

The high-tech road to family memories

by Suzanne Robitaille and Ellen Kampel

You've just returned from a family trip to the Grand Canyon, marveling at the vast, multi-colored landscape, taking an audio tour and posing for snapshots with those trusty mules. Upon returning home, however, you realize it's difficult to see all the wonderful photos and mementos you collected. You need an alternative way to create and preserve family memories when your vision impairment gets in the way.

From digital cameras to online photo sites, making memories has seemingly gotten easier, except for people with low vision. It doesn't help that devices are getting smaller and smaller, too. Here are some tips.

- **Find the right digital camera.** Many cameras have small visual displays, poor contrast, and a tendency to cause glare in sunlight. You'll want a camera with a reasonably large, bright screen no smaller than 2.5", and preferably at least 3.5", such as the Nikon Coolpix S60t. A camera with a viewfinder will eliminate glare problems.

- **Take better-quality photos.** Higher-resolution photos let you enlarge photos on your computer screen without losing the clarity. On the downside, higher-resolution photos take up more space on your camera and computer's hard drive. You won't be able to take as many photos on the flash memory card that comes with the camera, but you can always purchase a separate card with more memory.

- **Consider Web-based storage.** With a Microsoft Hotmail account, you can use Windows Live SkyDrive to store, view and share files and photos online. SkyDrive comes with 25GB of storage, which comes in handy when you've got high-resolution photos that take up a lot of storage space. SkyDrive also offers an option for public folders where visitors



Enjoy family photos even if MS has dimmed some of your vision.

can download your photos to their own computers once you send them the URL address.

- **Print larger-size photos.** For a quality 8" × 10" print, your image resolution should be at least 900 × 720 pixels, and print quality should be set to the highest level. Many point-and-shoot digital cameras and even mobile phones have at least five megapixels, which is perfectly fine for viewing and printing photos up to size 8" × 10". (Apple's iPhone 4 has a five-megapixel camera.) For even larger-size prints, or for cropping purposes, you'll want a camera with 10 to 12 megapixels.

- **Use good photo paper.** Premium 8" × 10" photo paper will resist fading; high-gloss photo paper enhances contrast.

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● **Make your own photo album.** Print 8" × 10" photos and put them in three-ring binder photo pages. These books use lift-up plastic sheets so you don't have to put photos in individual slots. Use a word-processing program to make large-font, full-page labels.

● **Try scrapbooking using a video magnifier.** Scrapbooking lets you display souvenirs and notes alongside photographs to give them even more meaning. A desktop video magnifier uses a camera to project photos and mementos onto a screen or TV at 75 to 90× magnification, and leaves you hands-free, which is essential for pasting and gluing articles into a scrapbook. A portable video magnifier is more cost-effective and compact, but they only magnify up to around 11× and will not give you the benefit of hands-free viewing. Enhanced Vision and Optelec are two of many video magnifier makers

● **Get organized with labels.** Use a low-vision pen, a 20/20 pen or wide-tip Sharpie marker to label your photo albums, CDs and DVDs. Buy white or brightly colored, unruled 3" × 5" index cards or large adhesive labels.

● **Use voice labeling.** Audio labeling kits let you identify items with your voice. Affix the adhesive label onto an item and record a description using the "pen." The same pen will replay your description anytime the pen touches the tag. Two good options are the VoiLa Voiced Label Reader and the U-SPEAK Voice Recording Pen.

● **Save audio memories.** Remember those folk songs you sang around the campfire? Sing 'em again—and store on a digital recorder or MP3 player. Many recorders have built-in features for low-vision users. The Olympus Digital Recorder 512MB has a voice-guided navigation system and 2GB of memory for over 500 hours of recording time. You can down-

load the files onto your PC for editing and storage.

● **Create online albums.** It's true that many online sites only display thumbnail versions of pictures. Google's Picasa is different. Picasa automatically finds your photos on your hard drive without having to import them, and lets you share them with friends with one click of the mouse. When it's time to print, choose 5" × 7", 8" × 10" or full-page photos. Picasa will also automatically create collages for you. It's free on both PCs and Mac computers, though you need a Google account to use it.

Even MS vision loss can't stop you from creating family memories. You and your family will enjoy these things for years to come.

Resources

Digital cameras—your best bet is to go to a store and try out different models. You can get more information on the Nikon Coolpix here:

nikonusa.com

Apple iPhone—**apple.com**

Optelec desktop video magnifier—**optelec.com**

Enhanced Vision desktop video magnifier—

enhancedvision.com

Low-vision pen—**abledata.com**

VoiLa Voiced Label Reader and U-SPEAK

Voice Recording Pen—**maxiaids.com**

Olympus Digital Recorder—**olympusamerica.com**

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