

How many is too many?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Summer is here, the heat is well-hot and many parts of Ontario are moving on to Stage Three - opening the doors to stores and restaurants and maybe even the odd beach or two. That also means, for some folks, more photo ops. More opportunities to be out and about in our community and farther afield, perhaps taking day trips to new and different locales (since we can't really travel out of province.) While this is great news for many and still scary for some of us, I'm more worried about the 'bigger picture' as it were. That is, the fact that my phone is now pretty much at capacity for pictures. What's capacity you might wonder? I'm sure it's different for everyone based on your plan and phone type but it appears for me, capacity is around 7,700 photos and about 200 videos. How many is too many?

At this point you might be justifiably asking yourself 'What the heck? How on earth did she amass 7,700 photos on a phone?' On. My. Phone. I'm ashamed. I'm aghast and I am now very, very afraid. Because, if I lose 7,700 photos I will have also lost a significant portion of significant, memorable and enjoyable life events captured over these past few years. Now of course I can anticipate what your immediate response might be. Have I backed these photos up? Sure. Some of them at least, but I can't remember the last time I did and as a public service announcement, I invite you to ask yourselves when you last backed up your photos? Because here's the thing: I think we are all guilty of amassing a ton of pictures on our handheld devices and unless we are super organized and very efficient, we're also all guilty of forgetting to delete the bad photos and back up the good ones. As for printing pictures, when was the last time you printed a photo, purchased a photo album, inserted said photo into the slot and labelled it 'Great Aunt Mary's 80th birthday celebration'?

These are first world problems to be sure. But as I went through the realization process of acknowledging the sheer volume of pictures currently stored on my phone it called into question how many more out there are like me? I recall, many years ago, going to one of those workshops where you 'scrapbooked' your photos. With no creative talent whatsoever my page of memories was a hot mess but the woman who ran the class used a phrase that has stuck with me all these years. She asked us all to consider why we were allowing our photos to remain 'trapped in technology' rather than printing them, pasting and preserving them? I also recall thinking that while scrapbooking wasn't really for me - printing photos was something I should consider doing more regularly. Have I? Nope. Should I? Probably.

These days, I dream about finding the time to go through the pictures on my phone, deleting the bad shots (of which I am sure there are at least 1,000) and also removing the countless 'duplicates,' 'an extra in case the first one didn't turn out,' the 'let me just screenshot that proof of payment so I remember it later,' and 'recipe's that I want to keep' photos which I promptly forget about and which are taking up valuable storage space. What this also suggests, I believe, is how we've become too comfortable with the incredible 'convenience' of using our phones in place of a camera. I'm old enough to remember coveting a Kodak 'Instamatic' camera and hoping for one for Christmas. The film was easy to load and I think the flash was automatic. Remember Kodak? Remember film? Back then, when you took a picture it was like rolling the dice. Maybe you got a good shot, or maybe everyone's eyes were closed and someone was yawning. You never knew the outcome until you dropped off your film at your local camera store and returned, about 7 days later, to pick it up. Sure you had the odd dud of a photo but more than anything, I think it forced us to really think about the pictures we were taking. Why were we taking a particular photo? To capture a significant life event, chronicle the birthdays and holidays or the special vacation memories? These days, it appears to me that we'll take a photo of just about anything - mostly so that we can promptly post the pics to social media with a funny or provocative tagline to see how many 'hits' and 'likes' we'll get from our followers. Who are our 'followers'? Maybe it's family and friends who live at great distance and seeing occasional updates is pleasant but mostly, I'd venture to say that mostly, they are people with whom we've had fleeting relationships. They are business colleagues, friends of our friends or, depending on how fast and loose you play with your privacy settings, maybe even complete strangers. The value of pictures it seems has been downgraded from 'precious memories' to a not so precious commodity.

It pains me to say I am 100% guilty of buying into the commoditization of the common photograph. I am as prone to posting pics as

many of you might be ? using social media to celebrate my special memories. Ultimately however, while I'm sharing plenty I'm preserving nothing. Perhaps it's finally time I make the time to sift through my photographs and if they are aren't print worthy ? delete them. If they are, it's time to start printing pictures again. I've a few empty albums to fill up! Perhaps you do too?