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INSPIRED

# For 25 years, Mayer man's Pictures of the Day have documented the richness and complexities of ordinary life



By [KATY READ](#), STAR TRIBUNE  
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On Nov. 1, 1996, Michael Deering took his very first Picture of the Day. It was his 30th

birthday, and he got a photo of himself and his parents celebrating over dinner at the Lexington in St. Paul.

He had decided to make a habit of capturing an image on film every single day.

Unlike many people's youthful whims, the Picture of the Day kept going. A quarter of a century later, Deering has taken a photo of someone or something every day of his life, always on film, which he gets processed into 4-by-6-inch prints. When he turned 55 this month, he shot his 9,125th Picture of the Day.

The subjects have changed over the years, he said. "Early on, I was always in the pictures, like Mr. Cool Guy." Gradually, he began pointing the camera outward. He's still in some of them, but most capture other people, objects, moments. They are happy or sad, beautiful or ugly, poignant or amusing, strange or mundane.

"Every single picture has to have meaning to it," he said.

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Deering's photos don't resemble the glamorous collection that, say, Kim Kardashian might

have if she had a photo of every day of her life (and let's face it, she probably does). They're scenes from the life of a fairly ordinary guy who grew up in Shakopee, lives on a 20-acre farm in rural Carver County with his wife and two kids, and runs a small public-relations firm called SuperStarPR in Minneapolis' North Loop.

But Deering also sees the Picture of the Day project in a broader sense — as not just a record of his own experiences but a document of life itself.

"It's about the human condition and the journey we're all on," Deering said.

"He's telling the story of the roller coaster that we live," said his close friend, Luke Kujawa, of Minneapolis, who has witnessed the project almost since the beginning. "It's the good days and the bad days. The real-life stuff and the crazy highs."

Deering's selection of a Picture of the Day is often spontaneous — an image grabs his attention for whatever reason, he takes out the film camera he always carries in his pocket, looks through the viewfinder, composes the shot ... and CLICK.

*Michael Deering in the ICU with COVID, April 14, 2021.*



Some of the photos recall major moments: Visiting his mother in the hospital days before she died. Holding his firstborn son moments after the baby's birth. Sitting on his father's gravestone and eating popcorn, as they used to do together. Lying in an ICU bed with oxygen tubes when he got COVID in April (he tested positive the day after getting vaccinated). One photo shows Deering's heart being removed from his body — he had surgery to implant a mechanical valve and the surgeon agreed to take the photo while he was unconscious.

A few are glamorous — Deering poses with Michael Jordan in one, with Debbie Harry in another. A few are historic — signs and flowers stacked against the Cup Foods building the day after George Floyd was murdered, a shot of the TV screen showing the U.S. Capitol being attacked on Jan. 6.

On April 21, 2016, Deering was driving past Paisley Park in Chanhassen when he noticed a couple of sheriff's cars out front. He pulled over and watched a woman walk up and stick a bouquet of flowers in the chain link fence. CLICK. Later, he learned that Prince had just died; within a day or so, the fence would hold hundreds of flowers, balloons, paintings, notes.

But most of Deering's photos are scenes from ordinary days. His wife, Catherine, and sons, Kray and Leo (now 17 and 12), playing on the farm. A woman in a bridal gown crossing a downtown street. A baby stroller abandoned upside down in a snowbank. Raindrops on a windshield. A dead rabbit lying on a road. Soup cans stacked in his pantry. A box of Kraft Mac 'n' Cheese smashed on the ground.

"Every single day you're not going to get something that's out of this world — sometimes it's mundane," Deering said. But again, that's life — often mundane.

But once it's done, it's done. If, after he'd taken some mundane Picture of the Day something big were to happen in the afternoon — let's say, God forbid, his barn were to catch fire — the blaze would not be the Picture of the Day. He'd have to wait and shoot the barn's smoldering ashes the next morning.

*Son Kray standing in a field, June 15, 2015*



Deering has taken the photos himself all but three times. One was the heart surgery. One was a test shot by filmmaker Melody Gilbert, who made [a five-minute documentary about him](#). (Gilbert proposed the project after overhearing Deering talking about Picture of the Day in a bar. "It just was so interesting," she said. "Like, who does that?") The third was a photo of a Pat Benatar concert — he was standing by the stage when he realized he'd forgotten to bring his camera. He saw a kid standing nearby taking Polaroid photos and, screaming over the music, asked for one. The kid agreed to take a photo of the singer, and sold it to Deering for a dollar.

A couple of other concert experiences didn't go as well. Once, "an over-testosteroned security guard" grabbed his camera and pulled out the film, ruining the 11 Pictures of the Day inside. Deering substituted them with 11 photos of a sign listing the club's rules, which did not prohibit photos.

Another time, he spent the night in jail after a security guard grabbed his camera and smashed his face into the stage. When Deering was released the next morning and retrieved his camera, he discovered the sheriff's deputies had taken the film inside to be processed. They gave him the prints — missing the one he took the night before. He replaced it with a photo of his face, still streaked with blood.

Deering keeps the pictures in leather suitcases in his basement, each year stacked chronologically and bundled in 3½-inch-thick piles.

"This is my life," he said. Looking back through the past can be a bit sad, he said. "But you know what? It helps you go forward, dealing with aging."

Inevitably, the Pictures of the Day project must someday end. What will happen to those thousands upon thousands of photos? If his memory should start to fail, what will the pictures mean to him? Will his sons want to keep them? Who, in the future, will ever look back through images that record every day of a man's life?

He doesn't know.

The Pictures of the Day let him look back and see where he's been, Deering said. But "they also put you in touch with your own mortality."

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**Katy Read** is a reporter covering Carver County and western Hennepin County. She has also covered aging, workplace issues and other topics for the Star Tribune. She was previously a reporter at the Times-Picayune in New Orleans, La., and the Duluth News-Tribune.

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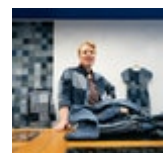
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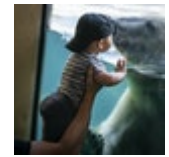
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