

Mourning Becomes Hers: Women, Tradition, and Memory Albums

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Rhonda Anderson had been assembling beautiful photograph albums since her teenage years, a craft she learned from her mother, Ada Kanning.¹ Surprised by the interest in the album-making workshops she taught in her Montana hometown, Anderson received encouragement from a friend to share her skills with an even wider audience. The friend, an attorney, told her, "Every day people come to my office filled with despair. . . . If only they had albums like these to look back and *remember* all the good things that have happened and all the reasons why life is worth living, I know they would have the hope to go on. *Everyone needs to have albums like these.*"² During a telephone call that afternoon with her album supplier, Anderson spoke to Cheryl Lightle, the supplier's marketing vice president. On that afternoon in 1987, the two women hatched the plan that became Creative Memories,³ a direct-marketing company that sells album-making materials and techniques to a mostly female clientele through a worldwide network of more than 90,000 sales consultants.⁴ By the beginning of the new millennium, millions of people had participated in Creative Memories workshops. The company's worldwide retail sales were pegged at \$400 million by the end of 2003; as the flagship entity of contemporary scrapbooking, Creative Memories has spawned many successful imitators, specialized publications and Web sites, and manufacturers of scrapbooking tools and materials.⁵ Observers of the industry estimated sales overall in 2004 at \$2.55 billion.⁶ The past few years have seen vigorous competition in and some sorting-out of the memory-keeping industry; innovations in technology such as online scrapbooking and professionally printed memory books have obviated much of the need for the albums, paper, "embellishments," and tools offered by in-home consultants. By 2005, the retail scrapbooking market began to contract.⁷ Indeed, in November 2008, the Antioch Company, parent of Creative Memories based in



St. Cloud, Minnesota, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy but reemerged in early 2009.⁸

Yet, over the past two decades, Creative Memories set the tone for an explosion of interest in what it labels the photo-preservation “movement.”⁹ Promising to keep photos and mementos safe from deterioration, Creative Memories also sold a worldview, reflected across the industry, that such preservation is essential to human flourishing—“everyone needs to have albums like these.” Such a claim invites considerations both of how the promoters of memory-keeping envision its working and how memory-keepers themselves distinctively shape their practice. This article will take the view that album-making constitutes a kind of innovative female meaning-making (that is, religion) shaped, in part, by American-style Common Sense epistemology while also reflecting what we might call a sidelong feminism—in which a woman expresses agency, claims her voice, and declares the complexity of her full humanity, all by using modes that, on the surface, appear compliant with and respectful of patriarchy.¹⁰ This article will also use certain notions of religious testimony to gauge the space between the Common Sense project of the album-making industry—represented most vividly in the official materials of the market-maker Creative Memories—and the results produced by album-makers themselves.

Creative Memories: A Representative Vision

As the company that brought the combination of home-based selling and archival-quality album materials to millions of women, Creative Memories early on expressed a clear and comprehensive rationale for why memory-keeping matters. The company’s “vision” is “Preserve the past, enrich the present, and inspire hope for the future.”¹¹ And the company’s representatives, “consultants” who present techniques and products at home shows or “crops”—work-oriented gatherings that last a few hours or a few days and allow clients to work undisturbed¹²—encourage clients to embrace the work with a sense of urgency. “It’s crucial,” Rhonda Anderson writes, “that we make albums”¹³—so crucial, in fact, that the cofounders prefer the term “album-making” to “scrapbooking” because the latter “is viewed as a hobby or craft, while making keepsake albums is about building connections, enriching our lives, and leaving a lasting family legacy.” These promoters of album-making believe, at base, that this work uniquely sustains community life. Albums do more than organize family mementos. The albums “instruct . . . like a sacred text or book of proverbs or fables can.” Memory books possess transformative

power: they are “gifts you *experience*.”¹³ They constitute religious activity because they organize the family itself, placing its members in deep context and, by doing so, laying out a map to each one’s destiny.

Consultants expect clients to work on their albums regularly; the *Creative Memories Way* urges the reader to “Start Now—Before It’s Too Late.”¹⁴ Consultants’ presentations aim at addressing procrastination and fear of commitment by emphasizing the design and completion of “Simple Pages.”¹⁵ *Creative Memories* has also contributed to a standard aesthetic: memory albums, whether made with *Creative Memories* materials or not, have a distinctive “look” that comes, in part, from their “photo-safe,” acid- and lignin-free materials.¹⁶ Journaling, too—writing one’s thoughts or feelings about the pictured event or person—gives memory albums their distinctive look.¹⁷ Assuming that one can fully elicit the picture’s meaning in words, the cofounders write, “We believe that a picture without words loses the greater part of its value. Pictures are much more powerful, lasting and memorable when paired with the stories that go with them.”¹⁸ A page is not really complete unless one describes both the events pictured and the feelings it aroused.¹⁹ Moreover, journaling gives one’s descendants a sample of one’s handwriting—an important physical relic for future generations to cherish, seen as uniquely expressive of one’s character.²⁰

The *Creative Memories* cofounders invoke the category of “tradition” in many ways as they expound their vision of album-keeping. On the one hand, *Creative Memories* cofounder Anderson seems at home with some traditional form of Protestant Christianity, perhaps a conservative branch of American Lutheranism.²¹ *The Creative Memories Way* contains sections of her personal testimony in which she refers freely to her own and her family’s relationship with God—including her husband’s “vocation” to adopt a child from overseas.²² The book refers approvingly more than once to Dr. James Dobson, head of the conservative ministry Focus on the Family.²³ The book’s publisher, WaterBrook Press—the “autonomous evangelical religious publishing division of Random House”²⁴—operates out of Colorado Springs, Colorado, the home of Focus on the Family and one (if not the) center of conservative Protestant evangelicalism in the United States. Christian language pervades the materials for both lay album-makers and the company’s sales force. For instance, consultant training material about “faithbooking”—creating an album recounting one’s spiritual journey—assumes a Christian orientation in album-makers.

These connections to evangelical Christianity stand as significant markers of the attachment that *Creative Memories* and the



contemporary industry it has helped create have to traditional religion. The company's promotional materials also set the expectation that scrapbooking more generally is a female-identified activity that leaves traditional gender roles in place. This article, however, will explore how scrapbookers attempt to make meaning—not necessarily “Christian” meaning but “religious” meaning in the sense that sociologist Peter Berger intended: by ordering, “nomizing,” the chaotic world.²⁵ Album-making practices such as those promoted by Creative Memories draw on philosophical, religious, cultural, and photographic traditions deeply rooted in American culture. Album-making establishes an ordered world, a *nomos*, by functioning as one way the album-maker “externalizes” her experience.²⁶ The debt that Creative Memories and similar approaches to memory-keeping owe to the American tradition of Common Sense realism reveals itself, in part, through the croppers' expectations that meaning can be seamlessly laid out—literally. The album-maker hopes to lead her audience directly from pictures to their significance. She tries to narrate the details of an event or a life such that her version becomes, in Clifford Geertz's words, “uniquely realistic” to her and her audience.²⁷

Indeed, I have found that the album may become a way that the album-maker *herself* becomes uniquely, abundantly, even surprisingly realistic. In my conversations with album-makers, I noted that each woman could discuss in detail one particular album that came together during a period of transition, out of some anomic circumstance—her adjustment to an empty nest, or to her departure from the paid workforce, or to the birth of a baby, or to the loss of a parent. While the albums held out the opportunity for nomizing work, the albums end with surprising revelations of ambiguity, unfinished business, and loss. The unexpected emergence of these gaps becomes what Virginia Lieson Brereton has called the testimony's “submerged narrative,” which belies both Common Sense affirmations of truth's unfettered accessibility and the comforting solidity of traditional gender roles.²⁸

Photographic and Philosophical Traditions

In *The Creative Memories Way*, Anderson and Lightle profess that their motivations run beyond the merely commercial: “Creative Memories is more than just a photo album company. We are about tradition.”²⁹ Dedicating themselves and their company to helping families create “legacies” of memory, they have established a norm for scrapbookers everywhere that albums create traditions that connect

generation to generation—traditions of memory-keeping work as well as the albums and stories that come out of that work.

