Google Photos

A pictorial/tutorial addressing the most commonly asked questions

by Bill Hladik

Google User A

**Tablet** **Phone** **Desktop**
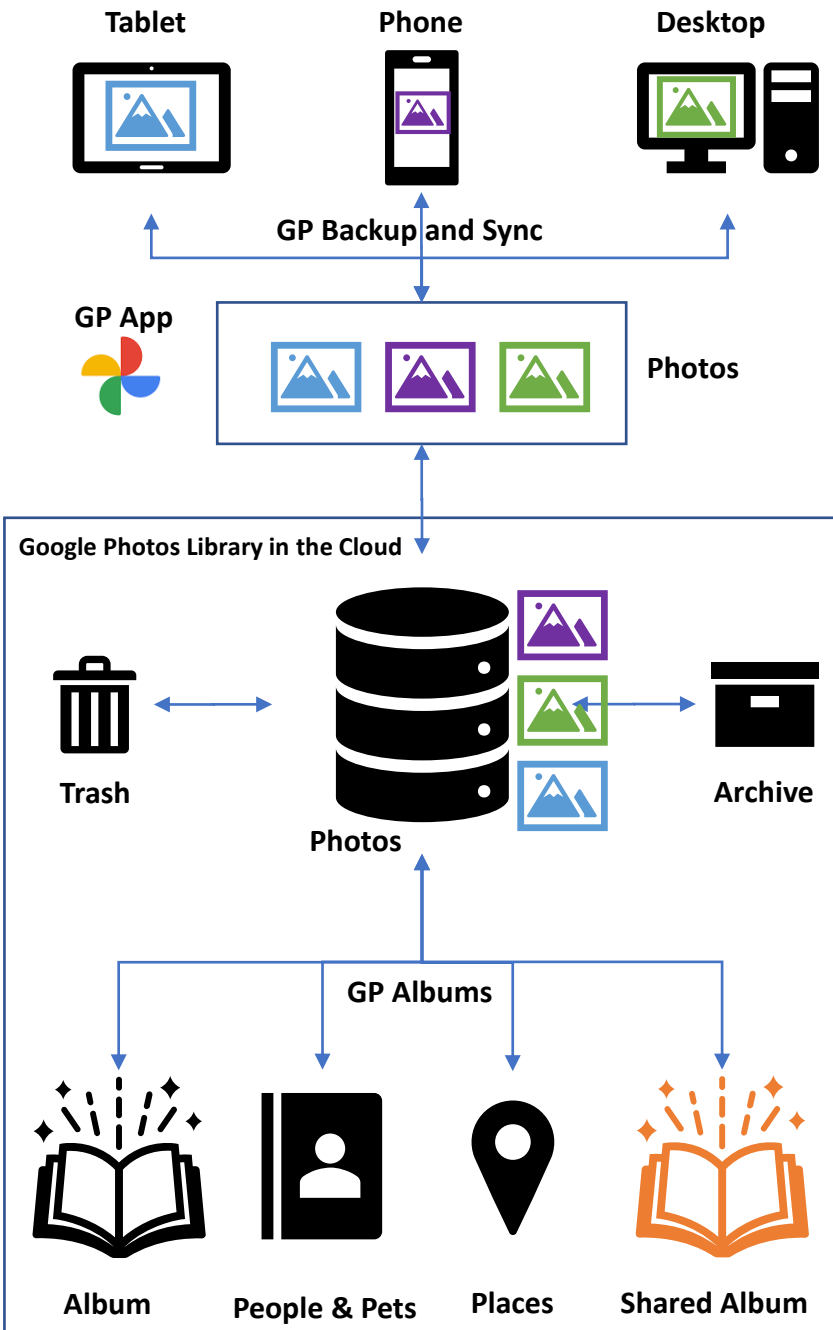
Pictures are taken or created on some device.

GP App

Photos

The Google Photos (GP) app or Backup and Sync app copies the photos to the GP Cloud.

GP Backup and Sync

Google Photos Library in the Cloud

Trash **Photos** **Archive**

Once photos are in the GP cloud, they can be viewed by the GP app on the device or from the GP website at http://photos.google.com. Any photo can be moved back and forth between the active Photos Library and either the Trash or the Archive.

