PERSONAL ARCHIVING: PRESERVING OUR DIGITAL LIVES

Generations before us have kept their histories alive by saving photographs, film, documents, and letters in boxes and books.

In the digital age, different practices are required.
ARCHIVE:
- (noun) a collection of documentation of historical and/or personal importance; an organization that acquires, preserves and ensures access to such documentation.
- (verb) to collect, preserve, and ensure access to such documentation.

DIGITAL FILE: any file that requires a computerized device in order to read it.

Remember: all online platforms (i.e. social media, etc.) will go away some day and all portable storage devices (laptops, cell phones) will fail or get lost at some point.

All content you want to preserve should be organized and stored in at least two places!
4 STEPS FOR MANAGING AND PRESERVING YOUR DIGITAL FILES

STEP 1  Identify what you have and where it is stored

- Take an inventory of what you have. Photos? Videos? Emails? All of the above?

- Take an inventory of where your digital materials are stored. Your camera, computer, smartphone, SD card, external hard drive, or somewhere else? On Facebook, Flickr, Shutterfly, etc.?

- Figure out how much of it you have. Do you have 10 videos? 10,000 photos? 3,000 emails?
STEP 2

Decide what is important (& what’s not)

- It’s easy to quickly create lots of digital content, of which maybe only a small amount is good quality and unique.

- Deciding which you want to permanently keep and which you can delete is an essential piece to managing your personal collections.
STEP 3  Organize your files

- Start a folder called “My Archive” and start moving files there.

- Collect your digital files
  - Export or download selected content in social media, blogs, email, text messages, etc. onto a personal computer
  - Each situation is different and some may require downloading specialized software. Try doing a web search such as: how do I export my Gmail? how do I download my Facebook? Or how do I download my text messages from [iphone]/[android]?
- Create sub-directories
  - Add more folders, such as “Photos,” “Music,” “Videos,” “Documents” or organize by year or by topic
  - Example: “2017” > “0216TitleOfEvent” > “Photos” (for photos taken at an event that occurred on February 16, 2017)

- Give your files a descriptive name
  - A file name of “Image 0298.jpg” is not very helpful if you’re trying to find a particular photo among hundreds of photos. Instead, use a file name like 201703-ArchWrkshp.jpg. (Using a date format like YYYY--MM--DD or YYYYMMDD can be helpful to sort files by date.)
  - Avoid spaces in file names.

Pro Tip: Add who/what/where tags to your digital files directly in the file itself! (Search the web for “Add tags to files in Windows” or “Add tags to files on Macs” for instructions)
Save at least 2 copies of files in different places

- One that you use and one that is a backup that you rarely access on a storage device or storage service

- Storage devices include hard drives, USB drives, CDs/DVDs, etc. “Cloud” services include Google Drive, Dropbox. Keep an eye on their terms of service agreements, costs, and privacy options.

- Manage your archive
  - Every few years, check your files to ensure that you can still access and open them and, if needed, move them to a new storage device.

LOCKSS
Lots of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe
“Perspectives on Personal Digital Archiving” by the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (Library of Congress) is available for free at:

Personal Digital Archiving Handouts and Videos (Library of Congress):
http://digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/padKit/handouts.html

38 Online Backup Services Reviewed:
http://pcsupport.about.com/od/maintenance/tp/online_backup_services.htm

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Handout adapted from one written by Sasha Griffin and adapted from “Four Easy Tips For Preserving your Digital Photographs” by Butch Lazorcha in Perspectives on Personal Digital Archiving published in 2013 by the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (Library of Congress).