Yet, other traditions, less explicit, animate the scrapbooking vision. Anderson and Lightle do not ever refer explicitly to photographic traditions and habits of mind that trace back to the nineteenth-century beginnings of the technology, but their assumptions about the power of photography to reveal the truth mirror those of the broader culture and reflect those very sources. Scrapbooking generally also reveres certain American traditions about family that took hold in the middle of the twentieth century—including the assumption that memory-keeping is a domestic, female-identified task.³⁰

Creative Memories and scrapbooking more broadly honor the almost immediate craze for image that followed photography's introduction into the United States.³¹ The technology came to the United States from France in late 1839 and quickly indigenized.³² Early the following year, a student of Louis Daguerre gave public demonstrations in New York City—lectures probably attended by a "substantial number" of women.³³ With some advancements in the photographic process, portrait galleries and roving photographers soon took "thousands upon thousands" of portraits, sized to fit into special cases made of imitation leather or plastic, or placed into albums.³⁴ By 1849, according to the *Godey's Ladies Book*, daguerreotypy was an "American Characteristic."³⁵ Simpler-to-use dry plate negatives came into use in the 1850s, making photography even more accessible to a hobbyist public.³⁶ In a famous 1857 essay, Lady Elizabeth Eastlake observed of the English scene that photography was "a household word and a household want."³⁷ Her words rang no less true in the United States.

Modern memory albums have also taken something of the often elaborate style and serious purpose of nineteenth-century albums. Collectors saved their pictures in bulky, often finely detailed albums without which "no Victorian parlor was complete." These early albums were "often highly theatrical in design," purposefully organized, with photographs "flanked by curtains, flowers, or other ornate borders." As in contemporary scrapbooking, such albums were typically women's work—nineteenth-century family albums make clear that the mother, or sometimes a mother and daughter together, served as "chronicler[s] of family history."³⁸ Women not only collected and sometimes "cropped" the photographs and mounted them in the album but also often captioned the pictures with names, dates, and descriptions of the events depicted.³⁹ Describing Queen Victoria's photographic albums, Jennifer Green-Lewis quotes a contemporary account describing the frequency with which the queen

consulted “one volume or another” of her album collection.⁴⁰ Modern-day albums find their purpose, too, in being read and reread by their makers and heirs.

Richard Rudisill, in his examination of the daguerreotype’s impact on culture in the United States, notes that the coming of photography sparked an almost insatiable desire among Americans for its images. The public—elite and masses alike—was “fascinated,” according to Rudisill, with the process and its products. Photography may have found such a ready audience in the United States because the nation’s temperamental pump had been primed, according to Mark Noll, by long exposure to the Scottish Common Sense traditions of the “*didactic* Enlightenment.” Affirming the sixteenth-century revolutions and Reformations that dismantled all-encompassing church and state authorities, Common Sense rationalism asserted that sense experience reliably reflected “self-evident” or “intuitive truths” about the nature and conduct of virtue. This mode of knowing asserted its imminent reasonableness and also its “affectional” quality—Common Sense “looked to the heart, or to the affections, as the surest ground for honorable behavior.” The American Common Sense approach to “moral philosophy” initially attempted to justify the new nation’s break with its mother country, to establish anew an ordered social world, and to preserve the moral power of Christianity—all by appealing to a way of knowing that matched innate human capacity with accessible, indeed, sensible, moral laws of the universe.⁴¹

These beliefs, already established on the American terrain, allowed photographic images to take on outsized, even ontological, status. Where Common Sense realism argued for trusting the endowments of “universal human instincts” (rightly trained, of course) to discern the truth of a given circumstance,⁴² photography allowed one to crystallize individual moments of ordinary but trustworthy experience so that they could be relived and reexamined, mined afresh for wisdom. (We will revisit the ordinary below.) Photographs—like sensory information out in the world, but better—provided a stilled route into the subject’s true heart, a “means of insight into human nature and character.”⁴³ Photography allowed one to demonstrate tasteful affluence.⁴⁴ Photographs also showed the truth of things. Indeed, photographs could authenticate life, make a story more true.⁴⁵

These roots anchor the seriousness with which Creative Memories and all contemporary album-makers take photographs. Then, as now, scrapbookers subscribe to a worldview that accepts photographic images as reliable revelators, smooth-functioning and direct, regardless of time’s passage. Alan Thomas, for instance, identifies nineteenth-century albums’ “extraordinary vitality of attraction”

with the fact that the story comes together with “*actual* materials . . . arranged by one of the actual participants.” Daguerreotypy devotees, too, saw their images as a “form of *direct* communication with future generations.”⁴⁶ Promoters of memory-keeping intend for the album to speak to present and future audiences without complicating gaps of time or interpretation. Anderson and Lightle’s joint insistence on the photograph’s uniquely authoritative place in twenty-first-century American life and thought comes from the very beginnings of photography in the United States and, further back, from the Common Sense epistemological mode of the American people.

Part of the heritage of contemporary scrapbooking lies rooted in the mid-twentieth century as well. Mass circulation “picture magazines” created a pervasive American visual canon that still dominates the scrapbook industry. *Life*, *Look*, *Collier’s*, and the *Saturday Evening Post* crafted iconic, noncontroversial images of American “middle-class normalcy” in the postwar period, according to James Guimond. Further, he argues that these images highlighted the hard-earned prosperity, solid values, and promise of regular folks and regular towns where “no one is bored, poor, or lonely” or, for that matter, nonwhite.⁴⁷ The images reassured their viewers by drawing them into a national community that followed the same sports teams, witnessed the same great civic events, and triumphed on the world stage.⁴⁸ These publications promoted a “conservative populism” celebrating the power of ordinary citizens, undivided by class or ethnic differences, to “band together against the cunning ‘interests.’”⁴⁹ Again relying on a Common Sense habit of mind, photographs created a community by picturing as truthful certain values, identities, and activities.

This populism was domestic and gendered. “The favorite subjects of these visions of American reality were happy families,”⁶¹ Guimond observes, and “the fathers of these families invariably hold full-time jobs and provide most or all of the family income; the mothers are housewives or have part-time jobs; the children are cute and well-mannered. . . . These [families] were specifically and insistently portrayed as being identical with America and its way of life.”⁵⁰ This family symbolized “cultural order.” Family rituals, often focused on children, appeared regularly in the magazines’ pages.⁵¹ The world described by Anderson and Lightle, and the one documented by contemporary album-makers, centers, too, on a similar model of family—led by the father, tended (and documented) by the mother, given purpose and the promise of continuity by multiple children. (As we shall see, scrapbookers can find agency, a particularity of individual voice, even as they document this style of family life.)

