

Fronts and Backs



At the library's local-history afternoon, Anton and his wife, Miriam, brought a tin of photographs. A younger volunteer, Anika, offered to help them make digital copies.

She picked up a picture of the old swimming baths. On the back was a date in Anton's handwriting.

"Taken in June?" she asked.

"Printed in June," he said. "I used to write the date when the envelope came back. That one was a cold April."

Anika added a question mark beside the month in her notes. Anton found the next picture and checked its back before saying anything.

Soon the table held several loose photographs. Miriam turned one over and could not remember which empty space it belonged in.

Anika took a stack of small paper slips. She numbered them, then set each photograph beside its number before copying the front and back. The slips stayed outside the pictures, and her list kept each pair together.

Anton began arranging the remaining photographs for her.

Miriam lifted a picture of a picnic cake. "Your fortieth birthday."

“Thirty-ninth.”

“You said forty at the time.”

“I wanted the larger cake.”

Anika waited, pencil above her list.

Miriam set the photograph beside its slip. “Put a question mark on that one too.”

Anton straightened the little number and left it there.

To remember

1. Anton explains that his handwritten date records printing, not necessarily the photograph
2. Loose fronts and backs become hard to match
3. Anika numbers paper slips and logs each copied pair together
4. A disputed birthday cake receives its own question mark.