

Home Movie Day Talking Points



1. Why is saving home movies important?

Although the inherent value of home movies seems obvious to people like us, some still need to be convinced that home movies are worth saving. Another common reaction is that other peoples' home movies (the famous or powerful, usually) are worth preserving, but certainly not mine. Some points to raise:

- Home movies as historical documentation

Frequently, the only surviving images of a town, neighborhood, individual or event that still exist are found in home movies. Professional moving image documentation has traditionally been limited in the range of activities covered.

- Home movies as social documentation

Home movies show how people really live. Their intimacy is unsurpassed among films in the types of things they can show. Home movie makers have access to things that nobody else does. You really can learn a lot about family and social dynamics by watching how people act when they are opening presents on Christmas morning, for example.

- Home movies as personal documentation

If these are your home movies, they can be much more evocative than any still photograph or other type of artifact can be. Seeing how your grandmother danced, or hearing how you sounded as a toddler can be an intensely moving experience.

- Home movies as entertainment

On the other hand, don't just make it sound that home movies are documents, or that watching them is "good for you." Home movies were frequently designed to be creative and entertaining, and watching them can be a lot of fun.

2. Goals of Home Movie Day

- Preservation

In order for home movies to be used, considered, and enjoyed, they have to continue to exist, which means that we have to have ways of preserving them. Film is on one hand a surprisingly durable medium, but at the same time it can be extremely fragile. Prints

from 1895 can still be in near pristine condition, while a poorly-maintained projector can destroy a brand new film just back from the lab.

The first step in the preservation process is convincing people not to throw their films away. It sounds obvious, but this still does happen with alarming frequency. Tell people that they should keep their original films even if they have been transferred to video (more on this later).

Home Movie Day is designed to create connections between archivists and audiences in order to provide preservation information for the films' owners and also to cultivate possible donations to the archives. If your Home Movie Day isn't associated with a specific archive, try to find an appropriate local or regional repository (such as a university or historical society) which might be interested in their films. Keep in mind, though, that not all archives are equipped to deal with film collections. The Center for Home Movies, Home Movie Day's host organization, is also available to help match potential donors with appropriate repositories for their collections or to consider donations themselves.

- Celebration

A second main point of Home Movie Day is to increase the understanding and appreciation of home movies. People are just starting to get over the stigma that home movies are boring or "all the same." The easiest way to disabuse them of this idea is to get them to watch the films and see how much variety exists.

3. Transferring films for access

First of all, emphasize that transferring film to video or digital media is not "preservation." Despite what a large proportion of the general public thinks, "digitizing them" does not give films a never-ending life. If you feel qualified, bring up such things as format obsolescence, unproven lifespans of digital media such as DVDs, or even differing compression algorithms. An easier way to make your point may be to show that at Home Movie Day you are projecting 16mm films and that 16mm was first mass-produced in 1923. This is to say nothing of the higher resolution and unique "look" of projected film as compared to video.

Video is, however, an extremely useful and important tool in the home movie preservation process. Face it, it's easier to pop in a VHS tape or a DVD than it is to set up a movie projector. Video also allows for easy duplication (for sending copies to friends and relatives), and projection of original films is always potentially harmful when done by an untrained projectionist. Video, then, gives access to the content of home movies, and therefore safeguards the original films and gives them longer lives.

Be prepared, then, to have a list of local transfer houses available. If you are projecting transfer copies at your event, use the opportunity to discuss the differences in visual quality between formats and quality control issues to be considered when evaluating transfer work.

Video also makes available the tools and techniques by which people can more easily edit, soundtrack, and narrate their transferred home movie footage. These sorts of multimedia scrapbooks aren't just home movie access copies anymore, they're new video works. How much you choose to present preservation issues specific to video and new media is up to you. If you prefer to keep the focus on film, you can at least convey that while video and new media

are not ideal for preservation, they are also preservation concerns (some basic, way oversimplified tips for video preservation: label it, back it up, keep it cool and dry, and migrate to new formats before the old ones obsolesce).

4. Home preservation tips

Donations of home movie collections to established film archives should be strongly promoted. Recognize, though, that families are not always willing to give up their films. If that is the case, it is our responsibility to provide them the information about what they can do to preserve their films at home.

Filmforever <www.filmforever.org> was created with just this in mind, so steer them to that site first (and preferably have a printout of the PDF version of the site available for perusal or as a handout).

The single most important factor in determining the long-term health of films is their storage conditions, so repeat the film archivists' mantra: COOL and DRY. Encourage people to get their films out of hot attics or damp basements. Secondly, promote the use of archival supplies such as reels, cans and leaders.

5. Super 8 is not dead!

And neither, for that matter, are regular 8mm or 9.5mm

Home movies are not just historical documents. Shooting home movies now instead of home video means buying time for the future of your own personal films--no need to worry which will be the video format of choice next year. Kodak and other companies have remained committed to supporting amateur filmmaking even in this "age of video," and there has even been a significant increase in the availability of lab work in recent years (thanks to our friends in the labs making significant investments in new gates and equipment). In recent years both Kodak and Pro8mm have even started producing Super 8 negative films instead of just the reversal stocks which were available in the past. It takes a little searching, but it's not all that difficult to find both film stock and processing. Try to have a list of local sources available for Home Movie Day audiences, but if you can't find it locally, it's readily available online or by mail order.

A great resource for all types of 8mm filmmaking and lab work is Toni Treadway's site <www.littlefilm.org> as well as Brodsky & Treadway's Video Aids to Film Preservation <www.folkstreams.net/vafp>.