In the scrapbooked world, much meaning resides in the “details” of a typical day.⁵² *The Creative Memories Way* does an especially good job of exhorting album-makers to capture it. A child’s bike ride on an “ordinary summer day,” a father working at his desk to “provide for his family,” a family on its way to Sunday services—all are “glittering moments in life that we can savor” through a photograph and some journaling.⁵³ “These are images,” the cofounders write, “that will give the next generation the truest sense of your family’s traditions, values, and heritage.”⁵⁴ The album-maker’s work unearths these ordinary moments. Collecting and displaying such photos transforms them into anchors for the community’s identity. True to Mary Farrell Bednarowski’s observation about the raw materials of female meaning-making, the Creative Memories rationale “expands” and then theologizes upon the notion of the ordinary. The list of the ordinary goes on and on, for “every moment of . . . life is worth celebrating. . . . Every day is an occasion worth commemorating.”⁵⁵ Such moments come unbidden, numberless and innumerable significant.

What comes to mind as “ordinary,” for Anderson and Lightle and other scrapbooking promoters and practitioners, does have a mid-twentieth-century picture-magazine shape to it: “Make sure your album includes Dad reading to the toddlers after work, kids husking just-picked corn on the front porch, the nightly ritual of tucking in a child at night with hug [*sic*] and a prayer, saying grace before each meal or having family devotions, sharing Saturday morning breakfasts with your girlfriends, meeting your child at the bus stop, Grandma canning pickles in the kitchen, and you at your aerobics class.”⁵⁶ This selection of images may intend to be more suggestive than all inclusive, of course, but it conjures up a kind of idyllic, quasi-rural existence of fresh produce, porches, pickles, and piety. This vision of existence assumes as normative the experience of one demographic slice and again reflects the lasting influence of Guimond’s picture magazines.⁵⁷

One study of nineteenth-century amateur photographers sees their albums as attempts “to validate [the makers’] status as *bearers of tradition*, as people whose . . . existence was presented not just as something enjoyable, but as *a reality that excluded other alternatives*.”⁵⁸ As noted, Americans in the 1800s loved what they understood to be the unerring clarity of photographs—a precision of view that many believed extended beyond the bounds of eyesight into insight.⁵⁹ Unblinking and scientific, yet still affecting, photography could be trusted to deliver the truth. *Life* and its magazine peers stood, in the mid-twentieth century, as America’s national memory albums, presenting a view of reality that claimed deep roots in national tradition

and, thereby, excluded other possibilities: life in the United States moved slowly and harmoniously and centered on family, church, and wholesome small-scale civic activities. Gathering the scattered strands of these impulses, explanations of contemporary scrapbooking reasserts photographic inerrancy and familial centrality. *Creative Memories* particularly, as the pace-setter of the memory-keeping companies, has restored these traditions by fusing them and marketing them to a large and eager audience. *Creative Memories* and its fellow travelers continue to draw on a Common Sense orientation to the world that sees reality reproduced in a photograph and made normative for future generations.

Against the grain of these ties to tradition, however, album-makers themselves often exhibit a spirit of innovation—toward “networks” and away from “hierarchies,” in a word—that reflects their overwhelmingly female populations.⁶⁰ Scrapbookers put into practice the kind of “horizontal” epistemologies and practices described by scholars of women’s experience such as Lesley A. Northrup and Mary Farrell Bednarowski.⁶¹ Noting these impulses helps us to see the coper both as holding fiercely to traditions of gender and epistemology and as participating in a “minor stream” of unself-consciously feminist ritual practice.⁶² Scrapbooking becomes an occasion for upper-middle-class suburban women to follow guidelines that reflect a deep passion for accepted canons of home and family and, yet, produce texts that, in their mode of creation and in their message, celebrate women’s particular perspectives on those traditions.

In practice, scrapbooking work displays a renovated, “horizontal” liturgical sense that steps away from what Lesley Northrup calls the “obsessive verticality” and patriarchal spirit of traditional Christian rituals. For her, women participating in “study gatherings, literary discussion circles, activist organizations . . . even traditional ‘women’s auxiliary’ groups” and, I would add, album-making “crops,” have modified or devised rituals to reflect the “spiritual dimension” of women’s experience. Such groups expand the notion of sacred space “into the world, into nature, into everyday life. . . . Sacred space is wherever women work, love, gather, dream, remember, relate.” Memory keepers find meaning and order horizontally, among women living, relating, and feeling.⁶³

Northrup identifies a handful of “actions and symbols” that enact this horizontality: gathering in a circle, sharing or minimizing leader roles, lifting up women’s work and everyday experience, celebrating connections with nature, “revaluing” traditional views of women’s sexuality and the female life cycle, and mixing ritual with secular culture.⁶⁴ These features represent “emerging patterns,” not

requirements,⁶⁵ but we can see several of these habits at work among album-makers. Moreover, the use of women's everyday experience as data, a hallmark of Bednarowski's female "religious imagination," occupies a central place in the practice of scrapbooking.

During demonstrations or classes, for instance, croppers focus attention on the consultant. But consultants experience their position as one of serving, not controlling. One Creative Memories unit leader spoke of her work as a "privilege," signifying that she saw herself in much more of a servant role than a leadership role. Shunning formal business language or a posture of "vertical" authority, she addresses her monthly e-mail newsletter to her "friends." Croppers thus empowered can proceed with their album-making even in the absence of a consultant. Northrup quotes Mary Collins: in feminist ritual action, "spiritual power and wisdom have been given to all."⁶⁶ This model of diffuse authority invests scrapbookers with the power to narrate their own stories as they see fit.

Northrup demonstrates that feminist rituals matter for the world outside the ritual circle;⁶⁷ so, too, do rationales for scrapbooking assert its significance for those outside the cropping circle. Anderson and Lightle, for instance, claim that important, palpable results come from album-making: "strengthened relationships, richer communication, increased self-esteem, and feelings of thankfulness and belonging." Creative Memories albums "pass on life's lessons" and "instill emotional and spiritual health" in the album-maker and her children.⁶⁸ These effects get to the heart of the memory-keeping vision more generally. These books are not just receptacles for photographs but powerful texts that will unify and give purpose to family members now and in the future. Their makers intend for the albums to do real work in the world, one family member at a time.

Anderson and Lightle also crystallize the industry's emphasis on the seemingly unimportant "everyday moments." Mary Farrell Bednarowski notes women's "desire to move beyond [their] identification . . . as custodians of the ordinary in ways that are trivialized, sentimentalized, and circumscribing" while, at the same time, trying "to broaden the meaning of 'ordinary,' to claim its wisdom as well as the compelling questions, insights, and transformations that emerge from theological reflection on the ordinary." Indeed, Creative Memories cofounders paradoxically claim, "miracles" can be found in the "ordinary." "The question," they write, "is not whether miracles occur, but whether we recognize them and what we do with them."⁶⁹ Any "turning point" or "signpost" qualifies as miraculous; any moment one can identify in retrospect as determinative in one's subsequent course stands out.⁷⁰ Anderson and Lightle issue a clear exhortation:

Albums can and should take account of an everyday “world thick with miracles.” In attending to ordinary events, scrapbookers reflect Bednarowki’s observation that women “ambivalent” in face of arid religious traditions discover deep significance in everyday experience. Those ordinary experiences had been ignored or discounted by tradition’s authoritative minds and voices, but women revisit them as terrain on which to construct meaning. The conversation between traditional categories and nontraditional data—the everyday miracle—drives the generation of new stories.⁷¹ For the cropper, the vigor of her album arises from a similar conversation that takes place as the directives of her industry consultant meet the album-maker’s own experience.

