

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF  
PERSONAL COMPUTER USERS  
WHO FREQUENT THE INTERNET,  
WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON GIST  
SUPPORT GROUP MEMBERS.

# safe surfing

THIS MONTH WE LOOK AT PHOTO  
EDITING SOFTWARE

## Photo Editing Software

There's a  
slew of  
photo  
editing  
software



out there, ranging from free to  
ridiculously expensive and from  
laughably simple to unnecessarily  
sophisticated. And as with many  
things, cost does not necessarily  
correlate to quality or usefulness.

The two extremes might be  
exemplified by the free and very  
basic **HP PhotoSmart Essential  
2.0** ([http://www.hp.com/united-states/consumer/digital\\_photography/free/software/download-thanks.html?os=Windows+Vista&idl=&relink=&hp\\_customer\\_email\\_submit=Download+HP+Photosmart+Essential+for+Windows+Vista+%BB](http://www.hp.com/united-states/consumer/digital_photography/free/software/download-thanks.html?os=Windows+Vista&idl=&relink=&hp_customer_email_submit=Download+HP+Photosmart+Essential+for+Windows+Vista+%BB)) at one extreme, and the full version of Adobe Photoshop that can run up to \$1000, at the other. I will look at a few of the programs available up to a price point somewhere in the middle, leaving the most sophisticated and expensive to the professionals for which they're intended. That's not to say you wouldn't enjoy learning Adobe Photoshop or some other more robust and fancy graphics program, but my focus will be more in line with what most of us need. Here are some of the titles that might do the job for you.

**FREE**

**BASIC**

Elementary programs such as Google's **Picasa2** (free here: <http://picasa.google.com/download/thanks.html>) and **HP PhotoSmart Essentials 2.0**, the free program I mentioned earlier, are not much more robust than the free editing programs already on many systems: **Microsoft Photo Editor** in XP or **Windows Photo Gallery** in Vista.

If all you want to do is something like I did to the photo above of my youngest grandson Matthew that I call "Busted" (crop or perform other basic functions such as automatic or manual balancing of color, brightness or contrast and red-eye correction) all of those programs and a host of others usually bundled with computers and/or printers will satisfy you. However, each lacks one or more feature that makes it unusable as a primary editing program in my view.

For example, I want the ability to easily resize, save to other file formats (e.g. JPG, GIF, TIFF or BMP) and repair scratches or dust. None of the three does that, even though they all do a decent job on

the relatively few functions they offer. But that's the problem: they just don't offer enough! I like a lot of special effects available so I can do things like in the photo below of my oldest granddaughter



**NOT-SO-BASIC**

The effect shown above is called "Stamp" in my old editor **Microsoft PhotoDraw**. The same effects are often called something else in other editors. Worse yet, until you've pretty well mastered a program, you can't be certain you're going to get the effect you



want even if the both programs use the same term. For example, the “Emboss” effect in **PhotoDraw** looks like the example on the right below while “Emboss” in **PhotoFiltre** looks like the one on the left:



I mentioned Google’s program **Picasa2** earlier and described it as “Basic.” It is really is quite good, though, much better than HP’s or Microsoft’s basic album and correction programs, and should probably be considered “Basic+.” Though not quite sophisticated enough to call “intermediate,” it has a couple of features not available (at least not readily available) in the others. For example, it has a “Focal B&W” feature that’s a lot of fun and unique. It simply allows to you to isolate color to a general, small area of the photo and leave the rest black and white. It also allows you to select your photos from its “filmstrip” and to load the photo for editing much more rapidly than does the other programs.

## **INTERMEDIATE**

All of the programs I’ve discussed so far work well in Windows XP and Vista. However, there are a couple of very good, full-featured editors I’ve tried recently that do NOT work well in Vista. Although I cannot recommend them for that reason, if you use and plan to continue using XP for quite awhile, you might want to try **Pixia** (when it works it’s almost as good as **PhotoFiltre**, but it only works to varying degrees, not for long and never reliably in Vista) or **VCW Vicman’s Photo Editor** (the makers of which promised me would soon be compatible with

