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SP.747

Final Project

My idea for the final project came from a conversation with my five-year-old sister. She was shuffling through my old projects from elementary school and she was upset that I didn't include her in our family portrait. I had always wanted a partner in crime when I was younger, but my parents were hesitant to have another child for about 16 years. I decided to composite family pictures, to change them to how we wanted to recall those memories.

Initially, I wanted to use the enlargers to make composites. I looked at the work of Jerry Uelsmann and I was amazed that he did all of his work without digitally fixing them. He had clean edges and imperceptible transitions, which I knew was already difficult using any kind image manipulation software. I tried to do the same thing with an even easier example, putting together two images separated by straight edges. The first few were never lined up correctly and the transition line always looked shaky. There was no way I'd be able to separate people out of the backgrounds and make it look better than cutting two pictures and physically putting them together.

I started by asking my father to send childhood photos of me from about 18 years ago. He only sent me about twenty negatives because he was afraid they'd get lost in the mail. While printing the photos I saw that most of the earliest ones had faded significantly and acquired some scratches along the way. I printed them in both color and black and white, but I scanned the black and white ones to use in Photoshop. It was easier to get pictures of my sister because all of her childhood photos

are digital, so my father had no problem sending me multiple images of her.

The hardest part of putting the images together was figuring out where I could place her image to look realistic. I used the magnetic lasso tool we learned in the first Photoshop session to pull an image of her away from the background, but it was difficult to separate thinner parts of the image around her hair. I found that this was easier when she had her hair in braids, so I made sure to look for those instead. It took some trial and error to figure out how to soften the borders, but I ended up blurring the transitions so that they would not be so evident. Also, I used backgrounds where there were minimal shadows so that they could be easily mimicked.

I'm not entirely happy with the results because they just don't look very convincing. Printing the negative and scanning it back in lost some of the details and the more recent pictures of my sister had better contrast and definition. Adding more contrast in Photoshop is done with an algorithm and can't produce the same effects as using the original image. I think this would definitely look better if I tried taking some pictures of my sister on film and then printing and scanning those to composite with my childhood photos. In the end though, I'll be satisfied as long as she finds them amusing.