These practical and epistemological innovations add an important dimension to the wider field of feminist inquiry. Northrup, for instance, focuses her research on groups of women “disaffected with traditional religion, politically attuned feminists, unchurched women looking for a meaningful spiritual experience, former New Age seekers, and women of all classes and ethnicities looking for safe and affirming community.” She might, therefore, be surprised to find the Creative Memories cofounders—who express a great deal of affection for religious and cultural tradition—opening the way for women to become liturgical innovators in the rites of cultural maintenance. The presence, in this shifting terrain of renegotiated traditions, of Anderson and Lightle and the many tradition-minded women who scrapbook teaches us that one does not have to jettison tradition consciously or completely. In Northrup’s broad characterization of her cohort, she makes no specific mention of the population of women that the local scrapbooking store has in mind—married women with at least one child, women likely on a more-than-sound financial footing, and, most important, typically Christian women whose church lives constitute a regular and important part of their lives. Northrup’s use of phrases like “scuttling sideways” and “sidl[ing] away” to describe some women’s retreats from direct confrontation with cultural and religious conventions of belief and practice may be helpful in describing what some album-makers do. They remain affiliated with philosophical, cultural, and even religious traditions yet, in their album-creation work, modify these connections to their own ends.⁷²

“Everyone Has a Story to Tell”

I propose that album-making partakes of at least one more tradition, that of religious testimony.⁷³ Virginia Lieson Brereton has asserted that the conversion narrative genre continues to form the



ways contemporary folk, male and female, talk about their lives, even lives lived far from churches and religious conversions.⁷⁴ Albums made according to the industry's standards resemble such religious testimony in several, somewhat incidental, ways: The formulaic quality of conversion accounts allows for the "rapid composition and extensive dissemination of narratives" by converts who could "easily grasp the essentials of the narrative and proceed to tell *their* stories in terms their hearers could understand and recognize immediately." While the conventions of religious testimony do "not emphasize the coming into being of an original voice, a unique viewpoint,"⁷⁵ the form nonetheless constitutes an invitation to speak. Likewise, the Creative Memories consultants' mantra of "Simple pages, completed albums," for instance—along with their demonstration of techniques, page examples in countless catalogs and Web sites, and a somewhat settled canon of typical album subjects—offers album-makers ready models for telling their stories. Album companies and craft retailers present the album craft as both important and easy. The form is there; the materials are there. All that is missing is the album-maker to step in and fill those pages.

Indeed, cropping and religious testimony converge, too, on the point of obligation. Just as Brereton's converts must complete their journey by testifying to the authenticity of their transformation, so must the album-maker gather her stories. Converts act from at least two motives. They want to demonstrate the truth of their experience, and they also want to provoke others to follow them to Christ. Similarly, proponents of memory-keeping exhort album-makers to glue down pictures and insert handwritten comments in order to settle the details of an event and, in so doing, instruct future generations about the family's customs and values. These motives reflect similarities, too, in the purposes of religious testimony as compared with album-making: these creative engagements with set forms are didactic activities. The album, like the conversion narrative, can "teach, edify, persuade, and exhort."⁷⁶

The most important connection between conversion narratives and contemporary photo albums lies in the "submerged," subversive plots that Brereton discerns in her converts' accounts.⁷⁷ Female religious testimony in bygone centuries voiced the subject's "veiled and mostly unconscious critique of women's place in American society."⁷⁸ Albums, too, have the potential to subvert not only the patriarchal domestic visions they picture and embellish but also the Common Sense claim to smooth, clear access to the future through the stories of the past. Against the industry's claims—made in the *Creative Memories Way* or in other comprehensive manuals such as *Memory Makers'*

Scrapbooking Your Favorite Family Memories or *Creating Keepsakes' Encyclopedia of Scrapbooking*⁷⁹—albums may not, in the end, affirm traditional models of gender and family or be able to contain the truth of the testimony that emerges as women put their pages together.

To explore this subversive power, let us turn to four album-makers in particular, three of whom constructed albums celebrating their children's lives and achievements. One other cropper marked her father's death by making a memorial album. But with all of their projects, the clear path of reproducing and preserving memories became obscured and powerfully so. All four women produced more heavily freighted texts than they had intended or expected. Their memory-work became mourning-work, fraught with loss and ambiguity. The anticipated order—the *nomos* of accomplishments celebrated or loved ones remembered—dissolved or at least had to share space with other unanticipated and insistent meanings and redoubled both the power of the album and the human depth of the album-maker.

One cropper's most treasured album was dedicated to her now-adult child's senior year in high school. She acknowledged that the purpose of this album was to "commemorate a really great year," a "fabulous year."⁸⁰ "Everything," this mother said proudly, "went right for him that year." She reported that she had "never been so proud of anything as [she] was when he spoke, as the valedictorian, to a packed football stadium." He received a standing ovation for delivering a speech that people still talk about. For now, she retains ownership of the album; she explained her continued possession of it, in part, by noting that some of the album remains unfinished. She plans to give it to her son one day, but she does not expect him to look at it with pride until he has children of his own because the subject matter is still too close, "too recent" for him. On the rare occasions when he has looked at the album, she said he "shakes his head," thinking her presentation of his life is "over the top." She thought it "embarrass[ed]" him to see his very successful last year of high school laid out so proudly, with such care. Yet, she clearly intended to construct a meaningful legacy for him, to "help him remember" that things he might see now as ordinary high school accomplishments were "extraordinary."

This album-maker did realize that her celebration of this day, and of her son's other milestones that year, was "artificial the way a yearbook is artificial." She acknowledged, too, that her son may not remember his senior year the same way she had. This proud parent was somewhat unusual in her awareness of the album's failure to be compelling for its putative audience, her son. In the end, she



recognized one of the album's "submerged plots": that the album about and intended for her son, in large part, was *her* album, which displayed her own pride and sense of accomplishment as the mother of a high achiever. She had gathered together all the things *she* was proud of and presented them in a way pleasing to *her*. In seeking to communicate clearly to her son the uniqueness of his achievements, she (at least for the time being) missed that objective but nevertheless created a witness to her own satisfaction in his accomplishments and, in the expertly laid out album pages, a brief for her own contributions to his success.

A certain wistfulness, moreover, characterizes her "testimony" and constitutes another submerged plot at work in the album. Its pages reflected, as noted, a time when everything was "right," when this mother's pride knew no limits, when this child still lived under his parents' roof. By preserving this precious year, this album-maker mourns the end of this now-grown son's adolescent dependence on and proximity to her. In her cropping, she pushes back against the sunniness of scrapbook motherhood: investing in children necessarily brings pain along with joy. Good parents let their children grow up and leave home; good parents learn to choose their battles when their efforts go unappreciated. The pages of this album become a palimpsest, layering her son's winning deeds, her pride in him, her pride in herself as a mother, and her longing for their past life together. This book is at least as much her book, about her own maternal achievement and ambivalence, as it is his, about him.

Another album-maker created a memory book for her daughter on the occasion of the latter's sixteenth birthday.⁸¹ She set out to surprise her daughter. The surprise succeeded in more ways than one: neither she nor her family considered her the kind of artistic or sentimental person likely to make a memory album; and she kept her work—which occupied weeks of gathering, selecting, and then assembling materials—a secret from them. The album contained samples of her daughter's childhood writing, remembrances of girlhood crushes, and drawings by and photos of friends. In contrast to the previous example, this child expressed delighted surprise at the gift, cherished the album—which was in her possession—and shared it with friends. Indeed, the daughter reported, looking through the album helped her friends understand her better.

