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IN SIGHT

These anonymous photos show what life was like decades ago



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From "Midcentury Memories. The Anonymous Project," published by Taschen. (Taschen)



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When I was a child, every few months or so, my mom and dad would lug out the slide projector and we'd all sit around and reminisce about our family history through events we shared and that were recorded by my parents on slide film. It was always a wonderful time, enjoyed by all of us sitting in the dark, listening to the warm hum and click of the projector as memories slid by in front of us.

I imagine there is some version of that happening today among families, although I'm sure it doesn't center on the nostalgic sounds of a slide projector clicking away in a dark room. But I'm sure there is a similar sense of gratification in sharing memories. It's one of the things we really seem to enjoy as human beings. Stories help us understand how we fit into this crazy world.

A new book, "[Midcentury Memories. The Anonymous Project](#)" (Taschen, 2019), taps into that love we all seem to have of reminiscing and reminding ourselves what we are all about collectively as a human race. These days, we've more or less abandoned the compact cameras that were ubiquitous decades ago. Instead, we are more prone to using the cameras on our cellphones. But what this book reminds us of so vividly is that, even as technology changes, many of our habits remain the same. There are some things that are universal even as time goes by.

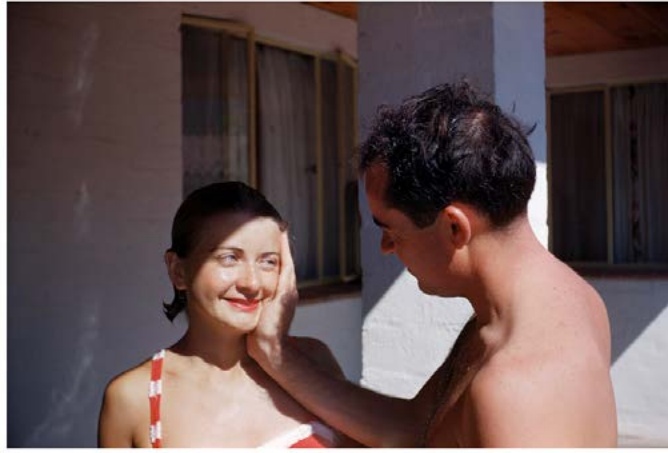
Today, platforms like Instagram are saturated with photos we take of our children, our vacations, our food or even just of ourselves (selfies!). But even decades ago, we were doing the same thing with cameras and film. That hasn't really changed. Things like hairstyles, models of cars and clothing styles have certainly changed. But many of the things that make us human beings have remained the same. The photos compiled in "Midcentury Memories" serve as a vivid, and fun, reminder of that.

This book is largely the product of one man's love of slide film, which eventually turned into the "[Anonymous Project](#)," a collection of thousands of images assembled over the years.

In 2016, British filmmaker Lee Shulman bought a box of old slides on a whim. When he opened the box, something special happened. In an interview with Reuel Gordon in the final pages of the book, Shulman says:

"I remember the very moment when I picked out the first one and held it up to the light. I was totally blown away, not only by the incredible quality and color but by the intimate stories revealed by these photographs. It was like discovering unique little windows into our past. It was hard to believe that some of these images were around 70 years old, and yet they looked like they had been taken yesterday. I decided then that I would take on the task of saving this lost collective memory."

Since then, Shulman, along with good friend and publisher Emmanuelle Halkin, has viewed over 700,000 slides to make up the collection that now includes more than 10,000 images. "Midcentury Memories" brings together an even smaller selection from that — just under 300 images. The result is a book that is great fun paging through, being reminded of the past, yes, but also of the threads that weave through the years and make us who we are. And what better time to look back, reflect and take stock on those common threads than at the end of one year and the beginning of the next?



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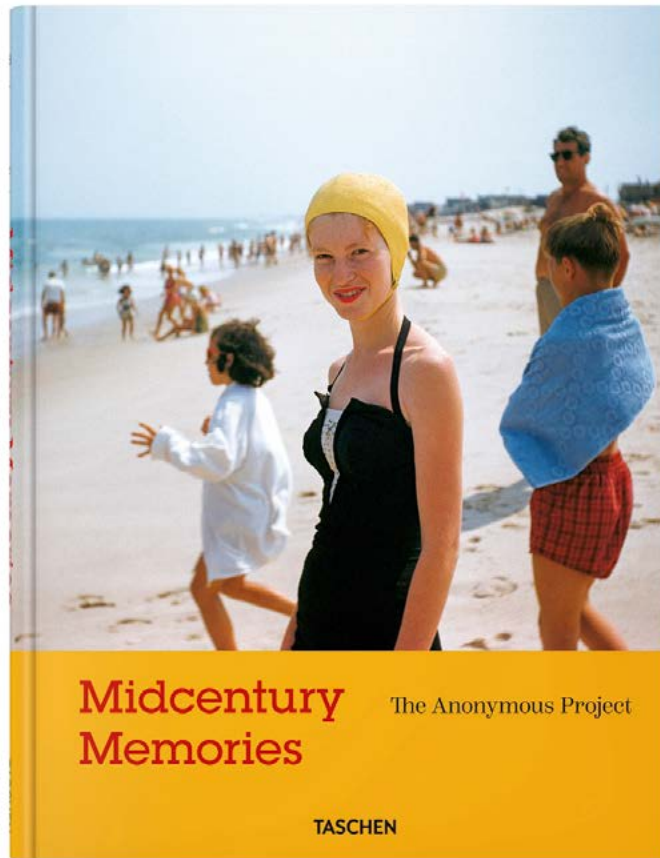
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