



*Unremarkable on the Face of It*

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My father took this picture of my mother in the early 1950s. He shot it with an Argus C3 35mm camera. My father was a blue-collar worker now able to afford a high quality camera. What is remarkable about the photograph of my mother is its utterly unremarkable character. My father simply walked in and surprised my mother while she was reading a magazine.

In early years photography was reserved for special events. The processes and costs and difficulties of shooting indoors meant most pictures were made outdoors, posed, and infrequently. In 1931, the one family friend with a camera made a picture of my mother as a teen with her sister. This is one of but a dozen or so images made of her family between 1915 and 1940. It is the one surviving image of my mother as a teen.



With the introduction of cameras such as the Argus and accessories such as flash bulbs, the possibilities of pictures of ordinary life made by ordinary people became blossomed. In only two weeks in 1950, my father made more images of our family than had been made in all the years before of his family and my mother's family combined.



The photographic record of a family now seems to be a given, but it could be argued that it is only with the beginning of the Baby Boom generation that such recording became both a possibility and a concern.

Think about the implications. While storytelling and cave paintings and marks on sticks

and realist Greek sculptures had given us some means of recording some aspects of life, as well as means for others to look back, we are essentially the first generation of hominids that can look back into our own past and see our loved ones, our old friends, ourselves, and even the bully from up the street.

I can see my mother not just as the woman now in her 90s with gray hair and osteoarthritis (still active and shooting pictures), but also as the young mother taking a break reading in front of the radio – a young woman with a smile on her face and dreams for the future; a woman in a happy relationship; a woman thinking of all the possibilities of post-WWII America.



With the same Argus camera my mother made pictures of my father and me when I was only two taking a Sunday walk; and my grandmother made a picture of both my parents walking home from church.

Tears come to my eyes in writing this precisely because I can see my parents as young people – I am not restricted to just guessing what they would have looked like, or constrained to try to remember them now from a child’s perspective.

What does such precise recollection offer or challenge us to construct as new ways of thinking across time?