<h1 style="text-align:center">**Slide Show** by Jerry Oltion</h1>

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Old technologies inevitably get replaced by new ones, but not always without a struggle--and in that struggle, as in others, might doesn't always make right....

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The first time Nathan aimed a camera through his telescope, he forgot to turn off the flash. The sudden burst of light ruined his night vision for half an hour, and he was certain it had ruined the photo, too, but when he got his slides back a week later, he had a decent picture of the Moon. Not a great one, but way better than he expected. The flash had apparently reflected off the telescope's curved body and not back into the lens.

He hung onto that shot, and even in later years, when he had thousands to choose from, he would often stick it in at the beginning of a slide show to illustrate how easy it was to take astrophotographs. "I didn't even mount the camera on the telescope for that one," he would say. "Just set the shutter to a one-twenty-fifth and pointed it through the eyepiece."

He had soon graduated to prime-focus photography, wherein he removed both the camera's lens and the telescope's eyepiece, essentially turning the telescope into a thousand millimeter telephoto lens. His photos of nebulae and star clusters often rivaled those from professional astronomers. He wound up selling some of his better images to *Astronomy* magazine and *Sky and Telescope*, and his planetarium shows were always a big hit. He was a local celebrity at the camera shop where he had his processing done, though he was always modest about his achievements, often saying, "Heck, anybody with a camera and a little patience can do as well."

To illustrate his point, he would tell people what he actually did for a living: he was a data processing clerk for the city of Spencerville. He spent his days in a cubicle, staring at a computer monitor or arguing on the phone with Homeland Security agents who wanted to snoop through his files. An English major in college, his degree awarded over a quarter century ago, he wasn't exactly a rocket scientist nor a hot young astronomer, but he could take a decent astrophoto, and so, he liked to say when he gave a presentation at a school, could *you*. He occasionally saw a spark of interest in a student's eyes, and a couple of times he even saw those students out on the flat-topped water tank at the edge of town where he liked to do his observing, but he knew his was a fringe hobby, and he didn't expect to draw many others into it.

He went out two or three times a week, when the weather cooperated, always burning up an entire roll of hyper-sensitized slide film in a night. That, he figured, was the real source of his celebrity at the camera store, so he wasn't overly surprised when the owner said to him one afternoon, "Maybe you'd better buy a few extra rolls this time."

Danny was standing in front of the wine-rack-style film display mounted on the wall behind the counter. The pickings looked a little sparse, but there were at least a couple of rolls in each slot.

"No, thanks," Nathan replied. "I like it to be as fresh as possible."

"Well, there's the rub," Danny said. "They've stopped making the stuff. As soon as the manufacturers sell what's in their warehouses, that's it."

"Stopped making slide film?" It took a moment for Nathan to grasp the concept. "You're kidding. What are professional photographers going to use?"

"Just about everybody has gone digital these days," said Danny. He nodded to the display case of digital cameras.

Nathan snorted. Those tiny cigarette-pack gadgets with their obscene little lenses that slid out suggestively when you powered them up? Those grainy, pixilated, yuppie novelties were replacing serious cameras? "No way," he said.

"It's true," said Danny. "A six megapixel image can be blown up to eleven by fourteen without pixilation, and you can do so much image enhancement with Photoshop..." He shook his head. "The only thing that keeps me in business these days is printing. Fortunately, it's still too expensive to do much of that at home."

"Printing?" Nathan asked. "As in paper prints?"

"No, we use real photographic paper," Danny said. "It's the same high quality as before, only from a--"

"Prints," Nathan said. "Gah. Now if you can make a decent *slide* from one of those digital gadgets..."

"Wouldn't matter if we could," Danny said. "They've stopped making slide projectors, too. Everybody's going to laptop computers and PowerPoint presentations."

"Stopped making slide projectors?" The steady onslaught of bad news had reduced Nathan to simply echoing what he heard. "But--they can't do that. I've got thousands of slides. Literally thousands."

"You'll have to scan them in," Danny said. "Or stock up on slide projectors. I can probably still get you one."

"Do that," Nathan said. "And bulbs. God, get me a case of bulbs. And a brick of slide film. Two. No, three."

"Bricks?" Danny asked. "As in twenty rolls each?"

"Is that all you get in a brick? Hell, make it ten."

Danny got out a calculator from below the counter and punched in some figures. "Uh, that would be over a thousand dollars, even with a volume discount. You sure you want to do that?"

"Damn straight," Nathan said. "If they're going to stop making the stuff, I want a lifetime supply."