In this case, then, the process envisioned in scrapbooking instructions appears to have worked: the cropper's goal of celebrating her maturing daughter's life emerged smoothly on the album's pages. The mother's reports about the time she spent working on the album, however, revealed other meanings, narratives that complicate

the book's happy, direct surface. She built this memory album at the same time that she was shifting from being a mother who also worked full-time outside the home to being a "full-time" wife and mother, as she put it. She described to me the time as one when her own identity was resurfacing—an identity apparently somewhat silenced during her time working in the corporate world. When she retired, her husband was traveling a lot with his work, and she was in a time of "transition and exploration." Somewhat aware, as was the cropper in the previous example, of the submerged stories involved in her project, this mother purposefully sought out family memories for her daughter's album as a way of recognizing both their importance and the significance of her new, primarily domestic, life focus. Even though her description of this time reflected some sadness about departing full-time paid employment, and losing or letting go of some part of herself, she characterized her new life as an opportunity to explore. Her shift of focus, which might at first glance look like submission to traditional gender patterns of breadwinning male and stay-at-home female, in some ways was a function of her own agency, her choice to adopt and thoroughly investigate that pattern. Much in the vein of Bednarowski's women, who redeem the ordinary in their religious work, this woman's album-making affirmed her family life and the worth of her expanded role as wife and mother. She called the album that she made for her daughter a "good reflection of her transition" from corporate executive to stay-at-home mother and wife. It "cemented" her new identity.

Another aspect of the album's context revealed yet one more layer of narrative: the daughter's birthday came just weeks after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Having started the project before the attacks, this album-maker continued cropping, working alone in her basement during the school day, while watching news coverage of the assaults' aftermath. She reported that she never would have watched so much of the reporting on 9/11, never would have stayed in one place for that much time with the television for company, had she not had this project to complete. What she saw and felt about 9/11 reinforced much of what she experienced as she sorted through her daughter's photos and memorabilia. She thought a lot about reprioritization, about her new, intensified orientation toward her family. It was, she said, a "very raw time." Working over her own precious artifacts, reflecting on the past accomplishments and potential of her daughter's life, and taking stock of the transition occurring in her own, the poignancy of the events in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania became even more pronounced. Although the depth of this

album-maker's experience is visible nowhere to the casual viewers' eyes, she, too, has engaged in multivalent mourning work, where her daughter's bright past and future meet a mother's freighted choices and her deep, stirring sense of human contingency.

These two albums celebrate the accomplishments of beloved, thriving children. Even as the croppers remember accomplishments, however, their albums echo bittersweetly to them as they interpret the ordinary and the tragic, time's passage and life's evanescence. Awareness of this quietly persistent witness ripples under the smooth fabric that connects intention with reception. For the maker, the album carries an added meaning to which its audience may never have complete access. The scrapbooking industry's omnipresent claim that albums communicate clearly and directly, while appealing to American habits of mind, does not always hold; these croppers have taken the straightforward tools and assumptions of the trade and used them to create and to understand more complex, more ambiguous, but also more meaningful narratives about others' and their own lives.

A third album-maker illustrates clarity's derailment, as well, and shows perhaps more clearly how a woman might resist the prescriptions of orthodox album-making in order to reflect on her own life in more complicated, authentic ways. This mother had been intent on celebrating her children in Creative Memories-style baby albums filled with creative layouts and journaling. She told me, however, that she did not enjoy looking back at the albums she had produced.⁸² Doing so was too painful for her. She had made several Creative Memories "baby books," one for each of her children. Her goal to create a legacy of loving memories for these children became complicated when her own mother died after the birth of the first child. Seeing her own mother in photographs in that child's beautifully cropped Creative Memories baby book—and then *not* seeing her in the other baby books—filled her with grief. The Creative Memories vision teaches that albums can soothe such feelings by mediating a connection between the living and the dead: "albums—perhaps more than any other tangible object—can help us find our way through the pain."⁸³ Especially in this case—where the album-maker's mother herself kept photos and "tons" of now-treasured albums—one might expect this healing connection to take shape. But, instead, the albums this mother made for her children concretized the rupture of family connection, the reality of a mother's death. These albums cannot carry or absorb the weight of her mourning, even after the passage of many years. No matter where she turned to remember her children's first years, she confronted her mother's absence anew. Against the claims of the Creative Memories cofounders and consultants about

the healing power of memory albums, this woman's sorrow obstructed a simple enjoyment of her children's first years. And, so, she put them away, rejecting the prescribed use of scrapbooks. In so doing, she created her own safe space, insulated from reminders of her mother's absence. In the wake of her mother's death, these baby books and albums took on new, unsettling meanings that defeat industry claims about the healing power of memory. The albums fail not because they have left anything out but precisely because of what they contain. They have become, for this grieving mother, a place of brokenness rather than connection. They are constricting, a problem rather than a capacious solution.

A similar case emerged in the work of one especially productive album-maker who reported having made an album for her picture-loving father, incorporating baby pictures and photographs from his teenage years, military service, marriage, and family life.⁸⁴ She gave this album to him for his sixtieth birthday. He loved it, she reported; it was "right up his alley" because he was always eager to have his own picture taken. Her father died a couple of years before our conversation, however, and, after his death, she made another album, intending to sustain connections across generations and even across dimensions. This album included the bulletin from her father's memorial service and the many cards and letters of condolence the family received when he passed away. She made this album, she said, for her children. She wanted them to have "special memories" of their parents, grandparents, even great-grandparents, and she feared that, if she had not created these books, no one else would have, and her children would have lost access to these wise and loving forebears. She desired for her children to be able to look back through "loving times," especially when she is no longer around. It was important to her that her children have something "tangible," as she put it—echoing the Creative Memories language cited above—to prompt their memories. In this regard, as with the aforementioned sixteen-year-old's surprise present, these collected mementos of a grandfather's passing have helped this cropper and her daughter, particularly, connect with each another. At least on this front, then, she achieved scrapbooking's proclaimed goal of creating and mediating connection to others through a reconstructed family story.

Yet, this album's power to draw together generations of mothers and daughters was not total. The album-maker's own mother—the widow—did not want to look at it. Indeed, like the highly successful high-school graduate discussed in our first example, this widow does not have, nor does she want, possession of the memorial album. Her album-making daughter told me that her parents were very close to

their Sunday school class; on the first anniversary of her husband's death, his widow passed the album around for them to view but without looking through it with them. This woman knew that her daughter had worked hard on the album and expressed gratitude to her for having made it. The album-maker recounted, however, that her mother was not ready to look at the album and "probably won't ever want to look at it." Here, as in the case noted above of the young mother mourning her own mother, the smooth transfer of memory, the clear act of remembering prompted by photographs, has run aground on grief. The album has not, for this widow, become a way through her pain. Although she shares it with others, and thereby allows that it might provide some healing to them, her own sorrow—which this grieving wife has taken seriously, listened to, and owned with integrity—has blocked the album's claim to connect and heal all comers. Retreating from the album establishes a space for her to mourn unhurried by her daughter, her friends, or by smooth pages of pictures and print.

These memory albums have exposed the complications involved in relaying family legacies, in remaining moored to meaning in seasons of change. The books discussed here have not simply captured or contained the past by reflecting what happened. These albums and the processes of creating and sharing them have, rather, unexpectedly activated webs of ambiguity, pain, and loss, and have, thereby, become occasions for these women to expand or resist the prescriptive clarity of the scrapbooking industry's approach. Meaning emerges, but not in forms that the instructional guides envision.

