

Memory loss frightens me abstractly and personally.

In this set of photographs, memory loss is referenced through an absence present in each image. The absence in each is immense and demonstrates the extreme impact memory loss has in one's daily experiences and interactions. Photography relates to my need to preserve memories as a way to combat memory loss and as such it was important for me that the representation of memory loss and absence in each photograph held a huge amount of significance to show the extreme impact of memory on our lives and to say: without our memories, we are not ourselves; without our memories, we are nothing.

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Memories shape everyone's personalities and inform almost every single decision made by every person. Our identities are bundles of ideas and memories that we rely on more heavily than anything else in our lives to direct us. This makes the reality of having a bad memory or possibly getting a disease like alzheimer's one of the scariest things ever. We have made it a priority in modern culture to attempt to record, share and preserve memories through social media platforms and technology. We have focused on revolutionizing tactics such as photography by making it extremely easy and accessible through multiple social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Photography has always been a big part of my life but only recently has the importance of its ability to preserve memories become clear to me. My memory has always been bad and so my fear of losing some of my more important memories has motivated me to research this topic.

To create a memory is to create a connection to a person, place or thing. The brain records a memory, categorizes it, and files it in a place where it is hopefully able to be recalled upon later on. In my life, many of the memories that I create are not able to be recalled because of my poor memory. Instead of remembering important events, I often remember small, insignificant details of unimportant things. I end up losing my connection to something once the memory fades away or once the memory is not able to be recalled. I often only remember the occurrence of large events, forgetting the important details of these periods of my life which makes it impossible for me to recall them. This makes it hard for me to connect with a person, place or thing that is no longer physically in my life because all I had left was the memory of it. One of my biggest fears in life is forgetting the moments that make a person or a place special to me. While I might be able to vaguely recognize the significance of a person or a place, I will never have the same connection if the details of their memory fade from my mind. Preventing this from happening has been a very important part of my pursuance of art and my life as a whole. Ever since the first very significant memory in my life faded away, I realized that I needed to work hard in order to retain others that I could not imagine losing.

One of the most prominent places in my life was the house that I lived in from age two to age twelve. Some of the very first and most important memories and most formative events in my life took place in this home. I lived in this house for more than half of my life. When I think back to living in this house, I cannot visualise the interior. I can vaguely picture the outside of the house, but once I attempt to open the front door and step inside, my memory goes blank. The bedroom I grew up in was seemingly wiped from my brain. The backyard I played in with my friends for the majority of my childhood is impossible for me to see clearly in my head. I have opened the front door and walked in that house thousands upon thousands of times, but something about my memory keeps me from being able to access my vision of what exactly that house was like. All of the memories in this house, no matter how important, are seemingly erased because of this. In a sense, the house does not really exist apart from my knowledge of the house existing. I remember playing with my childhood friends, but I can not picture the setting. The deep connection that I should have with this house simply faded away as my memory of it did as well. When I realized that such a significant part of my life had grown dim, I understood that I needed to take steps necessary to maintain other important things in my life.

My father has cancer. I think about losing him every single day. He does not make it obvious but I can tell he is struggling. Seeing him lose over 50 pounds due to chemotherapy and a dangerous infection made me realize that losing him is something that could happen any day. If my dad dies, all I have to connect myself to him are the memories that we shared and the experiences we had. If I lose that, I lose him. My fear of memory loss stems from this fear of losing the connection that I have to my father. I already lost my connection to the house I grew up in, but losing the connection that I have to one of my closest loved ones is something I do not think I could bear. It seemed impossible to me that something like my childhood home could simply vanish from my memory, which makes it even scarier to think about the possibility of losing the invaluable memories I have created with my dad. Learning about memory and modern brain research is very important to me as it relates to attempting to preserve the memory of my father.

One of the biggest contributors to modern brain research is a man known as Henry Molaison, also known as H.M. H.M. had extreme epilepsy for most of his life and because of this, he had to put his life on hold and move back home with his parents, unable to pursue a career due to the constantly recurring seizures. He decided that he did not want to live this way

and ended up deciding to get brain surgery. The surgeon cut off two small slices on both sides of the hippocampus in H.M.'s brain. After the surgery, H.M. stopped having seizures, but in addition, he lost the ability to retain new memories. He had lost no intellectual capability and seemed to have no noticeable mental disorder, but it was impossible for him to remember what he had done even five minutes previous. He was the subject of neuroscientific research for more than 50 years up until his recent death. The surgery that was performed on H.M. helped to form completely new theories about the formation of memories and where in the brain memory formation occurs. Interestingly, H.M. could retain motor skills even if he did not remember learning them. For example, in a test conducted by Suzanne Corkin, where "H.M. was shown a five-pointed star, with a double contour, and asked to trace its outline with a pencil, but in a condition when he could only see his hand and the star as reflected in a mirror. H.M. acquired this mirror-drawing skill during ten trials and exhibited excellent retention across [three] days" (The Legacy of Patient H.M. for Neuroscience). H.M. was able to retain the motor skills he learned across the ten trials even with each trial he had not remembered the one he had previously completed. And at the end of all the trials, he did not remember completing a single one. H.M.'s condition made it impossible for his brain to create new memories. In addition to all the scientific discoveries we have learned from researching H.M., philosophers realize the more personal importance of memories.