That night he went out to see if he could capture the Veil Nebula, the remnant of a supernova that had exploded thousands of years ago. It required a long exposure, over an hour's worth, which meant he only got two shots of it before Cygnus dropped into the west. Normally he would finish off the rest of the roll on quick subjects like planets or star clusters, but this time he decided to save his film. He couldn't hyper-sensitize it again without blowing the frames he had already taken, but he could still get decent results from it, and if the stuff was irreplaceable now...

When he got home he was too wound up to sleep, so he put a Moody Blues album on the stereo and listened to that while he sipped a cup of hot chocolate to warm up. The record was full of scratches, and it warbled a little from being drilled off center, but it was one of his favorites, and tonight he needed the comfort of familiar pleasures.

He supposed he was taking this too hard. Lots of astronomers had gone digital. The magazines were full of images taken with "Powershots" and "Coolpixes," even webcams, for Pete's sake; essentially home movies that a computer pulled apart into separate frames that it stacked on top of one another until they generated a decent composite. Nathan had resisted doing that, preferring the time-honored tradition of film, but he had to admit some of the images were stunning.

But what would he do with the thousands of shots he had already taken? How could he assemble a decent planetarium show with half slides and half digital images? Would he have to scan all his slides into digital form? If he did that, he would have to upgrade his computer, probably buy a laptop as well so he could carry his slide show--his PowerPoint show--with him to schools and the planetarium and the like. Plus the digital projector, too. By the time he added up all the computer equipment, he would be into it for several thousand dollars. Better to just buy a lot of film and a spare projector.

But it hurt to see an entire technology disappear. Maybe he was lamenting the demise of buggy whips, but damn it, he *liked* these particular buggy whips. To see slide photography disappear merely for economic reasons seemed a shame.

The Moody Blues started into "Sun is Still Shining," one of his favorites. He listened for the little pop just before the chorus, as much a part of the song for him as the rest of it. Thank goodness turntables hadn't gone the way of the dodo the way people had predicted when CDs became popular. Ironic that hip-hop, an artform that Nathan barely considered music, had kept turntables alive. Whenever he heard a rap "artist" abuse a record to make his sound effects, it made him wince, but at least a person could still buy a new turntable when he needed one.

That's what Nathan should do: he should start a new artform that used slides and slide projectors. That would keep the technology alive. He tried to think what else a person could do with a camera and a slide projector. Project temporary graffiti on building walls? Make cheap stage lighting? Send up Batman signals on cloudy nights?

Clearly Nathan wasn't going to be setting any new trends. If he really wanted to do that, he would have to put the equipment in the hands of someone better connected to modern culture.

He laughed at the image that came to him: wearing a black trenchcoat, he would go to a skateboard park at night and surreptitiously plant a loaded camera and a slide projector.

Yeah, right. Just when the stuff was getting scarce, he would give it away. Besides, the kids who found it would probably just smash it to pieces anyway. That would be a great new use for a slide projector: litter.

He put the idea out of his mind, but over the next few days, days spent rejecting Homeland Security requests for information on local citizens and explaining yet again to frustrated federal agents that the city council was still debating whether or not Spencerville was going to comply with their unconstitutional invasions of privacy, the idea kept popping up. Maybe hoarding wasn't the right answer. A person had to invest money to make money; maybe he should invest a slide projector to see if he could make more.

It was a dumb idea. Most likely he would just lose a slide projector. But after a week in which the thought resurfaced every few hours, he finally decided to try it. He could afford it, and who knows, maybe whoever found the equipment would at least get into photography. And once he had done it, maybe he could get the crazy notion out of his mind.

He had an old Canon AE-1 that didn't have a mirror lock-up, so it wasn't much use for astrophotography. He loaded that with a roll of film and got the older of his two slide projectors out of the closet. Both camera and projector were so full of memories that he nearly backed out when he saw the two of them side-by-side on the table, but he reminded himself that he hadn't used either one in years. Besides, he had two other cameras, and when his order at the camera shop came in he would have two projectors again, and that would just have to be enough.

He looked at the empty carousel. That wouldn't do. He would have to fill it--no, just half fill it--with slides to pique the interest of whoever found it.

He thought about filling it with astrophotos, but if he did that, he would be unconsciously biasing the recipient toward something that had already proven inadequate at keeping slide photography alive. He could put in a few, of course, including a copy of his very first shot, but he would need some other images, too.

It was still light outside. He took the freshly-loaded camera into the back yard and snapped a quick shot of his maple tree with its autumn leaves glowing yellow in the evening light. There were birds hopping around in the branches; he went back inside for his spotting scope and a T-adapter, then took a couple of frame-filling shots of a junco and a nuthatch. A plane was flying by a few miles to the east, drawing a bright contrail against the blue sky; with the ease of long practice he aimed the scope at it and snapped a shot of that, too.

