

Father/son team give old photographs new life

By CARMINA BROOKS

We all have them — the old photos. They're tucked away in drawers, in grandmother's trunk in the attic, in the album brought from the old country more than half a century ago. And there are some we haven't looked at since the death of a parent.

Jack and Less Gorbak, a father-son team, make such photographs come alive. It is called ancestor photo restoration.

Jack Gorbak said photo restoration shouldn't be confused with restoration of paintings.

But, what the Gorbaks do to restore old photographs seems like magic. To see a cracked faded and torn picture of the mother of a Troy family when she was a young girl before the turn of the century become a distinct and serious character study, is to ride a time machine.

Her gaze is direct behind reading glasses. The delicate lace of her high-necked blouse, the watch pin she wore, and the natural curl of her upswep hair, are details that bring that long

ago moment into clear focus. What was the book she was reading? one wonders.

THE EXTRAORDINARY BEAUTY of a now aged woman is almost miraculously captured for a West Bloomfield Township family in a restored photograph that becomes a treasured portrait.

From the old country, a photograph of the great grandfather of Dr. Max Winslow of Southfield is transformed into an heirloom oil painting. The photograph of the revered ancestor was taken in Kiev, Russia in the 1880s. He was a scribe who copied the Tora for his people.

The portrait that was never taken is created from two snapshots of the parents of Mrs. Lowenstein of Southfield. It seems fitting that the Gorbak Studio of Photography does its restoration work in the historic district of Franklin where preservation is part of village life.

The Gorbaks, residents of Southfield, first moved their family business from Detroit's Livernois Avenue of

Fashion to Southfield. Then five years ago, they moved to Franklin Village where they are located at 32731 Franklin Road in a building historically designated as Bullock's Tavern, circa 1830, recently the former Hutter Hardware Store.

The Gorbaks didn't alter the original interior construction details of the building, but what were bare wood rooms are now lushly carpeted and finished off.

People are trying to trace family records more than ever before and coming up with fantastic information on who they are and what their ancestors were like, Jack Gorbak said.

LES GORBACK, TRAINED as a marketing major at Wayne State University, later decided to join his father as a business partner. He went to Atlanta, Ga., to study portraiture with a master of the art. His father is past president of the Detroit Professional Photographers Association and has served on the board of directors of the Michigan association.

"When we restore photographs, it is important to get as much pictorial information as we can," Gorbak said.

"We ask for additional photos, if any, that will help show a person's character, shape of eyes, the way he smiled, the way the teeth looked, if they are to show."

For an oil painting, they ask for color of hair, eyes and jewelry, if it can be remembered.

Sometimes a family gallery is created.

"The family wall gallery is a grouping of portraits, snapshots and restorations that are tastefully framed and placed where the total look is not only a thing of visual enjoyment, Jack Gorbak said, "but also a contribution to the room decor and a reflection of the family's lifestyle and values."

There are no easy answers to the restoration of old photographs, but almost anything can be done, depending on what is wanted, Gorbak said.

To preserve old photographs, he advised against using paper clips, staples or tapes to hold damaged areas together.

"When an old photograph has been badly damaged, we must choose the technique which will best apply to accurately reproduce the image," he said.

Heat and humidity and certain paint fumes are major causes of deterioration, he said.

"The shape of the original is important. Photographic images have gone through many changes, but presentation years ago was as important then as it is today," he said. "Odd shapes and unusual mounts are also a part of a photograph's history. In restorations, it is important to retain these shapes if our client's wish them retained."

Viewing an old photo with a magnifying glass will reveal damage not visible otherwise. Restoration work helps modify print defects to improve appearance of a final copy. Restoration includes art work on a copy negative and a new print to modify damage or deficiencies apparent on an original print.

THE METHOD USED to restore a photo is optional, the men explained. Pencil retouching, air brushing, regrouping and oil painting are used in restoration. Depending on the condition of the original print, there are several choices.

Facial retouching only, or general retouching, removes or softens blemishes, wrinkles and minor defects. Spotting cleans the finished print. General retouching on the face and clothing areas of the print brings out the de-

tail. Dyes and special pencils are used to correct cracks and stains which aren't guaranteed to be unnoticeable, but will greatly enhance the print, Gorbak said.

Medium brush oil can remove unwanted background and make minor corrections to a subject. Airbrush work can make corrections on figures, backgrounds and remove areas entirely or allow buildup to balance a figure or a background. Full brush oil is used to restore the face, hair, clothing, etc.

Regrouping, placing subjects from individual photographs together, as in the Lowenstein portrait, necessitates making prints of each subject, resizing and enlarging them, making a new layout, a paste-up, and a receipt for a new negative and print.

PRESERVATION OF PHOTOGRAPHS begins with the processing technique, Gorbak said. Correct processing of the paper is an indispensable element in making pictures that last. Toning a photograph will help preserve the emulsion through the years, Gorbak said.

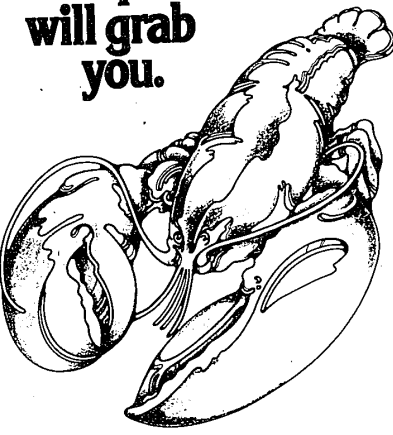
An old photo on mat stock, as opposed to glossy stock, will last a lot longer, since the glossy paper will dry out in time. Sepia toning gives an old time look, adds quality and helps the photo to endure, Gorbak said.

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