In David Hume's "A Treatise of Human Nature," Hume challenges the idea that we are made up of a single self but rather that we are a collection of memories and ideas that form what he calls a "bundle." We are simply a "collection of perceptions," he writes as he fights for the idea that our selves are constantly changing, as fast as our different perceptions of the world change. He also writes that our memories are simply organized records of our past perceptions, saying that memories are constantly being created and constantly contributing to our "bundle." As a result, he states that memories are the source of our personal identity. I agree with the theories that Hume is proposing in his *Treatise*. I believe that memories are indeed the main source of personal identity and that we are made up of our ideas, perceptions and memories; if we lose our memories, we lose most, if not all, of our ideas and perceptions of ourselves. If anyone were to completely lose their memory, they would lose their personal identity, and in the case of H.M., he lost the ability to change his identity as all of his memories existed before his brain surgery. In addition, diseases such as Alzheimer's which inhibit the brain's ability to recall memories which ends up in people who are affected by the disease losing their connection to family members and loved ones (Alzheimer's Disease). Due to the fear of memory loss that all people have, we have created and popularized many strategies that help preserve memories.

Finding ways to preserve memories has always been a part of human life. Language is used to pass on knowledge and ideas previously discovered and to share experiences to one another as a way to preserve them. Photographs were invented as a way to depict life realistically and to capture a single moment and keep it forever. Families often create photo books to memorialize past significant events. Today, modern technology has provided fantastic tools used to preserve moments and memories. Taking photographs has never been easier, and most everyone who owns a cell phone is able to take a photo extremely quickly in order to capture a moment. Social media is a new platform that also aids in this need to preserve memories as it not only captures moments through a Facebook status update, a Tweet, or an Instagram photo, but it also shares it to the world and preserves a record. Billions of people are constantly sharing memories as a way to ensure that they, and hopefully others will never forget the important things that are happening in their lives.

Taking photographs is the best ways to for me to preserve memories. Ever since I picked up a camera, I have been taking photos of the people most important to me and the places most important to me. My family and friends are often the subjects of my photographs and they are often in settings that are extremely important to me. Photographs of my dad are something I have been taking for as long as I have been interested in the art of photography. These photographs of my father forever preserve a moment in time. I do not feel as if I have to worry any more about losing the memory of him if I am able to capture the connection we share through a portrait. In addition to preserving memories, humans have always been looking for ways to improve their memory through more physical and mental ways.

Mnemonic devices are strategies that help preserve and improve retention of information in terms of our memory. One of the most common examples of a mnemonic devices is used in basic mathematics: the order of operations, which is PEMDAS (parentheses, exponents, multiplication, division, addition subtraction) is remembered as "Please excuse my dear aunt Sally." While the general effectiveness of these strategies is not currently quantifiable, mnemonics have been used for many years in human history as a way to remember things (Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory). Other mnemonic devices can be as simple as associating a face to a voice or a smell to a place as a way to preserve a memory. Associating a feeling or an image with a person, place or thing is a good way to preserve memories as it gives the brain more fodder to grab onto in order to reach a memory.

The following manifesto lists the most significant and important things to me I can remember about my dad:

I live for the memory of my father.

I live for the experiences we had and the lessons he taught and will teach me in the future.

I live for the jokes he told me and will tell me in the future.

I live for the games of basketball we played.

I live for the games of baseball we went to and will go to in the future.

I live for his devotion to the Cubs despite their tendency to lose.

I live for his carefully organized DVD collection.

I live for the clothes I steal from his closet.

I live for his large collection of carefully organized art books.

I live for his love of mystery books.

I live for the hugs we have had and will have in the future.

I live for his childish sense of humor.

I live for the blues songs he plays in the car.

I live for the movies we have watched together and will watch in the future.

I live for bad jokes he tells and will tell in the future.

I live for the dinners he cooks and will cook in the future.

I live for the photo walks we have gone on together and will go on in the future.

I live for his unconditional love and support.

I live for his strength.

I live for my father.

My father taught me most everything I know and I have learned so much from the things he has said to me and the amazing example of a person he sets every single day. He has been battling cancer for a couple years now but still finds the strength to go to work most days and travel to

see family. He loves what he does and proves to me that being a good person to others while pursuing something you love are some of the most important things in life. I was lucky to be born as his son and I am grateful every day. It is unfathomable to me that I could lose my father, but more than that it is unfathomable that I could ever lose the memories that we have created together and the advice he has given me since the beginning of my life. He has made the biggest difference in my life, and his memory will live with me forever.

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