THE LOOK OF THE PAST

A moving event this afternoon. A celebration of the life of a family friend, Barbara Levin, who died last week.

It was at her home in Portola Valley, where her son Dan Levin, Naomi Andrews and their daughter Maya now live. She loved food, travel, living life to the full.

What has stuck with me particularly are the photographs of her life.

They had been reprinted for the celebration – snapshots from the whole of her life – and mounted on boards and in frames for us all to enjoy. In Europe in her twenties. In her fifties again in the France she loved. All the way up to just last year. A record of a life, yes. And the changes, of course. The fashions and styles.

And the look of the photos. Why does a photo from the 1950s look different to one from last year? Styles, fashions, the look of places, yes. And something more subtle – the way we look at the camera, walk, sit, hold ourselves, stand – habitus. And then the medium itself – the camera and the way its lens takes in the world. Less contrast and sharpness in the 50s, but not definition. Some of it very difficult to put into words. The quality of blur, of what is and is not in focus. The habitus of a medium.

So will a contemporary life change in the way it presents itself to me if I use a 1936 Leica (Cartier Bresson), a Graflex (Weegee), a Nikon Reflex (McCullin)?

A camera – the clock for making images.