

Los Angeles Times CALENDAR weekend

STAYING IN

Now playing: your life

Just look at Grandma's hair! And who dated that guy? Past is present on Home Movie Day

By Brenda Rees
Special to The Times

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They've been lurking in the closet for decades: those 8-millimeter and Super 8 films of trips to the Grand Canyon, cousin Bernie's bar mitzvah, backyard barbecues. But who wants to fumble with a projector and screen? On Saturday, the second International Home Movie Day will let you trot out those memories while you sit in a comfy projection room — and someone else threads the film.

Organizers in L.A. and Irvine say anyone is welcome to sit in on the home movies, comparing and contrasting hairstyles, car models and comedic and dramatic family moments. Attendees also can learn how to properly care for home movies and find archives that may be interested in more notable films.

The idea for Home Movie Day came from film preservationists who were saddened by people tossing away their movie prints.

"We've heard so many heartbreaking stories of people who had transferred their memories onto VHS tapes years ago, only to find out that those tapes deteriorated and became unwatchable," says Grace McKay, owner of Electric Pictures post-production in Irvine, which will hold Home Movie Day activities at the nearby studio Wild West Media. "People threw out their films because they thought they had a stable copy."

"There is a belief that videotapes and DVDs last forever, but that's just not true," says Snowden Becker, public access coordinator at the Academy Film Archive and another Home Movie Day host. Becker says videotapes can be easily damaged — they're thin, delicate and crumble with age — and that DVDs also can wear out and fail.

Last year, about 200 folks attended Home Movie Day in L.A.; more than 2,000 participated worldwide. This year, amateur-film aficionados will screen movies at 40 locations, including sites in Britain, Italy and Japan.

Part of the joy of Home Movie Day, Becker says, is watching people discover long-forgotten family events. "Home movies are the closest things to time travel that we've got," she says. "Some Hollywood director didn't arrange a set or cast actors. These are real people and places, doing the ultimate reality shows."

Though family films are personal scrapbooks, they can also be historical treasures, offering glimpses of long-gone architecture, styles and culture.

The first 16-millimeter camera for the consumer market was made in 1923, and sales of 8-millimeter and Super 8 personal cameras and film hit record highs in the 1960s and '70s. "There is a lot of material out there," Becker says. "We want to find as much as we can."

Becker ultimately wants people to see their films as cultural documents. "Look at your home movies as not just a record of the Smith family but an example of American culture," she says. "Sure, they're family heirlooms, but they also provide a small piece of a bigger picture of who we are, and were, as a people."

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Home Movie Day

Where: Los Angeles Film School, 6363 Sunset Blvd., L.A.

When: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday

Price: Free

Contact: (310) 247-3016, Ext. 387

Also

Where: Wild West Media, 17522 Von Karman Ave., Irvine

When: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday

Contact: (949) 838-0001

Info: www.homemovieday.com