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To: Julie L. Sigall
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From: Ruthann E. Gray

Comment:

I traveled 600 miles in 2 days in 2001 to my father's funeral. There, I met a half brother for the first time, who brought with him to the funeral some photo copies of photos of my father. One was a photo copy of a school photo taken when he was about 10, in the 1940's. Another was a group boy scout shot taken in the same time frame. My half brother did not have the originals, so we went off to Walmart to make copies for me to have; before we went our separate ways after the funeral. There at the Walmart in Biddeford, Maine, the photo center clerk refused to allow me to have the photos of my father. Although we were using photo copies images, she said the originals were copyright protected. Having just buried my father a few hours earlier, I could not believe I was being denied precious photos of him as a child by a clerk who was more concerned about the rights of an unknown and likely deceased photographer than she was about me as a customer, grieving the loss of my dad. I was hysterical as she held the photos of my dad hostage in my view at the time. Likely the reality is she was concerned about losing her job if she allowed me to have the photos. If a photo is for my personal use, especially when I am the subject, or other family members whose memories I want to preserve, I want to be able to make quality copies. Soon personal computer printers will allow us this quality at home, without any oversight. But if I am not selling the image, I want to be able to make a copy for my own use. If a photographer has already been paid for the image when it was purchased, it now belongs to the person who purchased it.

When I married, I used only family members and friends to photograph my wedding, so I could have the negatives, crop to my heart's content, make as many copies and enlargements as I wanted, without someone else having any say about it. If my friends can take photos of me without copyrighting the images, then I think this is an essential option for those of us who would like the quality of a skilled photographer, which my friends were not, and the freedom to use our own images as we want.

When I have a photo taken of my sons at school by a school photographer, I do not want to give permission to the photographer to own my sons' images. I want a photographic memory of my sons. That's it. I should be able to retain the rights to images of my sons and me, not an anonymous photographer who happened to win the school's contract.