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Review of The Complete Guide to Personal Digital Archiving

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Brianna H. Marshall, ed. *The Complete Guide to Personal Digital Archiving.* **Chicago: ALA Editions, 2018.**

The Complete Guide to Personal Digital Archiving is a strange animal: a guide written by archivists, for librarians, to help patrons in managing their personal or community digital lives as though they were archivists. The guide does a remarkably good job at making this task feel surmountable.

The Complete Guide is a collection of works by different authors that all appear to have been written (or heavily rewritten) expressly for this guide, and each chapter references and feeds into the others. This many-voices approach not only builds on expertise from across the profession but also increases the opportunity for readers to find examples that suit their own abilities, resources, risk tolerance, and roles. The structure of the guide progresses through four sections, from the concrete and specific to the theoretical and abstract. It starts with the instructional "Learning about Personal Digital Archives Best Practices," moves through examples of institutional programs in "Personal Digital Archives and Community Audiences" and "Personal Digital Archives and Academic Audiences," and finishes with big-picture concerns in "Social and Ethical Implications of Personal Digital Archiving." The sections work well enough independently to be used by a single professional at different points of need or by multiple staff members representing different functions within their institution. While the individual chapters—particularly in parts 1 and 4—cover topics that could each be a monograph, if read from beginning to end, they give a rich enough overview to merit the titular use of the term "complete."

Fittingly for a guide authored by archivists, the work is introduced by an essay, "Placing Personal Digital Archives in Context," which lays out the history and role of personal archives and records management within the archival profession. Foreshadowing the approach of the book as a whole, it starts out concrete, with a definition of personal papers, and finishes aspirational, by justifying the involvement of information professionals in personal digital archiving. The author expresses the hope that the guide will lead information professionals to "learn from [their] constituents . . . more about . . . professional practices and biases" and "begin to better identify and address existing gaps and silences in the archives" (xix).

The body of the book begins with nuts and bolts. All of the authors writing in part 1 on best practices attempt to find balance between providing sufficiently specific guidelines to eliminate confusion for first-time implementers while avoiding naming particular tools that will too rapidly become obsolete. The resulting recommendations successfully make the topic feel approachable. Readers could cherry-pick part 1 for solutions for one type of content at a time. Chapters 1–4 are by media type—including digital photographs, social media, web content, and audiovisual materials—and offer in-depth implementation suggestions. Each chapter follows the same structure, including tools, techniques, and standards specific to the media at hand; a glossary; and suggestions for the information professional's role. Chapter 5 attempts to distill the acquire-and-arrange steps for each material type down to a succinct "recipe" to be shared with patrons. The results are so minimal that they fill only a very specific niche—while they would be useful takeaways following in-depth training, they are too general for use outside of one-on-one

instruction. The chapters of part 1 stop shy of being truly complete by failing to address audio or to consider approaches for more recent types of personal data generated by smartphones, wearables, and other smart devices.

Part 1 strikingly demonstrates that although the learning threshold for personal digital archiving can be made manageable, equipment may be the real hurdle. A computer, not the less expensive tablet or smartphone, is necessary for many of the steps described, as are external drives and a fast internet connection. In a book dedicated to allowing information professionals to help all patrons archive their digital lives, it is clear that any library that cannot offer users equipment as well as training will only be exacerbating the digital divide.

Part 2 offers case studies from a public library, a many-faceted collaborative supported by a college and a public library, and a large research university partnering with Indigenous communities. In each case, the institution acted as a resource for the local community to preserve personal digital content. The end result was often a strengthened sense of community through more visible, shared digital content. Mechanisms for this varied from project to project, from community events that fostered personal connections and physical exchange to collaboratively created online resources. Every example stresses the importance of knowledge-sharing on the part of the institution, but without supplanting the community's values with those of the institution. This section of the book is inspirational in demonstrating how information professionals at any level, from early career fellows to well-seasoned professionals with a whole department of resources, can implement a community personal digital archiving program with enduring impact.

Part 3 continues with case studies documenting institutions supporting academic users and applies personal digital archiving to a broader diversity of goals. The chapter "Personal Digital Archives Programming at Liberal Arts Colleges" shows how one successful program can inspire uptake at an array of other institutions via staff migration, collaborative networks, and information-sharing. "Supporting Artists' Digital Archives" suggests assisting an underserved academic audience using a museum audience pilot program, and "Personal Digital Archiving as a Bridge to Research Data Management" employs personal digital archiving as a tool to help prepare undergraduate students for their professional lives after college. The three studies passively illustrate the importance of having sufficient institutional resources, particularly in terms of staff time and representation from multiple departments, to both the early success and endurance of these outreach initiatives.

Progressing beyond instructions and examples, *The Complete Guide* concludes with further considerations. Part 4 contains essays on issues surrounding ownership, privacy, diversity, inclusion, and ethics in personal digital archiving. This section largely poses questions rather than offering answers; consequently, it is the most thought-provoking part of the book.

This section's first chapter, "Avoiding a Gambit for Our Personal Digital Archives," raises serious concerns about who has control of our digital lives, but it lacks depth. It identifies ownership concerns for many portions of our digital lives but without specific examples to underscore the risks. The second chapter examines embedded metadata in shared photographs

and the tradeoff between convenience and privacy risk such information presents. This is a natural follow-up to the review of the digital content platforms in the first chapter.

The third chapter, "Black Folk Magic," reaffirms concerns about the gaps in the archival record for minority communities. It presents examples taken from engaged, social-justice-minded millennials to addressing those gaps in ways that circumvent the traditional hierarchies and value judgments inherent in institutional archiving. The author draws on personal experience to demonstrate how using web tools to create (or rescue) digital archives that acknowledge an explicit bias, or the perspective of a particular community, can be a corrective to an imposed "neutrality" that in fact represses diverse perspectives.

The final section wraps up with an unexpected ethical consideration: digital rights after death. Although death traditionally denotes the moment when many archival collections are acquired, it is surprising in this work because *The Complete Guide* endeavors to be forward-thinking, encouraging readers to be proactive in preserving their digital estates. This essay changes perspective and examines the consequences of not preserving personal digital archives.

This book is both aspirational and inspirational. While some of the example projects set a high bar for implementation, their successes, combined with the approachable steps in the best practices section, are a real inducement to try. For those who have already implemented personal digital archiving instruction programs, the ethical considerations in the final section point to where further work remains to be done.