A Very Brief History of Photography

Taking photographs is so easy today. There are cameras in all price ranges, with all sorts of features, including telephoto lenses that make it possible to take pictures of things very far away and lenses that can take microscopically close-up shots. Even most mobile telephones are equipped with cameras. People can take pictures and distribute them immediately via telecommunication networks, sending them to be posted on Web sites or printed if they desire. Images can be manipulated easily on computers using graphics software.

Things were not always so easy, to say the least. Early photographers needed bulky equipment to take photographs and elaborate darkrooms to develop them. Two Frenchmen are credited with inventing the first method of recording an image, Joseph Nicephore Niepce and Louis Daguerre. Daguerre managed to get exposure time down to 30 minutes, which still meant that a subject had to hold perfectly still for that length of time! The images were recorded on sheets of silver-plated copper. With a process that took so long, the subjects did not worry about being photogenic; they were just happy to get a reasonable likeness.

Others later invented ways of recording images on tin and coated glass, and in 1889 George Eastman invented flexible roll film. Variations on this type of film, including those with the ability to record images in color, were commonly used until the widespread adoption of digital cameras. Today, digital imaging has taken over because film developing is not necessary and one can take and store multiple digital images more cheaply. This way, the photographer can choose to print or post the best images from many choices.