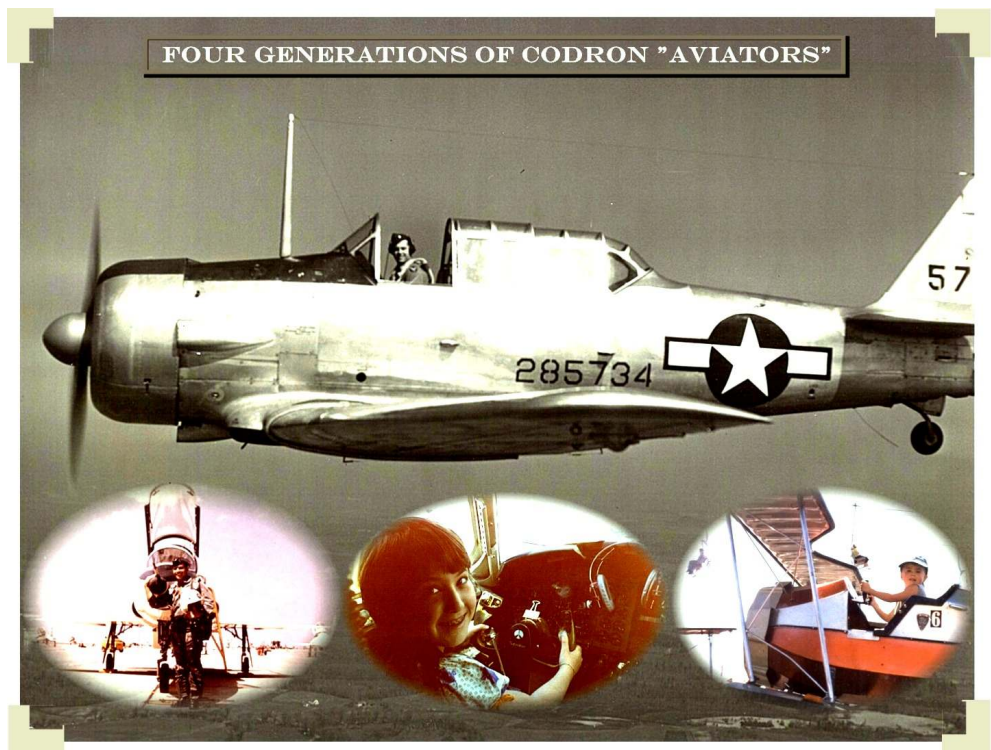
Vista). But there are plenty I’ve been examining that work beautifully in all recent Windows environments, so let’s focus on them.

One of the fanciest, most full-featured free editing programs I’ve seen is **GIMP**. You can download it here but even just downloading it is more of a task than you might expect. It’s almost too fancy. You need the both of the first two files shown here for Windows: <http://gimp-win.sourceforge.net/stable.html>. I don’t use **GIMP** primarily because I don’t need anything quite that robust and don’t want to spend the time required in the learning curve to use it properly, much the same reason that I don’t spend the money on huge programs like **CorelDraw** or **Adobe Photoshop**.

Another very good free program I’d consider “intermediate” is **Serif PhotoPlus**, available here: <http://www.freeserifsoftware.com/commence-download.asp?CommenceDownload=photoplus&navproduct=photoplus&Check=True>

advanced **Adobe PhotoShop**. It is very highly rated and can be found in various versions up to 5.0, all less than \$100. **PaintShop Pro** (originally from JASC and now owned by Corel) is similarly “intermediate” and under \$100.

As I mentioned earlier, I have used **Microsoft PhotoDraw** for quite a long time and enjoy it very much. Although the program has been discontinued and is no longer supported by Microsoft, you can often find it at garage sales, thrift stores and/or bundled with **Microsoft Office 2000**. It contains some significant conveniences common to most of the programs I would classify as intermediate: one-click auto balancing of brightness, contrast, hue and/or tint, easy insertion and manipulation of text boxes, scratch and dust correction and a host of other features included numerous special effects. These make the programs particularly comfortable to use, especially for things like the montages and fake magazine



## **NOT FREE, BUT VERY GOOD**

**Adobe PhotoShop Elements** is a scaled down version of the very

covers shown on this and the next page.

The first (above) is a montage of my father and me as young

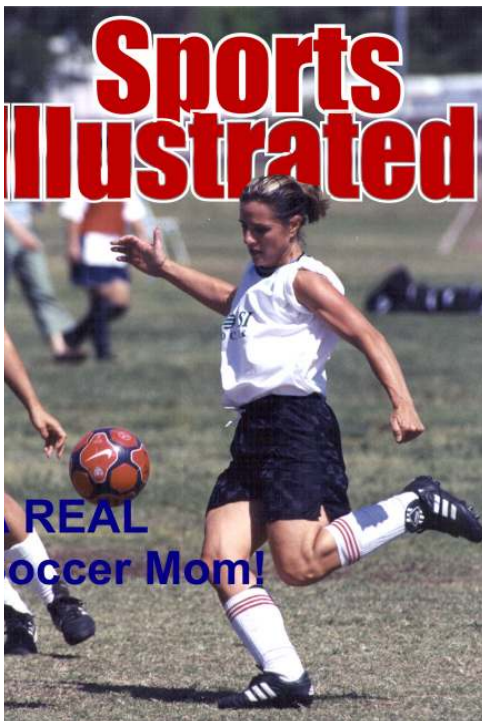


student pilots, my oldest daughter Kim as a child, and her eldest son Michael. I did it in PhotoDraw before I got very good at color balancing.

The one below is of my oldest grandson Michael done in PhotoFiltre.



The next one (below) is of my youngest daughter Leah using PhotoDraw.