People of the Book

We end, then, by observing four albums that, contrary to most expectations, mark mourning spaces. Each stands, for its maker or for close observers, at some place along a continuum from the ordinary and somewhat transitory separations of everyday life to the more conclusive separation of death. In all of these cases, each cropper has made the album reflect in some way *her* experience, her life. These albums display the ordering perspectives of their respective makers; when the books open suddenly onto frontiers of ambiguity, then, that instability, too, is *hers*. It arises as a product of her reconstruction, the result of a process of valuing and interpretation that she has engaged. Calling on the traditions of Common Sense clearmindedness, photographic trustworthiness, and family virtue, the album-maker nevertheless negotiates her own way through those conventions to end with something that is her own.



Yet, her ownership, as we have seen, is not total, clear, predictable, or even desirable. She is an agent in re-remembering the family stories, indeed, but she also is subject more than most to the vicissitudes of remembering. These submerged complications belie the smooth surfaces of industry prescriptions, which so lucidly reflect deeply held American understandings of reality's solidity and its accessibility through the visual sense. As philosophically realistic and culturally traditional as the album-making practice may be, it can become a wildly unpredictable vocation whose products call their makers, in surprising ways, to account. In their books, memory-keepers may encounter formidable assemblages that re-remember the world in unexpected ways. Industry promoters revere the objective power of the completed album. It is, as noted above, envisioned as a "gift" for one to "experience." Yet, these views typically cast this experience as positive, as something tending toward completeness and security. The reports of our album-makers, however, speak of endemic human discontinuities and losses that trouble and sometimes defeat hoped-for connections. The recognition of these gaps, emerging in the work of the album-maker, is uniquely hers.

Notes

This article grew out of conversations with Pam Kelley, whose questions on the subject of scrapbooking prompted me to think about its religious aspects. She also graciously provided me with her copy of *The Creative Memories Way*. See her article, "The Scrapbook Life," *The Charlotte Observer*, November 2, 2003, 1G, 4G.

I would also like to thank Kathleen Flake, Trent Foley, Gary Laderman, Fuji Lozada, Jan Shipps, Greg Snyder, Grant Wacker, and Trey Wills for their kind encouragement and thoughtful comments on earlier versions of this article. Portions of it have been presented at the Southeastern Regional Meeting of the Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion, Atlanta, Georgia, March 6, 2004; the NEXUS Interdisciplinary Conference on Religion and Nation, Knoxville, Tennessee, April 7, 2006; and the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies at Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina, November 30, 2006.

Among consultants and croppers, several in particular generously shared their expertise, impressions, and/or albums with me: Creative Memories unit leaders Kathy Grunert and Natalie Goodwin and more than a dozen other dedicated scrapbookers. Obviously, I owe my deepest debts to the four album-makers I feature toward the end of this article. My sincere thanks go out to them all.



1. Cheryl Lightle and Rhonda Anderson with Shari MacDonald, *The Creative Memories Way* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: WaterBrook Press, 2002), 2, 90. Henceforth referred to as *CMW*.

2. *Ibid.*, 3 (emphasis in original).

3. *Ibid.*, 3–4. The story varies slightly from the version on the company's Web site, <www.creativememories.com>, which refers to the telephone conversation as "The Call."

4. See Cheryl Lightle with Heidi L. Everett, *Creative Memories: The Ten Timeless Principles behind the Company that Pioneered the Scrapbooking Industry* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004), xiii; and Kim Hughes, Power Demo Day 2004, NorthStone Country Club, Huntersville, N.C., February 7, 2004.

5. Lightle with Everett, *Creative Memories*, xiii-xiv. One beneficiary of Creative Memories' success is Stampin' Up, another home-based direct-sales company offering specialty rubber stamps around the world; although stamping stands as a craft in its own right, many croppers use stamps to embellish their memory album pages. Other companies have thrived because of scrapbooking's popularity: K&Company and EK Success (both owned by Wilton, the cake decorating company) and Buzz&Bloom produce papers and stickers for albums; Cricut, a Utah company, produces a variety of sophisticated programmable cutting tools that allow croppers to produce customized embellishments. Since 1996, *Memory Makers* and *Creating Keepsakes* have been two of the most popular magazines for album-makers, although *Memory Makers* announced in May 2009 that it would cease publication with its September/October 2009 issue and consolidate its subscribers with readers of *Scrapbook Trends* magazine, <<http://www.memorymakersmagazine.com/forum/forums/thread-view.asp?tid=26896&posts=1>> (accessed October 29, 2009). Major craft retailers such as Michael's, Jo-Ann Stores, A. C. Moore, and Hobby Lobby now typically feature aisles of album-making materials and have prominent scrapbooking links on their respective Web sites. Web sites such as www.scrapbook.com and www.ScrapbookingTop50.com feature links to vendors, products, and tips and display the wide range of styles in which scrapbookers work. The e-mail newsletter www.Scrapbookupdate.com and trade publications such as *ScrapbookBusiness Magazine* and *Scrapbooking.com's Business News* follow the industry side of album-making. An October 2009 search on Amazon for "scrapbooking books" turned up almost 800 titles, including Jeanne Wines-Reed and Joan Wines, Ph.D., *Scrapbooking for Dummies* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2004), and many books published and reprinted by the Memory Makers and Creating Keepsakes companies.

6. This figure is widely repeated, perhaps because it reflects the high-water mark for the industry, since sales began to slide the next year. See “Annual Sales for Scrapbook Industry Reach \$2.55 Billion; Creating Keepsakes’ 2004 ‘Scrapbooking in America’ Survey Measures America’s Passion for Preserving Memories,” *Business Wire*, FindArticles.com, <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0EIN/is_2004_June_14/ai_n6064762/> (accessed October 29, 2009); and Dennis Conforto, “What to Consider for the Rest of 2008,” *Scrapbooking.com Business News* 6 (June 25, 2008), <http://scrapbooking.com/images/newsletters/SMART_032107.htm> (accessed October 29, 2009).

7. Conforto, “What to Consider.”

8. Ambar Espinoza, “Scrapbooking Company Attempts Fresh Start after Bankruptcy,” Minnesota Public Radio, January 9, 2009, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2009/01/08/creative_memories_bankruptcy/> (accessed October 29, 2009).

9. CMW, 4.

10. I take my understanding of “religion” primarily from Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor, 1990 [1967]). He explains that humans live in a world that at once shapes and is shaped by their actions. All human activity aims, in Berger’s view, to impose order (*nomos*) on chaos. Yet, religion—“the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established”—most powerfully imposes such order by tying events, practices, concepts, and places to something “other than” but nevertheless related intimately to humanity (25).

Lesley A. Northrup inspires my thinking on the subject of side-long feminism; see her “Expanding the X-Axis: Women, Religious Ritual, and Culture,” in *Women and Religious Ritual*, ed. Lesley A. Northrup (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1993), 145, in which she speaks of women “sidling away” from patriarchy rather than rebelling headlong against it. One mines other contexts in U.S. religion for other examples of this phenomenon, where modes of compliance get reshaped in order to express agency or resistance: antebellum slave spirituals—giving voice to both faith and liberatory zeal—and nineteenth-century women’s reform fiction—expounding the power of female piety.

11. For references to the album-making “vision,” see CMW, ix, 1; for the mission statement, see CMW, 51; Creative Memories 2003 catalog, the *Storybook*, 3; and newsletter, the *Chronicle* 1 (2004), 1.

