

Accentuate the positive through cloning

by Bruce A. Love

Cloning is a very useful tool and shows great promise for eliminating some physical imperfections that most of us have. Under the proper conditions, cloning can be used to generate limbs, eliminate acne, remove scars, and of course, create human life forms where none had existed previously! As remarkable as it sounds, these feats can be accomplished from home on a personal computer!

Of course, I am not talking about flesh and blood and genetic engineering. I am referring to pixels and palettes and digital photography. With the right combination of software and hardware, you will discover that it is relatively easy to remove scratches, and brush away other imperfections in old photographs, using cloning and other photographic techniques. You can even sharpen images and restore severely faded photographs to their original brilliance with some common editing tools.

Digital photography has come a long way in a short amount of time. As with many computer-based technologies, costs associated with digital photography have plummeted, while quality, speeds, and capacities have soared. The essential tools for editing photos at home include a computer, a scanner, photograph editing software, and a digital camera. The editing software typically comes with the scanner or camera, and the camera can be omitted from your list of tools if you just want to work on old photographs.

One of the most rewarding experiences in photo editing is finding an old damaged family photograph, repairing it, and preserving it for future generations. In my family, we were fortunate to have found several photographs of the Loves from around 1890. One was a family portrait taken in the "old country." The quality of the photo was pretty good, but the surface was riddled with mold spots (commonly referred to as foxing). This is not an unusual occurrence with old papers and photographs, but I like to think of my ancestors as being spotless.

Photo editing using a personal computer is a combination of art and science. The process starts with either scanning an original photograph, or transferring a digitized image from a camera to your computer. Once transferred, open your favorite photo editing software and get to work! Most editors use very similar terms and have nearly identical sets of basic controls. All editors allow you to adjust the contrast, brightness, tint, and sharpness of images. By using a combination of these four basic tools, you can add new life to faded or discolored photographs.

If your photo has more severe issues, then it is time to open your editor's toolbox. Again, most editing software will have a group of tools with very specific purposes. Among these, you will find dust removers (to eliminate the tiniest of specs), red eye removal (to neutralize the red eye effect produced by camera flash), and smudging and cloning tools, to name a few.

With photos affected by foxing, or people affected by blemishes, I have found that the cloning tool works best. This is where practice and a little artistic skill may help. Use the cloning tool to pick up samples from other similar areas of the photograph, and apply them to affected areas. This effectively smoothes out or eliminates the trouble spots.

If you are looking to perform "extreme makeovers," try adding or removing people from your pictures. This can be very entertaining. I've used this cloning technique to create family portraits when it was impossible to get the entire family together at one time. You can also swap people in and out of group pictures to make sure everyone looks their best in the same shot!

To see some examples and explanations of photo enhancements, visit:
www.LoveConsulting.com/PhotoFun.htm.

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