The sky stayed clear into twilight, so he loaded his big scope into the car and headed for the water tank. It wasn't quite dark by the time he had set up, so, feeling a little like an international spy on assignment, he swung the great barrel down below the horizon and aimed it at the skate park. There were five kids on the edge of the concrete bowl, watching a sixth zoom up and down the sides. Sodium vapor lights illuminated the bowl with their eerie orange glow.

"Oh, yeah," Nathan murmured. He attached the camera, set it for a quarter second exposure, and snapped a couple of shots.

The next day he took the camera to work and took a picture of a Homeland Security information request on his computer screen, sticking a Post-it note over the names to make sure it stayed anonymous. He took a picture of his coffee mug, with steam rising. During his lunch hour, he took a shot of the city council chambers, the councilors' name placards identifying their empty seats. When he got in the car to drive home at the end of the day he took a picture of his car's instrument panel, centering on the "check engine" light.

This was turning out to be more fun than he had expected. He had concentrated on astronomical subjects for so long, he had forgotten to look at other things, but now he was exploring his world with new eyes. And the idea of leaving both camera and slide projector for a random stranger to pick up--it felt more deliciously right than he had ever imagined. It had ceased being about the medium, and was now an act of performance art.

He took two rolls of slides in three days, and somewhat reluctantly decided that was enough. He wanted to leave room for the equipment's new owner to add some shots of their own.

He loaded the carousel, putting a couple of the slides in sideways just for the heck of it. Thinking outside the box, and all. For the last slide, he took a paperclip and scratched into the emulsion of a shot of a concrete sidewalk: "Do something new." At the last-minute, he loaded it backwards.

He didn't wear a trenchcoat. That seemed like overkill. He just drove over to the skate park at the end of a night of Lunar observation, set the plastic bag with the camera and the slide projector in it under one of the benches, and drove home.

Nothing happened for nearly a month. Nothing that he knew about, anyway. But one day he got a Homeland Security information request on three fourteen-year-old boys and a high school journalism teacher, and although he gave HomeSec the standard reply that the city council was still in deliberation on the issue of compliance, he also did a quick search on their names to see what would come up.

The only thing in the city database was a record of their appearance at a city council meeting a week ago, on which they had spoken in support of the resolution to defy the Patriot Act's invasion of people's privacy. They had apparently requested time for a slide show, but were denied. But a web search

showed that they had given their show at the public library two days ago, and would give it again tonight at the W.O.W. hall. They called it "Captured Light Speaks Out for Freedom."

Nathan went to the show. Sure enough, there was his slide projector on a wheeled cart in the middle of the aisle between rows of folding chairs. A teenage boy was making sure it was ready to go. The seats filled surprisingly quickly, until people were forced to stand around the edges of the hall. At showtime, another teenage boy stepped onto the stage in front of the white screen and held up Nathan's--now his--camera, which he aimed at the audience and fired off a shot.

"At least one of the people in the picture I just took is a Homeland Security agent," the boy said. "Does that bother you?"

There was a moment of stunned silence, then several members of the audience--Nathan included--shouted, "Yes!"

"Wait until they start asking questions about you," the boy said. "Actually, they probably have, but you'll never know because it's illegal to tell anyone when a request for information has been made."

The audience roared this time in inarticulate dismay.

The boy said, "A month ago, somebody struck an anonymous blow against them. I was boarding with some friends when we found it under the bench: this camera and that slide projector. The projector was half full, and the camera was loaded with fresh film. It seemed pretty clear what we had to do."

He stepped aside. Someone in back flipped off the lights. The boy at the projector flipped it on in the same instant, and Nathan's first photo of the Moon flashed up on the screen.

"A telescope is an innocuous enough device," the boy on the stage said. "You can take pretty pictures through one."

The junco flashed up on the screen. "You can take close-up pictures."

The picture of the kids skateboarding appeared on the screen. It was a pretty good shot. The one actually boarding was a blur of motion, and the others were clear, easily recognizable as they watched their buddy perform. "Or you can take surveillance photos. That's me." He pointed to one of the watchers. "As near as we can tell, this was taken from half a mile away."

The next slide showed the airplane. "United" was clearly legible on the fuselage. You couldn't quite see faces in the windows, but it looked as if you might if you zoomed in a little. "This is what drives the government nuts," said the kid. "What if some terrorist is in our midst, gathering information for his next strike?"

The next slide showed the Homeland Security information request. "Maybe we should let them dig for information. After all, it's for a good cause."

Then came a slide Nathan hadn't taken. It showed a high school girl checking out a stack of books at the library. The next slide zoomed in on the titles. *Understanding Sexuality*, *Family Planning and You*, and *Speaking to Prozac*.

