat down to see his family video, I watched my husband run around in the woods playing Indian at the age of 7; I saw his family and the house where he was born and raised. In that half hour of our first date, I fell in love with the boy in the man I married. Viewing that video told me all I wanted to know; I still see the boy in his now 80-year-old self.”

*“I took hundreds of photos every year. Culling and organizing them was always a thing I would do someday. Now, I am confounded by a combination of the daunting size

of the task, the uncertainties of changing technology (how long are CDs I create actually going to last), my fading memory (4 kids, a few parents, aunts, uncles and cousins seem to have markedly different memories of who, what, where and when), and my spineless inability to throw almost any image away.

“I have met the enemy, and it is clear that I am the reason so much family history will disappear.”

“Starting with a Kodak Super 8 movie camera and moving to a Canon video camera, I faithfully covered all the memorable family events, from baptism to graduations and, at the same time photographed these events. About 25 years ago (I'm 77) I had a blazing epiphany: The movies and videos collected dust in shoeboxes, but the still photos continued to be requested and viewed. I sold the video camera and never regretted it.”

“Here's what I was told to do. Create a 1 minute video of each child or grandchild for each year of their life and give it to them when they are 18.”

“This article touches me more than any other you have written. I agree with the reasons you gave for shooting, and would like to add one or two of my own.

“I shoot because things go by too fast, and I want to be able to go back and revisit past events, to reflect on observations we made at the time but have since forgotten.”

“You forgot one fairly important reason to shoot video: to share with people that couldn't be there to see it in person, like grandparents who live across country. People shoot video

for place-shifting, not just time-shifting reasons.”

“Why do I shoot home videos? For me. I don’t expect anyone else to sit through the hours of video we’ve recorded. But when my daughter is out in the world building her own life, I have no doubt that I will love spending an hour here and there looking at the way life used to be.”

“Most of my childhood photos were lost in my parents’ multiple divorces and international moves. I wonder if it’s a coincidence that much of my childhood is now a blur to me.

“I wish I had those photos back.”

“For anyone in the future who might be interested, video you take today might turn out to be an invaluable record. Put it right up there with the fellow who said, ‘Plant a seed for a tree you’ll never sit under.’“

“I never made home movies, but I did make audio recordings. Almost every night when I put my little girls to bed, I would go over the highlights of what happened that day. Then they would then say their prayers and go to sleep.

“I plan to play these recordings on my deathbed to remind myself what a wonderful life I had.”

I also heard from Glenn Reid, the programmer who, at Apple 10 years ago, wrote the original iMovie:

“Two opposing thoughts that come to mind on this issue (and believe me, I’ve thought about it more than most people).

“1. Why **not** record video? Like a backup, you might only need it sometimes, but if you need it, well, nothing else will

do. Most of the time, it doesn't matter either way, and the tapes end up in a drawer. But you can't go back in time and do it over.

“2. On the other hand, if you have to choose between really *being present* and shooting video, you should opt for being present. Many times I have seen people (and yes, been guilty of) filming an experience rather than actually experiencing it. It can be as though you aren't even there, if you're peering at your daughter's birthday party through a viewfinder the whole time.”

And finally, a note from reader Larry Eisenberg, who often sums up my column cleverly in limerick form:

“Home videos are fun to shoot,
The kids and companions are cute,
So enjoy the full measure ”
Of editing pleasure;
Who'll watch in the future is moot!”