The Rescued Film Project

Have you ever gone through an old photo album? While you leaf through those pages, protecting dear and beloved memories, it is impossible not to be touched by that bittersweet sense of nostalgia that goes along with old photos. Like Proust's madeleine, those images will take you back to how things used to be… despite the fact that those memories might not even be yours: those recollections might belong to your parents, ancestors or even to strangers, yet sentimentality prevails, taking materiality through the yellowish and faded tone of old prints. It is a peculiarity of film, like an ancient spell.



Courtesy of The Rescued Film Project

Preserving that spell is the enormous task that **the Rescued Film Project,** a couple of years ago, decided to get involved with: in acquiring undeveloped rolls in every possible way, they try to keep strangers' forgotten photographic memories alive.

Film is a degradable material, if not held properly or developed, images lightly start to disappear from it.

> *These moments never made it into photo albums, or framed neatly on walls. We believe that these images deserve to be seen, so that the photographer's personal experiences can be shared. Forever marking their existence in history.*

Like time travellers opening time capsules, like archaeologists revealing ancient secrets, the Rescued Film Project already had the chance to come across captivating stories, for example in 2015 they found 31 rolls of film taken from a WW2 soldier.
In 2016 they discovered 1,200 rolls of film shot by one photographer in the 1950s, thanks to crowdfunding they managed to get enough money to developed them, saving Paul's memory from oblivion.



Courtesy of The Rescued Film Project
Levi Bettweiser is the main man behind this beautiful idea, we had the chance to ask him a few questions:

P: Can you tell us how the project started?
L: As a film photographer, I'm always on the hunt for cameras in thrift stores, antique shops, etc. About 5 years ago I started noticing that many of the cameras I was looking at still had film in them. Since I was processing my own film I decided, because I was curious, to start buying cameras, even ones I didn't want, just to acquire the film inside. Once I had enough rolls, about 30, to justify the time and cost, I processed them. I was really surprised at how many images there were still on the film. I had assumed most of the cameras had been opened, ruining the film. I realized that if I could get several hundred images from the rolls just in my local area, that there must be thousands of rolls still out there from around the world. So I actively started searching for them and the result was The Rescued Film Project.

P: How do you get the rolls?
L: We get rolls from all over the world. They come to us as donations from Rescued Film supporters. But the majority of the rolls we acquire are purchased directly by us from stores, auctions, and other random places.



Courtesy of The Rescued Film Project

P: What are the problems you encounter when developing old film – are light parameters written on the rolls you find? Which one was the oldest you found?

L: We have the most trouble processing color film because there have been so many different times with their own unique chemical processes. Black and white film really hasn't changed all that much in regards to how it is processed. We often are forced to process color film as black and white which can cause the images to be very dense or thin. Also with old film, exposure to moisture is very common which causes mold to fuse to the emulsion. Moisture and heat can also make film very brittle. We often have film just disintegrate in our hands when attempting to work with it.

P: Are you the only one taking care of the developing process?

L: Yes The Rescued Film Project is pretty much a 1 man operation. This includes the film processing and scanning, but also social media, website, acquiring film, and notification of film status to anyone who has donated film.

P: Did you manage to find out more about the stories behind

the rolls? And there is a story that's particularly dear to you?

L: We rarely find out anything about a roll, its origin, or the images it contains. Every once in awhile we are able to identify a location within a roll or a famous person. But the vast majority of our 30,000 images have no supporting information.



Courtesy of The Rescued Film Project

P: I read you found 1200 rolls from the same photographer – Rescued Paul – or about those rolls belonging to a soldier who fought in WWII. Are they still "unknown"?

L: Yes the photographer is still unknown. But most of the locations in which the images were taken have been identified. For the "Paul" film we are in contact with his children and have started learning more about who he was.

P: While Vivian Maier has now become a globally known example – and a "blockbuster" exhibition – her story proves how much beauty can be hidden in privately held films yet, referring to the films you developed: what if those picture were never to be revealed? Is this something you thought about?

L: This is the main driving force of the project. We believe that all images, however mundane, are important for a few reasons.

1. They were important to someone and had meaning to them. So we feel those images deserve to be revealed even though we may never understand the true context behind them.

2. The images in the archive document a part of the human experience that we rarely see showcased. Since most of the images in the archive are shot by amateur photographers of their personal lives, they document our collective personal experiences as human beings. When you got to museums, you primarily only see photos of moments that have large historical significance. But how we lived and what we did every day should also have relevance to future generations.



Courtesy of the Rescued Film Project

P: Considering the decline of film photography, has it become more expensive to get the chemicals you need for the developing process?

L: The expense of processing film is still pretty reasonable. There has been a resurgence and increased interest in film

shooting and processing over the last 5 or so years which i believe is still keeping the medium alive.

P: Did you submit these rolls to museums or galleries? Are they interested?
L: We initially reached out to a few places regarding the WWII images but wasn't met with any interest.

P: What's the goal of the project?
L: To create a vast online archive of rescued film images where people can go to view, research, and potentially help reconnect images with the people in them, or who shot them.

We hope for this project to meet as much support as possible, because to peak into these photographic moments, to imagine the smell of rain or the warmth of summer breeze, to think about the lost words behind these pictures is something to hold on to.
If you want to submit films to the Rescued Film Project click here.

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