12. See, for example, Kathy Grunert’s newsletter, “A Creative Update,” Winter 2003, 1–2; and crop schedule, via e-mail, February 10,

2004. "Cropping" is "the practice of trimming . . . photos, sometimes into circles or shapes, so that the focus is on the most important part of the picture" (CMW, 32).

13. CMW, 3, 4, 154, 67 (emphasis in original).

14. Ibid., 39; 81, "start . . . today"; 103, "before it's too late."

15. Techniques aim to simplify and speed up the work; for instance, the "Power Layout Box" allows the album-maker to "organiz[e] an album in under two hours" (*Storybook*, 59). Consultants also recommend that beginning album-makers start with their most recent photographs and work backwards. See CMW, 47, on "Simple Pages, Completed Albums."

16. There are as many different types of albums as there are album-makers, but a few seem to be typical: heritage albums (gathering together heirloom photographs), school albums for children (one or two pages per year, with letters from the teacher and other students), ABC albums (a different character trait or favorite thing for each letter of the alphabet), baby books, and even something Creative Memories calls a "faithbook," which "chronicl[es] life's [miraculous] signposts in order to encourage us in our daily lives" (CMW, 152). See *Storybook*, 6–18, for album examples; and CMW, 14–16, on photo-safe materials.

17. See, for instance, *What about the Words? Creative Journaling for Scrapbookers* (Denver, Colo.: Memory Makers Books, 2006).

18. CMW, 29.

19. For example, unit leader Kathy Grunert's repeated mention of journaling during her presentation (January 16, 2004). Discussing album pages she had made earlier in the day, she pointed out the "journaling box"—a small square of colored paper included with the photos on the page—that she would return to later in order to write her memories of the day (Christmas Day with one of her children). Cropper Lori is not unique among women I spoke with in being almost apologetic as she showed me the captions she had written under every photo in her toddler's two albums. She explained that other album-makers write entire pages about the events included in their books.

20. CMW, 17.

21. See *ibid.*, 16, when Anderson mentions childhood memories of her Grandpa Jensen reading the Danish Bible to her, which suggests a Lutheran background.

22. Ibid., 58–59; 129–30; adoption, 150–51.

23. For example, *ibid.*, 55–56.

24. From <www.randomhouse.com/waterbrook/>, “Our Mission”: “WaterBrook Press is committed to creating products that both intensify and satisfy the elemental thirst for a deeper relationship with God. By communicating spiritual truth through books and ancillary products of the highest quality and creativity, we hope to provide a deep well of spiritual refreshment that will give readers a taste of the Living Water” (February 2, 2004). The press’s name comes from Psalm 42:1.

25. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 25.

26. *Ibid.*, 4.

27. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90, from Geertz’s classic description of a religion.

28. Virginia Lieson Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation: Stories of Women’s Conversions, 1800 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), chap. 3.

29. *CMW*, 4.

30. While *Creative Memories* does not discourage men’s participation, promotional and instructional materials focus on women and children. See, however, “Real Men Build Things,” *Chronicle* 1 (2004), n.p.—a *Creative Memories* publication advertising the “Sweet Moments” album. The story pictures a Sweetheart Workshop during which eleven men created albums as Valentine’s Day gifts for their wives. Women and girls exclusively attended the scrapping events I observed.

The *Creative Memories* Web site features some testimonials from men who make albums. In *CMW*, see “Tip: Album Making: It’s Not Just for Women Anymore,” 20; also Mike Nistler’s story, 76–77; and Shari MacDonald’s story of her husband’s “dream album,” 21.

31. Richard Rudisill, *Mirror Image: The Influence of the Daguerreotype on American Society* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), 227: “No other nation produced more or better daguerreotypes, and no other nation more widely employed the medium than the United States.”

32. *Ibid.*, 197–98, gives figures for the numbers of daguerreotypists and other photographers in the mid-century decades.

33. *Ibid.*, 65–67, although, without explanation, Rudisill takes women’s interest in Gouraud’s topic not as evidence that they wanted to learn photography but, rather, that they wanted simply to be entertained.

34. See Beaumont Newhall, "American Photography, 1839–1900," in *Image of America: Early Photography, 1839–1900, A Catalog. An Exhibit Held in the Library of Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1957), 2; and Rudisill, *Mirror Image*, 213–14.

35. Rudisill, *Mirror Image*, 165.

36. Newhall, "American Photography," 1.

37. Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, "Photography," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 40. In her 1857 appraisal of photography, Lady Elizabeth Eastlake reviewed the course of photographic innovations in England and France from the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries. Her goal was to show photography as a scientific feat rather than an art form.

38. Newhall, "American Photography," 8 (for a series of historical views of scrapbooking in the United States, see Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia P. Buckler, eds., *The Scrapbook in American Life* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006]); Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 113n; Alan Thomas, *Time in a Frame: Photography and the Nineteenth-Century Mind* (New York: Schocken, 1977), 43. Eastlake, "Photography," personifies photography as female (66).

39. Thomas, *Time in a Frame*, 43. Thomas discusses a sampling of English and American albums: the Waterlow family album, kept by Anna Maria Waterlow; the Wimpole album, which belonged to the Hardwicke and was prepared by Lady Hardwicke; and the Shurman albums, which Mrs. Shurman began and handed on to her daughter to complete. See Thomas, *Time in a Frame*, chap. 3, "The Family Chronicle," 43–64.

In *CMW*, 118–21, the cofounders tell the story of Beth Lamdin and her daughter Michelle, who share the album-making tradition. They have experienced great personal transformations because of their shared photo-preservation work.

40. Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians*, 2.

41. Rudisill, *Mirror Image*, 72; Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 95 (emphasis in original; Noll credits Henry May with the phrase "didactic Enlightenment"), chap. 6 *passim*, 110, 109–110.

42. *Ibid.*, 94; the phrase is Norman Fiering's.

43. Rudisill, *Mirror Image*, 73, and 233, which notes that daguerre-*typy* entered the United States during "the period of Emerson's ocular concern for spiritual insight through perceiving nature."

44. Newhall, "American Photography," 2; quotation from Rudisill, *Mirror Image*, 116, but see also chap. 6, "The Recorder and the Symbolist." Rudisill does an excellent job throughout of showing how quickly daguerreotypy spread, how pervasive its impact became among many different kinds of Americans, and how well its processes were adapted to show a particularly American spirit.

45. Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians*, 4. See also Rudisill, *Mirror Image*, 224–25, on the often unflattering but nevertheless "authoritative" poses assumed by portrait-sitters; such stances had quickly become standardized, recognized as the way one sat for a daguerreotype.

46. Thomas, *Time in a Frame*, 48 (emphasis mine); Rudisill, *Mirror Image*, 224 (emphasis mine).

47. James Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 215, 161; see also 151, 170–71, and chap. 5, "The American Way of Life at Home and Abroad." In contrast to these magazines, Guimond offers the work of William Klein, Diane Arbus, and Robert Frank, whose stark styles he examines in chap. 6, "The Great American Wasteland."

48. *Ibid.*, 156: "unlike documentary work, these images of ordinary Americans were almost invariably reassuring, and they were presented to illustrate popular stereotypes about patriotism, progress, gender roles, and the joys of consumerism." See also 217: "Whether they were members of families shopping in supermarkets, citizens of friendly towns, smiling employees of large corporations, fans cheering for their sports teams, or voters chanting 'I Like Ike,' the Americans in the picture magazines were almost always people who *belonged*, cheerfully and voluntarily, to a society that made them happy and prosperous."

