

DEVOTED TO DIGITAL

GOOD RIDDANCE
TO THE DAYS OF FILM

VERY FEW PEOPLE are nostalgic for the old days of photo processing: the interminable wait to see if you got even one decent image on a roll of 36 frames of film, the abject disappointment if you failed to, and the cost of prints and slides. If you had your own darkroom or worked in one, the routine included agitating film canisters by hand, mixing smelly chemicals, wielding tongs and washing trays, and the constant fear of light leaks. Wild horses couldn't drag me back to those times, but I did have some interesting photo lab jobs over the years.

My first was in a small Wasilla-based business. During that time, I also volunteered at a horse boarding stable and had lightly frost-bitten my fingertips while wearing damp gloves. I quickly learned that peeling fingertips from winter's nip does not go well with fixative. Ouch! I had to use rubber gloves for lab work for a few weeks until I healed up.

A photo lab in Anchorage liked me so much that every time I quit to go commercial salmon fishing with my family over the summer, they'd welcome me back in the fall. My five stints there in the '80s and '90s taught me all about color balancing, retouching, pushing and pulling film, and all the weird and wonderful things people took pictures of. I printed hundreds of 8x10s of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill that likely went into lawsuit files; images of the viscous, gloppy brown crude choking shorelines and smothering seabirds were gut-wrenching. But I found the forensic autopsy photos I enlarged for the Anchorage Police Department strangely fascinating.

I worked for a semester in the photo lab at the Alaska and Polar Regions Department



Above: Columbine brighten up the Resurrection Pass Trail on the Kenai Peninsula.



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at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, where I was entrusted to print black-and-whites from delicate glass plate negatives. And a national chain photo lab in Seattle hired me when I lived there briefly; I remember recognizing the name on an order once, from someone in Talkeetna—it made me homesick.

While I'm glad to have had those unique experiences, I'm also happy that these days I can go for a hike, download my photos when I get home, edit some with a few clicks, and share them online with the world as I relax on my couch with an evening beverage. Lazy? Perhaps. Ephemeral? Surely. Even so, I'm a dyed-in-the-wool digital devotee.

See our Q&A on page 8 to learn which of my *Alaska* magazine colleagues agree.

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