

Chad's Page

(Scroll down to read technical aspects of setting up the web site)

12/27/10 - I switched from using Adobe Photoshop Elements 3 to Coffee Cup Photo Gallery 5.94 for creating my photo Galleries. Both create an OK photo gallery but Elements was a real pain to change or update (newer versions may work better but are expensive). Coffee Cup was cheap (about \$10 on sale) and allows for adding and editing photos, captions, and some format. I first had to play around with a basic theme (layout) to get a format I could live with.. Options are limited unless you want to pay to buy additional themes; the formats that came with the basic program are cheesy. I essentially opted for a blank format and added component parts to create my own, very plain format. It took longer than I thought to convert the existing galleries to the new format, especially as I kept tweaking the format, but from now on adding new galleries or modifying existing galleries will be much easier. That's my next challenge - loading the gazillion photos still on my PC but not yet up on the web site. I know I'm uploading way more photos than I should but they are all meaningful to me and its easier to load too many than to decide which to omit. Sorry!

6/10/2010

I started to use a new photo gallery program, CoffeeCup Photo Gallery. I purchased on a special offer for a few bucks. The Adobe Elements gave me a good product but it is too difficult to edit and update. This is a lot easier for updating and also gives a fairly good result. Eventually I'll convert the existing Adobe galleries over to CoffeeCup.

12/26/09

Barely a week old and already I had to restructure the site. I had to remove the drop down menus because they didn't work in FireFox or Safari. Also, that allowed me to correct an annoyance with the galleries - once in them, the only way to get back to the home page was to back out through all the photos or close the window and start over. I had tried some workarounds but couldn't come up with anything short of this restructure. The real problem is my limited coding knowledge. As I learn more, I'm sure I will find better ways to deal with "cross-browser" and other incompatibilities. The current fix is to use a separate page in lieu of the drop down menu. It's not as clean but allows me to use basic coding, common to all browsers, for my links. I resolved the gallery issue by forcing each to open in a new browser window (I couldn't do this in the drop down menus) which will allow you to "back out" by simply closing that window. A key dilemma is that Photoshop Elements creates the galleries using "frames", i.e., windows within windows. If I simply tried to use a "return to home page" link, only the photo frame would do so and the thumbnail frame would remain open. I didn't realize that until after I had made a universal change on each photo and then spent a couple of hours undoing my "fix"! That also taught me to hang onto my backups a bit longer.

Next priority is to put up more photos. I'll concentrate on learning more code later, unless of course, my "fixes" still aren't compatible with FireFox/Safari. I'm becoming less enamored with Adobe Photo Elements. It sure simplifies making the galleries but very hard to modify a gallery after its created - its easier to re-create it, except that I have to tweak each photo file each time I create. Of course my version is quite old - & I'm too cheap to buy an update. I may find something better.

12/14/09

Well this has certainly turned into a project! I thought I could set up a website in a week or so - and I could if you just wanted to go with the default settings and templates. But of course I don't, so it is dragging on - and on - and on. And I'm still not certain the end product is going to do what I really want. But ya gotta try!

Primarily I wanted a web site pretty much as a repository of our photos for others to easily view. I don't mean ALL our photos but almost certainly much more than any one person (besides us) would be interested in. So the challenge is to organize things in such a way that folks can reasonably view what they want and only what they want. I could have gone with Flickr, Picasa, Facebook, or similar services but by having my own web site I have almost unlimited flexibility, no ads, and no membership requirements. Plus I have been able to tag on some other services unrelated to the web site itself. And finally, its just something I wanted to do - another great learning experience!

And the first thing I learned is that the simple web programming I had learned several years ago is absolutely inadequate. But by looking at other sites and templates, and a LOT of trial and error, I'm slowly figuring things out. Our site is still very basic by most standards but again, I'm not trying to do much. And I am always up for feedback on how to make it better, so let me hear from you. I'm sure I'll be playing with it anyway, to make changes for change's sake if nothing else.

I wanted to have the basic site finished in early December (having started after Thanksgiving) and announce it in a "short" newsletter sent with the Christmas cards. I'm now at the point of having to get the cards out, site ready or not. I may still make it as long as I can limit the photos going up. So for now, photos are limited to some of our "favorites", our animals of course, our trip to Canada (Montreal/Quebec) this past August, and our wedding photos (since we got married in Muscat, Oman 29 years ago, I can safely say none of you attended and a very, very few of you ever saw the pictures!).

Eventually, as I noted, I want to put up a lot of photos, going back "forever" - family, friends, travel, visits, military assignments, and more. Last Christmas, Santa brought me a slide/negative scanner and I have spent many days indoors avoiding the heat/drought/rain/sun digitizing photos going back over 40 years! My printer will scan the photos themselves, but a lot of the old photos have faded a bit and its much better working with the negatives. Even still, just about every photo requires a bit of editing so it is a VERY time intensive project. And we still have drawers full of photos I haven't touched yet. And just think - eventually, you too will be able to see them all! Ha Ha Ha.

So that's it for now - unless you are possibly interested in doing your own site or are just interested in some of the technical aspects of my site. I cover that on the next page - so press on if interested.

Wish me luck and please do send me your suggestions for improvement. Wishing y'all a very Merry Christmas and Holiday Season.