"Still think so?"

Another shot of book titles; this time *Mein Kampf*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and *Quotations of Chairman Mao*.

"Taken out of context, kind of scary. Put into context--" another slide showed the books sitting on a shelf labeled *Political Science* "--the only scary thing about it is knowing which picture the government will use at your trial. If you get a trial."

The slide show continued, Nathan's pictures interspersed with the teenagers' own shots. Sometimes the projector operator let a single slide linger for minutes at a time, letting people examine the maple tree until they felt like they knew every leaf; other times he jumped from image to image so fast they were mere suggestions. Nathan marveled at how his random photos had sparked this protest, and how well they fit together under its common theme. Apparently his own agenda had directed the camera without his conscious knowledge.

All the same, it was just a slide show. He had hoped that the kids would think of some brand new use for the equipment, some skateboard-powered, rap-inspired artform that would keep the technology alive; not simply set it up and use it for the same old thing that Nathan did.

But as he watched, he slowly began to realize that it wasn't the same old thing. When was the last time he had seen high school kids draw a full-house crowd for a political protest? How had they managed to make a telephoto image of a nuthatch--a photo that Nathan himself had taken!--seem so threatening? The outward mechanics of the show were nothing new, but there was something different here, and the audience knew it. They fairly crackled with energy, and it built to a crescendo that Nathan would never have guessed possible in a group of people watching a sequence of still images.

The slide show ended with the "check engine" light, followed by the "do something new" slide. In this context, the scratches in the emulsion looked like rips in the fabric of reality, as if they had been etched by the fingernail of God. The kids let it run for a full minute before they turned on the light, and the applause continued for the entire time.

The narrator was looking straight at Nathan when the lights came up. Nathan felt a moment of alarm, but when it became apparent that the kid wasn't going to say anything, Nathan nodded to him, then got up and joined the rest of the people streaming out the door. It probably hadn't been too difficult to figure out where the photo of the skateboard park had been taken from, and there was a guy up there with a telescope and a camera practically every clear night; it wouldn't take a genius to figure out who the anonymous benefactor was. But Nathan had nothing to say to the kid, other than "Thank you," and even that seemed redundant. His presence here had said that clear enough. The kid had done exactly what Nathan had asked, and produced something completely outside Nathan's expectation. Not a new art form, by any means, but something new had happened here, and the people flowing out of the hall were carrying it with them. It was bigger than Nathan now, bigger than the kids who had produced it, free of the nest and flying on its own.

Two weeks later, the city council voted not to comply with the Patriot Act, and Nathan was directed in an official memo to refuse any and all requests from the federal government concerning the lawful actions of the citizens of Spencerville.

In the following months, other people presented slide shows of their own. Some had political agendas, but often they were just family vacation photos. People started asking for a dollar at the door to help defray the cost of film and hall rent, but rather than drive people away, that seemed to lend the whole concept an air of legitimacy that brought still more people to check out the phenomenon. By spring, it was just as common for couples to go to dinner and a slide show as it had used to be for them to take in a movie, and the practice had spread into Europe and Asia.

People tried giving PowerPoint shows as well, but when the digital images were blown up to fill-the-hall size, they just couldn't compete with the old technology. The richness of color and detail of slides looked

almost miraculous by comparison. Plus, using an analog medium felt more like art to both the photographer and the audience. All the gimmicky fades and wipes of PowerPoint presentations just got in the way of the message, and too many of the digital images were doctored until they looked obviously fake. With slides, the audience felt like they were looking at the real thing, as if the photographer were revealing something that they might have seen with their own eyes had they been there at the time.

Nathan continued his astronomy presentations, and managed to smile when people congratulated him on joining the hot, new entertainment sensation.

He smiled even wider every time he read about another city defying the Patriot Act. Civil rights seemed to be a concept whose popularity was resurging again, too.

One day in the photo store, Danny asked, "How much of that slide film do you have left, anyway?"

"Seven bricks," Nathan replied. "Why?"

"Would you mind selling some of that back to me?" Danny replied. "The warehouse is out. The film companies are retooling to start production again, but it looks like there's going to be a month's gap where nobody will be able to get any slide film. If I've got some on hand while everybody else is out, I'll gain a lot of repeat customers. I'd replace your stock with fresh film as soon as it becomes available."

Nathan laughed. "No problem. I'll sell it back to you at cost, and go back to buying it a roll at a time like I used to. I only wanted that much because it looked like it was going extinct."

"Not much chance of that," Danny said. "Not for a while, anyway."

No, not for a while. The clock would turn and public interest would eventually move on, but Nathan had bought at least a few more years of reprieve. Apparently for everyone.

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