

A Thousand Words

by Kevin Myrick

Snap.

There it was on the little screen, a moment frozen in time for eternity like mammoths found thousands of years later in huge blocks of ice. A moment of light captured forever, an object which can last for the ages. Everyone of them is a monument to our past, and sometimes the future. That's the beauty of a photograph: It captures moments of time, once thought to be lost forever to the cosmos or only held partially correct in our memories.

That was then, before the photograph came and changed everything. There was the written word, the painting or etching, and memory. Those were how things were remembered. But along came the photograph, originally the daguerreotype first announced in 1839, which had the power to tell truth from fiction, to make art from nothing and bring back from the ages things thought forever lost. Lost is just one of the things that can be prevented from the single click of a shutter.

There are many types of cameras out there that take photographs: old plate models, 8mm motion picture or the Polaroid. They are stored in electrons now, carried around on small chips instead of printed off and kept in giant albums. No matter the medium, they are treasured and kept safe; evacuated even from the paths of storms or other natural disasters in the trunks or backseats of cars alongside children, pets and clothing. Of all the things moved and taken, photographs are among the priorities.

Photographs can create, both good and bad. They can create a way to make a living, but they can also create opportunities for black mail, divorce settlements and most of all they can create power. Power over people, capital, land and title. Before it took an

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exceptional man born to privilege to capture that kind of power. Now the press of a button can lift a man into the heavens or bring him down to the pits of hell.

Within a frame one can see who leads them and who is left behind; the results of our labors and the consequences of our ignorance. Photos can reveal the beauty of nature, of life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They too can show the destruction of war, poverty and the dirty side of human nature.

A simple snap can reveal political corruption or be used to steal state secrets; show love and kindness or anger and madness. They can even now be used to catch you speeding in your car down the streets of our cities and towns.

For something so simple and visual and natural, its absolutely complicated. Light and the objects which are revealed in its splendor are captured by film or through computer chips and turned into the images we see on negatives or screen. Chemicals or computers are used to process them, to edit them, to make them something more than they were originally intended. They are framed, printed in papers and presented online to friends and acquaintances and strangers alike. They are not just objects, but living things that set into motion other parts of life, other organisms to aid in the process. Like everything of its nature, photographs are simple and complicated all at the same time.

Take many photographs and put them together and they turn into a movie, or a book or a collection in a box. Photographs are everywhere and yet unknown to some.

Photographs are even on cakes. The man who invented that process is an interesting man, said the process was one that developed in his mind over time. He has a photography and framing business to go along with his patents.

The man said "listen, I can't really explain how I came up with the process of printing photographs onto cakes in a short version. But I tell people this: one night, aliens came into my room and told me that they would tell me the secret to anti-gravity. And when they tried to tell me I couldn't understand so they just said "come on, let's just give the guy the cake thing and move on."

That's another thing photographs allow: people to move on. The loss of a loved one or friend is held in memoriam in photographs, sometimes framed around a house or kept hidden away and tattered in a wallet or pocket. People will pull the photo out and study it and wondering what they could have done to keep the person here, in reality.

The photograph allows one to hold onto something so treasured and sacred to the heart: hope. Hope that all will be like it was in the photograph, of simple times that the owner does not realize are gone forever, in the past. That grasp on hope is what the photograph truly achieves over all other art forms.

Most of all, photographs can keep our minds fixated on something, on sadness and grief. It forces us all to rise up as one and do something to make the problem better. It was photographs of Vietnamese getting executed in the street that angered a generation of Americans. It was photographs of dogs attacking humans that set the new order of things in the south during civil rights. It was photographs from Haiti and India and all over the world that announced our intentions as a human race to try and end poverty.

And yet, no matter how great, how sad, how awful or wonderful a photograph can be, much of the time we do nothing but look. Unable to bear the tragedy anymore, we turn the page or close the window instead of doing something to effect change..

And from time to time, photographs are truly worth a thousand words.

A birthday boy was captured in time blowing out the candles on his Spongebob Squarepants cake, and his parents looked over him proudly and knew they could always look back on a time when he was innocent again and 8 years old.

