

Archive of the Unseen: The Digital Diaries of Gen Z

Unveiling the hidden photos that matters most.

We all know the drill. You take the photo, maybe tweak a blemish or two, slap on a filter, and wait for the dopamine hit of likes. But something's shifted.

For Gen Z, who practically grew up with Instagram in one hand and snapchat in the other, the relationship with photography is evolving, less about impressing others and more about expressing self. We live in a world where every brunch, birthday, and breathtaking sunset feels like it's asking to be posted. We scroll through curated feeds and highlight reels, forgetting that behind every perfectly-lit snap is a camera roll full of blurry moments, private jokes, and photos that never made it to the grid. Not because they weren't good enough, but because they were meant just for us.



Profile of Interviewees from left to right: Andrea, Jun Rui, Ray, Arielle

We spoke to four Gen Z individuals—Andrea (20), Ray (20), Jun Rui (21), Arielle (18) about what photography means when no one's watching. Their answers, sparked by six simple questions, paint a picture of a generation quietly reclaiming photography for themselves.

Andrea & Jun Rui



Collage of Andrea's and Jun Rui's Unseen Archive

If social media disappeared tomorrow, would you still take photos?

Andrea: “I think I’d definitely still take photos because I’m a very sentimental person. As much as I would love to relive a moment, the closest thing I could get to that is scrolling through my photo album.”

JunRui: “I would definitely still take photos. It’s a recent hobby that I picked up, but it’s mainly to capture moments that I wanted to remember. I don’t get that many moments anymore to meet up with friends or catch up with them and have those kinds of fond memories, so to me, I would still definitely try to take photos to remember those times.”

How often do you take photos, and what do you usually capture?

Andrea: “I take photos almost everyday, and it depends on the situation that I’m in. If I’m spending the day alone, I would usually end up taking pictures of the scenery, or the things around me, or the food I eat. But when I’m with other people—my friends, with him, my family, I tend to take photos of us together.”

JunRui: “I usually take pictures on the weekends and of people, or funny moments. Moments that I would want to remember in the future. Because those are the things that mean something to me.”

How do you decide what to post and what to keep private?

Andrea: “It’s a simple process for me because I don’t really take too much into account when I’m posting. As long as it’s visually appealing to me I would put it online.”

JunRui: “For me, I tend to post pictures with bigger groups online. Usually it's because I want to share those moments with my friends as they are also in those pictures. Maybe for those one on one moments which I share with certain people when I catch up with them for lunch on the weekends, those I want to keep to myself. I feel like I don't need to let everyone know what I’m doing on a day to day basis as well, and it’s just nice to keep those moments to myself, and between me and them.”

Do the photos you keep private feel more meaningful?

Andrea: “For me, yes they do. Especially the ones with other people or other people sharing the memory with me. I like that we all have different sentiments towards just one moment in time. It’s very sweet to look back on.”

JunRui: “I like that the pictures that I keep to myself usually are more private, like one on one. Even in groups in general, private moments which I think are more meaningful to me. And I think that keeping those photos in my gallery to myself, allows me to look back on and also just remember the times in general, like the weeks and months, around the time period.”

Do you think of your camera roll as a digital diary?

Andrea: “I see it as a digital diary. There are some moments in time that I can’t remember but my photo album will. I’ve got a group of friends where we don’t meet up very often, but at the end of the year when we do, we like to look back on each other’s photo albums. To bring each other as close to the moment as we can, even though we weren’t physically there.”

JunRui: “For myself, I don’t get to take photos that often anyways. So, taking photos over the weekends helps me to not only remember the moment but also the week that comes before that, or even the month before that. Because sometimes I could be overseas for certain things and coming back, I get to meet my friends and have these moments with them. And taking those photos helps me kind of look back at it and reflect because they have time stamps on it.”

If you had to delete all but one photo from your phone, which would you keep and why?



A Moment to Remember - Andrea & JunRui

Andrea: "This is the photo that I would want to keep. It's very special to me in a way that it's not very easy for me to open up to other people, but for some reason, with him, very early in the relationship I was able to share concerns that I wasn't really able to share with other people before, and it was a sweet moment that I want to remember this out of many other memories."

JunRui: "For me personally, I chose it because it's very early on in our relationship. It was very sentimental to me because it was very easy to open up to her. And for a long time I wondered why I wanted to talk to her so often because I felt that it was very comfortable to open up and share things with her, which I wouldn't really share with other people. And because of that, this moment I kept very private to myself and I've never posted it, never told anyone about it. It's just a nice moment which I like to remember between me and her."

Arielle



Collage of Arielle's Unseen Archive

If social media disappeared tomorrow, would you still take photos?

Arielle: “Definitely. I take photos for myself and more as a digital log of what I’ve been doing ever since I got hold of a phone. I mean I could post them on social media but I don’t feel like I need to because I like to keep a certain amount of things to myself. Not everyone has to know every single one of my memories over the past year, which is why I don’t use social media as a public log itself.”

How often do you take photos, and what do you usually capture?

Arielle: “I take photos almost every single day and I take pictures of anything from any insects I see on the ground or something new that I bought, or pictures of my friends when I’m out. Quite literally anything that seems somewhat interesting to me even if it’s objectively kind of mundane.”

How do you decide what to post and what to keep private?

Arielle: “I don’t really have a fixed ‘yes post this’ or ‘no, don’t post that’ but it’s more like which ones I feel are ‘instagrammable’ enough—pretty street pictures, following the rule of thirds, landscapes. Otherwise, it’s nothing too personal. It’s just what I feel like what people want the public to see.”

Do the photos you keep private feel more meaningful?

