

A gifted photographer once said he hated taking pictures. He said it was a futile effort to hang onto a time, place or person that inevitably changes and passes with every tick of the clock.

Well, even though time marches on, and with it come wrinkles, gray hair, and even death, I still love to hang on to how it used to be.

This last week, as we moved some furniture around in the house, I found a big, old steamer trunk loaded with pictures from the past. I never did get the furniture moved because I spent the rest of the afternoon sorting through that musty old trunk bringing up relics of a different generation.

One scrapbook was filled with photos from childhood. It took me half an hour to recall all the names of the kids at a birthday party. Then there were relatives and friends from my early days in Vero Beach, Uncle Waldo Sexton hanging one of his famous bells at the Driftwood Inn. Art Talbert proudly showing off a new milk cow at the dairy. My Dad and Dewey Reams posing with a huge grapefruit in front of the packing house in Oslo. Then pictures taken after a hurricane showing the Royal Park area inundated. A later picture showed Jim Thompson and me with a bag full of golf balls we had collected from the golf course after the hurricane winds shook them out of the palm trees.

I love old pictures. I still have framed memories of my fraternity brothers in college and love to spend happy moments remembering, and wondering what has transpired over these last 20 years. I still keep my high school annuals in a prominent place on the bookcase, just because I love to flip back occasionally and remember old classmates and teachers.

This passion for pictures seems to have affected my children also. We have been a picture taking family, preferring snapshots to slides and movies. We have a big drawer full of random snapshots in the front room, pictures that date back to when the children were babies. Occasionally I'll come into the house and find all five kids sitting in a circle, the drawer pulled out and pictures stacked in a heap on the floor while the house rings with whoops of laughter.

After all, what can brighten up a rainy Saturday afternoon any more than my 12-year-old son running across an old picture of his now teenage brother and sisters, all nude, grinning at the camera over the edge of the bathtub. Or an old picture of their Mom, complete with Bobby-sox and below-the-knee-dress, staring with lovelorn eyes at a skinny young guy they recognize as their daddy.

I admire landscapes and sunsets. I have some prize pictures I made on collective farms in Czechoslovakia, others made riding over the Andes in a taxi driven by a wild man from Bogota, action shots of Mexican hatdancers in Guadulajara, and some fantastic shots in a Belgium Cathedral. But none stirs me like those old schoolmates, freckle-faced and snaggle-toothed, sitting on a water fountain in front of the school.

On my desk I have two photos. One is of my Dad, taken at his desk 25 years ago. Another is of the girl who became my wife, made when she was sweet sixteen with her hair in bangs and a couple of gold chains dangling around her neck.

When I look at them, I stop time, or even turn it back.