## MY NEW FAVORITE

But my favorite of all the free programs I have seen (and that's a lot) is a French program called **PhotoFiltre** available right here: <http://www.photofiltre.com/> **PhotoFiltre** just about has it all. In fact, the more I learn about the program, the more I appreciate it. Unlike the other free and many costly programs, it downloads and installs easily, it doesn't taunt you with constant ads about an upgrade or other products, it doesn't take a programming or digital graphics arts degree to use and it has everything I need. They also make a superb shareware "Studio" version that costs 25 Euros after 30 days, but I saw too little difference between versions to justify buying it. I do like to donate to companies that continue to make useful freeware like this available, and I have done that for their free version because it's excellent and clearly robust enough for most users.

Additionally, it has more special effects than I've seen anywhere except in the most advanced and costly programs. And, unlike in those programs, invoking the feature is a simple process, even though each one also allows considerable flexibility within the effect. That is, you can easily adjust the intensity or other aspects of each effect. And unlike almost all photo editing programs I've tried, it's unbelievably fast opening and saving files, and rendering each feature. Sacré Bleu, they've really got a winner here!

With **PhotoFiltre** I can choose to give special emphasis to a special photo like this one of my youngest granddaughter Paige, by, for example, making it simply grayscale:



Or I can make it look like a classic work of art in colored pencil on heavy paper like this:



But, no matter how many effects any one program may offer, you will inevitably find that you prefer some effects in another program. So you will often want to keep a few editors on your system just for those special needs. For example, I'm certain I'll be keeping **MS PhotoDraw** because of how much I like the oil painting effect in that program, as illustrated in this photo of my son-in-law Jeff walking my then-two-year-old granddaughter Phoebe to the water's edge:



## SUMMARY

The advanced programs, exemplified by **Adobe PhotoShop** and **CorelDraw**, are well beyond the needs of most users. But those costly programs and others like them that support a "layers" concept, like the free **GIMP**, are



fascinating and full of possibilities. They also involve a humongous learning curve, another reason they don't suit me I prefer the balance of cost, utility and ease of use. And, where cost is a concern, "free" is tough to beat! Virtually all of the programs I've discussed will take the rough edges out of and crop a photo if that's all you need to do.

For example, the excellent photo to the right that someone took of Matthew, Paige and Michael needed virtually no manipulation except cropping. This kind of snapshot is a piece of cake to get ready for printing! If that's all you ever had to do, you wouldn't need to consider any of the other programs I've been examining and that I've summarized in the chart below.

But **PhotoFiltre** does that and a lot more, and (altogether now) it's **FREE!** That's what I'm talkin' 'bout!

*Note: Please excuse my indulgences this month, but I love those kids and their photos! And what better way to show you just what these programs can do, than to use the photos as examples, right?*



Program	Works in Vista	Sophistication	Ease of Learning	Ease of Use	Layers	Effects	Score	Price*
Adobe PhotoShop	Yes	Advanced	Very Difficult	Difficult	Yes	Many	☆☆☆☆☆	High
CorelDraw	Yes	Advanced	Very Difficult	Difficult	Yes	Many	☆☆☆☆☆	High
<b>PhotoFiltre 6.0**</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Intermediate+</b>	<b>Very Easy</b>	<b>Very Easy</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Many</b>	<b>☆☆☆☆</b>	<b>Free</b>
GIMP	Mostly	Advanced-	Difficult	Moderate	Yes	Many	☆☆☆☆	Free
PhotoFiltre Studio	Yes	Intermediate+	Very Easy	Very Easy	No	Many	☆☆☆☆	Low
Microsoft PhotoDraw 2000	Yes	Intermediate	Easy	Easy	No	Yes	☆☆☆☆	Low
Adobe PhotoShop Elements	Yes	Intermediate	Easy	Easy	No	Yes	☆☆☆☆	Low
Serif PhotoPlus 5.5	Yes	Intermediate	Very Easy	Easy (but slow)	Yes	Yes	☆☆☆	Free
Paint.Net	Yes	Intermediate	Easy	Easy (but slow)	Yes	Yes	☆☆☆	Free
VCW Vicman's Photo Editor	No	Intermediate	Easy	Easy	No	Many	☆☆☆	Free
Picasa2	Yes	Basic+	Very Easy	Very Easy	No	Some	☆☆	Free
Pixia	No	Basic	Very Easy	Very Easy	No	No	☆☆	Free
Windows Photo Gallery	Yes (only)	Basic	Very Easy	Very Easy	No	No	☆☆	Free
Windows Photo Editor	No	Basic	Very Easy	Very Easy	No	No	☆☆	Free
HP Photosmart Essential 2.0	Yes	Basic	Very Easy	Very Easy	No	Few	☆	Free

\*High = Well over \$100; Low = Well under \$100; Free = Well, FREE!

\*\*My new favorite and highly recommended

Barry Codron still lives (with his wife and doggie and near his children and grandchildren) in the Sacramento area. He is technically retired (from the Air Force, he's proud to say), but often consults in areas including technology and music, among other fields that pique his interest from time to time. He welcomes your questions, comments, ideas or corrections. Email him at [barry.mart@sbcglobal.net](mailto:barry.mart@sbcglobal.net)

