 Stump the PC Club is a free tech-advice column written by members of the **North Orange County Computer Club**, which has been in existence since 1976. Visit the club's site at noccc.org.

QUESTION: I have some old pictures, mostly JPGs, that I have copied to my wife's PC and the dates for the files are different on her PC than on mine. Why is that and which ones are correct? My PC is running Windows XP and hers has Windows 7.

PC CLUB: JPGs are the most common file type used by digital cameras. When we transfer the files from our cameras to our PC, either by using a card reader or by connecting the camera to our PC with a USB cable, we end up with a bunch of these JPGs. After a period of time or after they have been edited, it's frequently difficult to determine exactly when the pictures were taken.

For some reason the engineers at Microsoft have not been consistent in how dates for JPG files are reported. The dates for other files such as Microsoft Word documents are handled more consistently. Pictures such as JPGs and other image formats are a special case since the digital cameras that we use today actually store the date that a picture was taken as part of the picture or JPG file.

There's several ways to transfer the pictures to our PC to help us remember when they were shot such as placing the date taken in the name of the folder used to house the files but that doesn't help those of us who didn't do this. But - there are a ways to determine when the pictures were taken. Before we get to some of these ways let's discuss how Microsoft Windows handles JPG file dates.

The file date shown by Windows XP is the date that the picture was last edited by any graphics program. The date shown in Windows 7 is the date the pictures was taken regardless of when the pictures was last edited or modified. To have any version of windows show the date you have to use the Details view in Windows Explorer. Another way to see the dates is to right click any JPG file and select properties. The resulting displayed date can be confusing, however.

Fortunately, all JPGs have this data stored in them in addition to the picture data. This data is embedded into the picture by the digital camera and contains information including the date the picture was taken, the name of the camera manufacturer, if the flash was fired and much more. This data is referred to as metadata or EXIF (Exchangeable Image File) data. Most graphics editors leave this data intact and can even display some of it.

For example, if you open an image in Adobe's Photoshop Elements and click File, Fie Info, you will see the Date Created (date of original photo) and the Date Modified. This is shown when you select the

Description tab at the top. If you select the Camera tab you will see a lot of data regarding the camera that was used including the shutter speed and lens opening.

There are several free programs that display EXIF data including the following:

- IrfanView at http://www.irfanview.com/. Just open an image and press the letter I on the keyboard and select the EXIF button.
- PhotoME at http://www.photome.de/. This program can edit the data.
- XnView at http://www.xnview.com/. Just use the Browser to locate a picture folder, select a picture and choose the EXIF tab at the bottom.
- There is also an online EXIF viewer called Jeffrey's viewer at http://regex.info/exif.cgi. Just Browse for a photo and click the View Image From File button.
- FastStone Image Viewer at http://www.faststone.org/FSViewerDetail.htm. This program can view or remove EXIF data. Use carefully.
- JPG Time at http://jpgtime.learsy.com/

One of Adobe's best picture manager and editor uses metadata for cataloging pictures and allows you to do such things as find all you pictures taken with a particular camera or even down to the lens. It's pretty amazing. You can find this program at http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshoplightroom/. It's fairly expensive at $299 but it's the best at what it does.

Remember, there are only two dates that matter regarding your pictures, the date the picture was taken and the date it was last modified. Even though you can't rely on Microsoft Windows to give you these dates, any one of the solutions above will do the job.

For more information on this subject see http://www.digicamhelp.com/glossary/exif-data/ . ~Ed Schwartz, NOCCC member. View his Web site at www.edwardns.com.