Arielle: “Some of them do, but some of them are just kind of like these photos look kind of bad but I want to keep them for myself. But the ones that I do think are more meaningful

are like photos of my friends when they are laughing, the unflattering images of people. Such photos are more meaningful to me because I can associate a particular emotion I was feeling at the time and what my friends are feeling, so I keep them to myself and I find those more meaningful.”

Do you think of your camera roll as a digital diary?

Arielle: “Yes, definitely. One thing I really like about smartphones is that they have made photography really really accessible. And I’ve got quite a lot of storage for a lot of photos so it has become a digital diary. Also because I don’t like keeping written diaries, I don’t do well with writing, and I can;t remember anything I write, so my phone has become my main log of things.”

If you had to delete all but one photo from your phone, which would you keep and why?

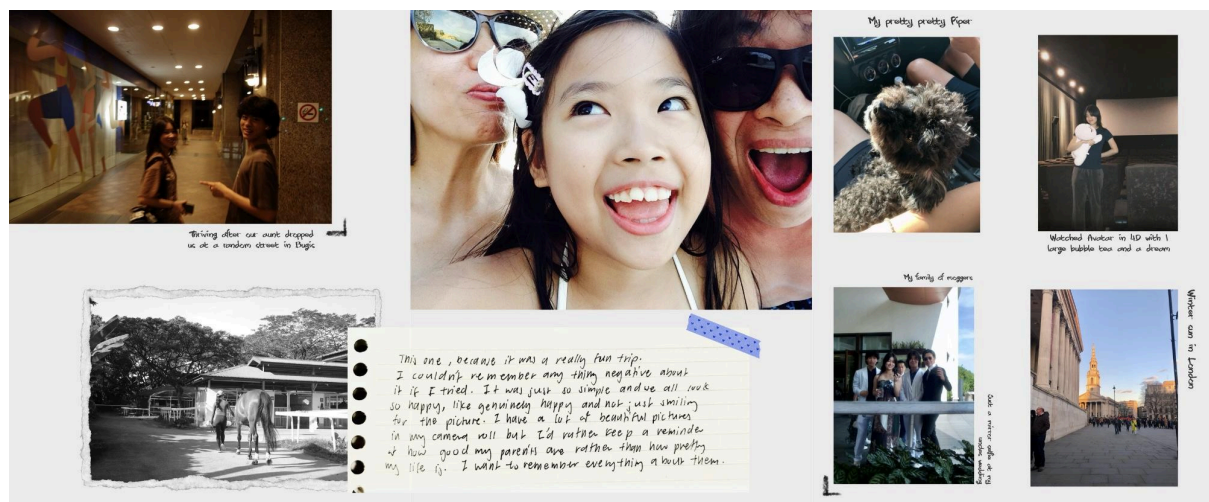


S8 Train to Richterswil Station - Arielle

Arielle: “It would be this photo. It’s just a picture of my view from the train back in Switzerland. I used to live in Switzerland at least like three, four years ago. And, I’ve got a

really really poor memory so I can't really remember what exactly life was like there. But with that photo, it kind of reminds me a lot of my everyday routine that I used to go through—go to school, come back on that train and go to my father's house. So, when I have that photo I can also remember all my experiences back in Switzerland that were tied to my daily routine. My friends in Switzerland who are no longer in Singapore at least, so it's very nostalgic to me even though it's kind of a 'lame' photo."

Ray



Collage of Ray's Unseen Archive

If social media disappeared tomorrow, would you still take photos?

Ray: "I would. Because I feel like I don't post that much, I tend to just take photos of anything. I like to take photos of my food, or my dog. I think for me it's just to capture memories so that I don't forget them and it's something that I can always look back on."

How often do you take photos, and what do you usually capture?

Ray: "Well, I feel like I take photos every day. Normally if I see something interesting. After a year of studying in design, if I see something that would be a good inspiration then I would take a picture of it. Or if I'm with my friends and I see a cute moment, I would capture that as a scene, because I feel like I would want that as a memory to keep, so I would do that and send it to them."

How do you decide what to post and what to keep private?

Ray: “I’m quite casual about what I post, so I normally just post things that I think look good or stuff that I think would go together well with what’s already posted. Most of the time it’s just memories that I share, and things that I keep to myself. I guess it’s like stuff that’s more intimate, or stupid stuff of my friends, things that they probably wouldn’t want posted.”

Do the photos you keep private feel more meaningful?

Ray: “I think they do. When I look back on them, I feel that anyone that needs to see the photo is already in the photo. So it’s kind of like a special moment between me and them, and it’s something almost like an inside joke, but it’s captured or immortalised in that way.”

Do you think of your camera roll as a digital diary?

Ray: “I think so. Because I feel like we all do that thing when we’re bored we all look at our camera rolls and we kind of like scroll through and it’s like a story of my life. Camera rolls are divided by months, so it kind of divides my life into different phases of my life and emotions that I felt in association with that time.”

If you had to delete all but one photo from your phone, which would you keep and why?



Phuket 2014 - Ray

Ray: “It was a family trip to Phuket when I was maybe eight or nine, and it was just a really nice trip that was really simple and really positive, I don’t think I can remember anything that was super negative. Normally, when you go on family trips you’ll be stressed and there’s a lot of stuff that’s going on, but this trip was really chill. We just went to the villa and we laid out in the sun together. It was a nice time because I got to know my parents more. I think it’s just something I wouldn’t want to forget. If I had to delete every other memory, this is one that I want to remember. This is the one I want to keep because it just shows who my parents are as people and I think I wouldn’t want to forget that ever.”

In a generation raised on digital noise, there is something refreshingly defiant about choosing not to share everything. About keeping some images sacred, letting a photo be enough even if no one else ever sees it. In that choice, privacy becomes its own kind of intimacy.

Not every photo is meant to be seen, but that doesn’t make it any less important. In a world that’s always looking, there’s something powerful about saying “this one’s just for me”.