

Restoring Old Faded Color Photographs

The photograph used in this demonstration was taken in 1951 and was, for the most part kept in a family photo album, which means it was not subject to a lot of sunlight, direct or indirect, which could have accounted for the faded, color shifted appearance.

At the beginning of any photo project determine the finished size of your picture and crop to those dimensions, this will save you the trouble of retouching areas that will later be cropped out.

To start the restoration go to “enhance” in the toolbar then down to “adjust lighting” then over to “levels,” in the “levels” window select channel “Red” position the sliders at each edge of the mountain. Note the difference in the image with just this single input, now do the same with the “Green” and “Blue” channels. (Picture #1)

Be advised that there are usually 4 different ways to do a given thing in Photoshop elements, the methods being demonstrated are but one path to the desired end result, feel free to develop your own style and use the tools you feel most comfortable with.

The mans features are not well defined, they can be enhanced by use of the burn tool (o) which is grouped with the dodge and sponge tools, as usual start with a low value of exposure, in the neighborhood of 15% and move over a given area a number of times until it becomes dark enough. In particular note the definition in and around the ears in picture #3. The beauty of the burn tool is that it does not create new detail it merely intensifies existing detail. Zoom in close and use a small brush, zooming out from time to time to check the result, When zoomed in close a detail can look over done yet when viewed at finished size it appears normal, so check repeatedly to insure you are achieving the desired result.

Picture #4 is the additional development of detail using the burn tool (o) to enhance the man’s tie and the woman’s lips and teeth. The woman’s top has been improved first with the paint brush (set to a low opacity - 25% or less) to bring up the blue color then the “burn tool” (o) to intensify the red stripe Note the improvement of the red and white “V” figure Also note the light streak down the right side of the woman’s face has been removed with the use of the clone stamp (s) tool, which was also used to remove the eyeglass shadows around the woman’s eyes.

Now to bring up the flesh tones go to “enhance”, “adjust color”, “Adjust color for skin tone” the curser will change to an eye dropper select the

area you like to be the flesh tone and click the mouse button. (Picture # 5)

To give the picture a little more snap go to “enhance” down to “adjust lighting” then to “brightness contrast” and adjust the sliders to your personal taste. (Picture # 6). As a final step the “unsharp mask” filter can be used if more detail is desired, it is located under “enhance” the amount slider is the control to use the other two should not be used, in fact I have no idea why they are even put there as everything I have read or heard from instructors says to leave them at their default setting.

The pictures used as examples are in an incomplete state so that you can try your hand at finishing them using the tools described in the foregoing text, first of course by down loading the pictures to your desk top so that any changes you make can be saved.

A second picture has been included showing how a background can be added. Using Beverly-6 you can change the background layer to something else if you so desire.

Just a final thought, the amount of time you spend restoring old photos has to be a labor of love because it takes time to become familiar with the tools and how they interact, which tool to use in a given instance and how best to achieve a desired result. Be patient and practice, practice, practice and practice some more. The more you do the easier it becomes. Never give up!