Chad

Technical aspects (in non-tech terms):

If you want your own web site, you first have to buy ("register") a "domain" (swedtex.info). Domain names are controlled internationally and only a few registrar agencies are allowed to "sell" them. Do an online search for "Domain names" and you'll get a list of agencies that will sell you one, commonly for a very reasonable \$10-\$15 a year. You must renew annually to keep your domain. You get to pick the site name (any name not already in use) and the extension (.com, .org., net, etc.). Swedtex was available and I chose the "info" extension because it is descriptive and it is less likely to attract random traffic (.info is not a good choice if you build a commercial site and want lots of traffic) - I only want friends and family.

Once you have the domain, you need a host computer (server) connected to the web to hold all your website data and make it available to the internet. You could actually do it on your own home computer but it really isn't worth the hassle and expense of special security concerns, backups, 24/7 up time, special software, etc. Search for "web hosting" for a list of sites that will host your web site for you and provide additional web site tools and services to get you started. Most of the hosting services will run you \$10-\$20 a month. Some hosting services, like Google and Yahoo, will also help you get the domain name (they subcontract with the primary domain agencies) for an all-in-one package deal. The cost is the same but some find it easier to go with a single company (OK if you stay with that one company but it can be confusing if you later decide to change).

I bought my domain name through Google because they included a security feature (that basically hides my identity as the owner of swedtex.info - which avoids a ton of spam, etc) for free, whereas if I went direct to the domain sellers, I would have to pay an extra \$10 a year for that feature. Google registered the domain thru eNom, one of the large primary domain registrars. Google offered their hosting service but I don't like it. HostGator offers more and better services at a better price than Google (and 2 or 3 year contracts for under \$10 a month). So altho I bought and will annually renew my domain name with Google (for the security feature), I use none of their services: the domain is registered with eNom and the site is hosted on HostGator. Those are the two companies I deal with. The only "hassle" of splitting up my services like that is I have to reconfigure my domain set up with eNom show that I'm hosted on HostGator instead of Google. Its not difficult at all but could be intimidating to a novice. But a really good feature is that you can talk to a live support person 24/7 at both eNom and HostGator and they are actually quite helpful! I will guarantee that you will NEVER talk to a live help person at Google - getting help from them is maddening. I do not recommend Google for hosting. If you don't want to split your services like I did, you might consider Yahoo - a bit more expensive (~ \$15 a month) but they will register your domain, host your site, and provide reasonable site templates and tools - and live person customer support is possible. You can go to Linda's pet sitting web site, www.HillCountryPetCare.com, for an example of what you can do on Yahoo.

Lastly, you may consider some software for tweaking your web site if you find the tools provided by your web hosting service not quite adequate. There are good freeware programs available and some reasonably priced. HostGator has some good templates

but not quite what I wanted. So I decided to get some software and do my own programming. This is where I started getting in over my head and unless you are as stubborn as me and/or really want to learn website programming, stick with the tools and templates provided by the hosting service (and in that case I might recommend Yahoo - I think HostGator is a better host, but I think Yahoo's tools and templates might be better/easier; and you can still register the domain thru Google if you like). My software is CoffeCup and I can recommend it. I started with the free version but upgraded to the paid version (\$38 after a coupon I found online - normally about \$50). You may find the free version adequate. Even with CoffeeCup, you still will need to understand at least some programming even if you mostly "cut and paste" from other sites or examples like I do. I bought some used web programming books that are 2-3 years old for a few bucks to use for reference. They are slightly dated but give me a basic understanding; I can search the web if I need more current info.

I also needed software to create my photo galleries. Again there are hosting tools and freeware programs available but none I found easy to use. Fortunately, another gift from Santa years ago was Adobe Photo Elements which really simplifies the task. My version, 3.0, is quite old but does what I need. A new copy, version 8.0, runs \$75-\$100 on Amazon.com and you may find an older version for less.

If you are going to create documents for the web, putting them in a .pdf format is probably your best & safest choice. Foxit software (search it online) offers a good free PDF Creator program (you "print" your document to the pdf creator from the application you used to create the original document - neat and simple). They also have a free pdf Reader that I recommend far and away over Adobe Acrobat Reader - it is simpler, smaller, and much less "invasive" than the Adobe Reader. Install both Foxit programs and get rid of Adobe Reader!

One VERY painful lesson - You have to pay very careful attention to naming folders and files and to typing the path statements in your web programs. HostGator is case sensitive. Windows is not, So what may work fine on your computer may not work at all once you upload your web files to the server - unless you mind your case (I recommend naming all files and folders all lower case for simplicity; and be sure to follow that convention when writing your programs). Also, I had used spaces and the ampersand (&) in my file names and again that worked fine - until I went to upload. CoffeeCup let me down here as all the testing on my PC worked great but when CoffeeCup did a final "link" check as a precursor to uploading, it suddenly did not like all those spaces and &s - and it actually modified my files as a result; it took me hours to sort that out.

I've tested the site on Internet Explorer 7.0 and Opera 10.0 and it works fine on both; IE7 seems to handle the margin edges better. I have not tested on Firefox, Chrome, or Safari so if anyone is using one of these, I'd like to hear how the site comes up.

And I think that's enough for now; I have some Christmas cards I need to get working on. Contact me if I didn't bore you with enough detail above.

Chad