Digital Restoration from Start to Finish

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the photograph a little too flat and grayish up until just before you want to print it out. Then you can adjust the end points of the curve to place the black and white values exactly where they need to be to give you a full-range print.

Many faded prints have very poor contrast in the shadows. Even when you restore the overall contrast range of the print you may not have a good tonal separation in the darker areas. The curve in Figure 5-23 fixes that. I restricted the lightening effect by adding adjustment points along the curve to keep it from arcing upward overall, as did the curve in Figure 5-19, left. Locking down values near the highlights ensured that they didn’t lose any contrast at all. It increases the contrast a lot in the shadows and sacrifices a little contrast in the other tones. It also makes the prints somewhat lighter overall (Figure 5-24).

Heavily stained and copy prints (Figure 5-25) usually have poor highlight tone separation (you’ll also see that in a very severely faded photograph). The curve in Figure 5-26 takes care of those problems. I’ve also applied other control points a la Figure 5-23 so that the rest of the
photograph doesn’t become too much darker. I’ve darkened the middle-highlight tones considerably and at the same time dragged in the white point to restore the sparkle to the whites. The result is livelier and looks more like an original than a copy print.

Now that we’ve covered some of the basic moves with Curves, let’s look at some nifty tricks for improving tone. There’s a lot more I can do to improve this copy photograph, and I cover that on page 151. First, I want to introduce a very powerful Photoshop tool for improving tonality.

**Fig. 5-23** This Curves adjustment greatly increases the contrast in the deepest shadows and lightens them up to bring out more detail, as shown in Figure 5-24. It does not affect the tonal range of the print, its overall contrast, or the brightness of the highlights. Note the multiple control points in the middle of the curve that keep the midtones and highlights close to their original values.

**HOW TO IMPROVE A COPY PRINT WITH CURVES (continued)**
Fig. 5-24 The original photograph (top) has a lot of important subject detail buried in the shadows. The middle-to-dark tones are a little too contrasty; this is most obvious in the subjects’ faces. The Curves adjustment in Figure 5-23 created the lower photograph. A lot more shadow detail is visible, and contrast in the darker midtones is greatly improved.
Copy photographs also have especially bad tonal separation in the highlights and shadows, where the contrast will be extremely low. It may take strong changes to bring out good shadow and highlight detail. But strong changes like those of Figure 5-27 don’t usually produce attractive results. The midtones become so compressed and low in contrast that the print looks flat and lifeless.

By way of example, I applied this Curves adjustment to the slide restoration I did in Example 4 of Chapter 10. When I did that restoration, I chose not to change the overall tonality of the photograph because I wanted to preserve the original “amateur” quality of on-camera flash in
Fig. 5-26 This curve increases contrast in the highlights and restores the whites, without having much effect on the midtones and shadows. As with Figure 5-23, I’ve used multiple control points to minimize changes to those tones (in the shadows) that I want unchanged.

Fig. 5-27 These Curves adjustments don’t alter the total tonal range of the photo, but it increases contrast and separation in both the highlights and the shadows at the same time. In consequence, midtone contrast is reduced. That can make a print look lifeless, as shown in Figure 5-28, so use adjustments like this carefully.