49. *Ibid.*, 162.

50. *Ibid.*, 171, 222. See also David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard, 1993), chap. 38, for a quick view of postwar middle-class growth and its effects on women's lives: "A postwar definition of femininity evolved. To be feminine, the American woman first and foremost did not work. If she did, that made her competitive with men, which made her hard and aggressive and almost surely doomed to loneliness. Instead, she devotedly raised her family, supported her husband, kept her house spotless and efficient, got dinner ready on time, and remained attractive and optimistic; each hair was in place. According to studies, she was prettier than her mother, she was slimmer, and she even smelled better than her mother. . . . The ideal fifties women were to strive for was articulated by *McCall's* in 1954: togetherness. . . .

And who was responsible ultimately for togetherness if not the wife?" (590, 591).

51. Guimond, *American Photography*, 222; on rituals, see 223.

52. *CMW*, 105.

53. *Ibid.*, 109.

54. *Ibid.*, 111.

55. Mary Farrell Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 88; *CMW*, 113, 115.

56. *CMW*, 111. See Guimond, *American Photography*, 160–61, on *Life's* profile of Franklin, Indiana, titled "A Small Town's Saturday Night," which focused on the activities of one farm family—dad's haircut, mom's shopping trip with the young children, the teenage daughter's date at the soda fountain—and town attractions such as the "new bowling alley" and the "lover's lane." The pastoral, uncomplicated tone of the profile matches the cofounders' wistful images of modern family life.

57. See Guimond, *American Photography*, 169, on an optimistic postwar photo essay titled "Dreams of 1946," which featured women's and men's (material) dreams.

58. Grace Seiberling with Carolyn Bloore, *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 64 (emphases mine).

59. Indeed, even beyond life into the afterlife. Rudisill, *Mirror Image*, 218–19, 223, reports that some nineteenth-century patrons of photographic studios expected the camera to generate, as part of the portrait, an image of distant or even departed loved ones.

60. The "contrasting images of hierarchy and network" are one way Carol Gilligan characterizes, respectively, male and female "thinking about moral conflict and choice"; see her classic study, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 33.

61. Lesley A. Northrup, "Claiming Horizontal Space: Women's Religious Rituals," *Studia Liturgica* 25 (1995): 86–102; Bednarowski, *Religious Imagination*, esp. chap. 4; see also Diann Neu, "Women Revisioning Religious Rituals," in Northrup, *Women and Religious Ritual*, 155–72.

62. As opposed to the “major streams of feminist ritual practice,” identified by Charlotte Caron, *To Make and Make Again: Feminist Ritual Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1993): liberal Protestant feminists working from within their respective denominations; Women-Church, Rosemary Radford Reuther’s predominantly Roman Catholic movement; goddess-worshippers; and participants in consciousness-raising groups. Cited in Northrup, “Claiming Horizontal Space,” 89.

63. Northrup, “Claiming Horizontal Space,” 87, 89, 91 (but cf. 91, where Northrup quotes Edward T. Hall on the differences between men’s and women’s visual impressions of the world).

64. *Ibid.*, 93–99 (quote from 93).

65. *Ibid.*, 93. Neu, “Women Revisioning,” 158–66, lists a series of nine quilt “patches” or “principles of feminist ritual-making” that correspond in many ways to Northrup’s condensed set of four.

66. Unit leader Kathy Grunert, Huntersville, N.C., January 16, 2004; unit leader Kathy Grunert, via e-mail: see, for instance, February 10, 2004, May 12, 2006, and May 30, 2008; Northrup, “Claiming Horizontal Space,” 94.

67. Northrup, “Claiming Horizontal Space,” 98.

68. *CMW*, 10, 125, 136.

69. Chapter 8 of *The Creative Memories Way* is titled “Celebrating Life: Special Events and Everyday Moments”; Bednarowski, *Religious Imagination*, 87 (see also chap. 4, “The Revelatory Power of the Ordinary and the Ordinarity of the Sacred”); *CMW*, 150 (see also chap. 12, “Signs of the Miraculous”), 149.

70. *CMW* 149, 152 (citing Os Hillman). Distortions of perspective may admittedly appear when the category of “miracle” opens so widely. In the cofounders’ story of album-maker Naomi Shedd, for example, Shedd recorded two “miracles” in one album: a friend’s healing from cancer and Naomi’s finding a lost receipt (154).

71. *Ibid.*, 157; Bednarowski, *Religious Imagination*, chap. 2, “Ambivalence as a New Religious Virtue.” For a lovely example of renovation within tradition, see Bednarowski’s discussion of the sixteenth-century Mexican nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in *Religious Imagination*, 86–87.

72. Northrup, “Claiming Horizontal Space,” 90, 102; Northrup, “Expanding the X-Axis,” 145. An instructive episode of tradition’s fruitful coexistence with feminist innovation—the founding of the National

Organization for Women—has received powerful recent treatment by Ann Braude, “Faith, Feminism, and History,” in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 232–52. Another good example of this combination is treated in exemplary fashion in R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

73. The title for this section comes from CMW, chap. 1 (section subheading for pages 9–23).

74. Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation*, 103 and chap. 8 *passim*.

75. *Ibid.*, 18, xii.

76. On obligation, see *ibid.*, 59; 3 (quote).

77. *Ibid.*, 28. “Submerged” plots include the woman convert’s empowerment (to speak publicly, to publish, to defy male authority); her freedom to give expression to “the period of rebellion and anger” that led up to the conversion; and her determination to grapple meaningfully with life’s absurdity (30–34).

78. *Ibid.*, 40.

79. [Michele Gerbrandt], *Scrapbooking Your Favorite Family Memories* (Denver, Colo.: Memory Makers Books, 2003); Tracy White, ed., *Encyclopedia of Scrapbooking* (Little Rock: Leisure Arts, 2009).

80. Quoted comments and information in this discussion from R., interview with the author, October 27, 2006.

81. Quoted comments and information in this discussion from E., interview with the author, October 21, 2006; and her daughter E., interview with the author, October 5, 2006.

82. Quoted comments and information in this discussion from C., interview with the author, October 12, 2006.

83. CMW, 143.

84. Quoted comments and information in this discussion from N., interview with the author, October 17, 2006.

ABSTRACT In 1987, two women hatched a business plan that became Creative Memories, a direct-marketing company that sells scrapbook materials and techniques to a mostly female clientele through a worldwide network of sales consultants. By the beginning of the new millennium,

millions of people had participated in Creative Memories workshops. Many successful imitators also flooded the crafting market with specialized publications, Web sites, tools, and materials, creating an industry worth \$2.55 billion by 2004.

As significant as the economic impact of scrapbooking is, however, the claims of importance made by its practitioners rate closer examination. Promising to keep photos safe from deterioration, Creative Memories also sold a worldview, reflected across the industry, that such preservation is essential to human flourishing. Such a claim invites considerations both of how the promoters of memory-keeping envision its working and how memory-keepers themselves distinctively shape their practice. This article takes the view that album-making constitutes a kind of innovative female meaning-making (that is, religion) shaped, in part, by American-style Common Sense epistemology while also reflecting what we might call a sidelong feminism, in which a woman expresses agency, claims her voice, and declares the complexity of her full humanity, all by using modes that, on the surface, appear compliant with patriarchy. This article also uses certain notions of religious testimony to gauge the space between the Common Sense project of the album-making industry and the results produced by album-makers themselves.



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