

Guest Commentary

Time threatens precious family assets

By Mark Rukavina

Most families in mainstream America have taken home movies for decades and then put the film reels or videotapes away in a box and rarely re-watch them.

While seniors and baby boomers primarily used home movie film as their medium of choice, Generations X and Y are more comfortable with camcorder videotape.

The dividing line really arrived in the early 1980s, when camcorders became popular and it became even easier to point and shoot.

However, just as with film, the video tapes are stashed away and rarely re-played.

While videotape is more affordable than film and represents a practical way to capture family moments, it is a dangerous medium to use for archival purposes. Experts agree the degradation of videotape begins as early as 10 years because it is magnetic.

Anything and everything can be the enemy of VHS tapes — dust, air, moisture, heat and even merely playing them on a camcorder or videoplayer.

Unfortunately, it is extremely common to take out a videotape you have not viewed in several years and find out that huge, valuable segments of footage are completely gone or unwatchable.

If the famous Zapruder home movie film of John F. Kennedy's assassination had been shot on videotape instead of film, the quality of the original would have



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been significantly degraded by now, over 40 years later.

While home movie film is comparatively more durable, it also degrades — though, more slowly. Consequently, in the early part of the 21st century, we are at the watershed time for both kinds of media for home movies.

Tapes and reels of weddings, first baby steps, and family get-togethers sit in attics, closets and garages all around Arizona. Their watchability and shafability are degrading with time. Adding to complications, most families have a mixture of formats in their possession — anything from the 8mm, Super 8 and 16mm film their parents used to VHS and 8mm videotapes — and there is no single device that can take that potpourri of media and allow it to be sharable.

Fortunately, the world of digital is here. Digital preserves footage and allows easy access, sharing and duplication.

Once digitally mastered, a home movie will look its best and will never lose fidelity. High-grade DVD media is archival ready,

designed to last at least 100 years. DVD players are everywhere now — living rooms, bedrooms, computers and cars. Even portable models are mainstream.

Those who want to belong to the “digital in-crowd” have an opportunity to share their home movies online. This represents the next level to the highly publicized online video sharing of

YouTube.

Unlike most online video sharing communities, you do not post tiny video clips — traditionally of other people — for the whole world to see. Instead, you share your entire home movie collection, privately and securely, with designated family and friends.

It is time to take another look at those old home movies and preserve them for the precious family assets they are. Even with the benefit of modern technology, if film or videotape has gone bad, there is not much anyone can do to bring it back.

When it is too late, it is too late.

Editor's note: Mr. Rukavina is the founder and CEO of iMemories.