GP Albums

Album **People & Pets** **Places** **Shared Album**

Any photo can be tagged to appear in an album you create or in a Shared album you create. Any photo might also be tagged to appear in GP auto generated albums such as a People & Pets album based on facial recognition or a Places album based on location metadata or GP's AI inferences.
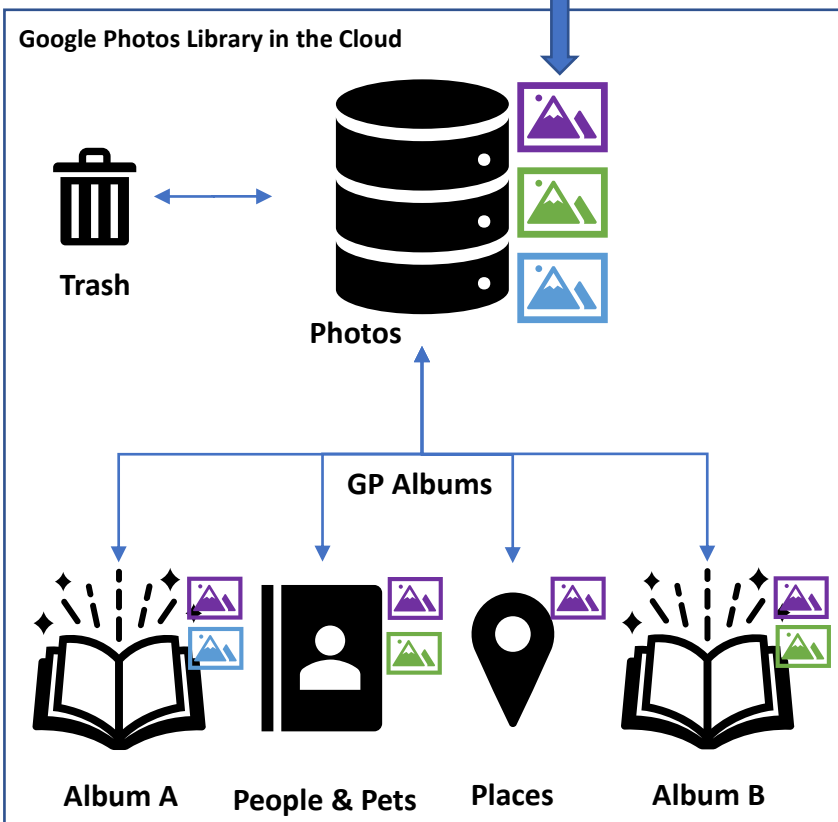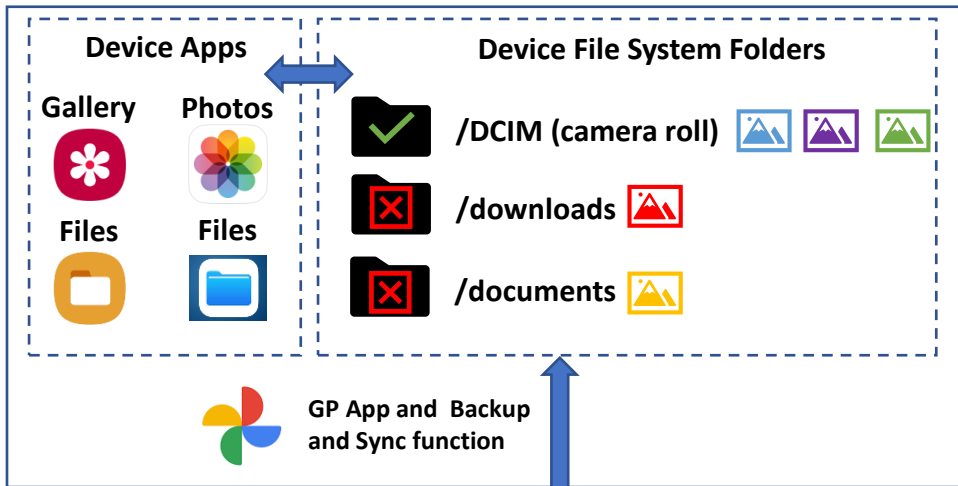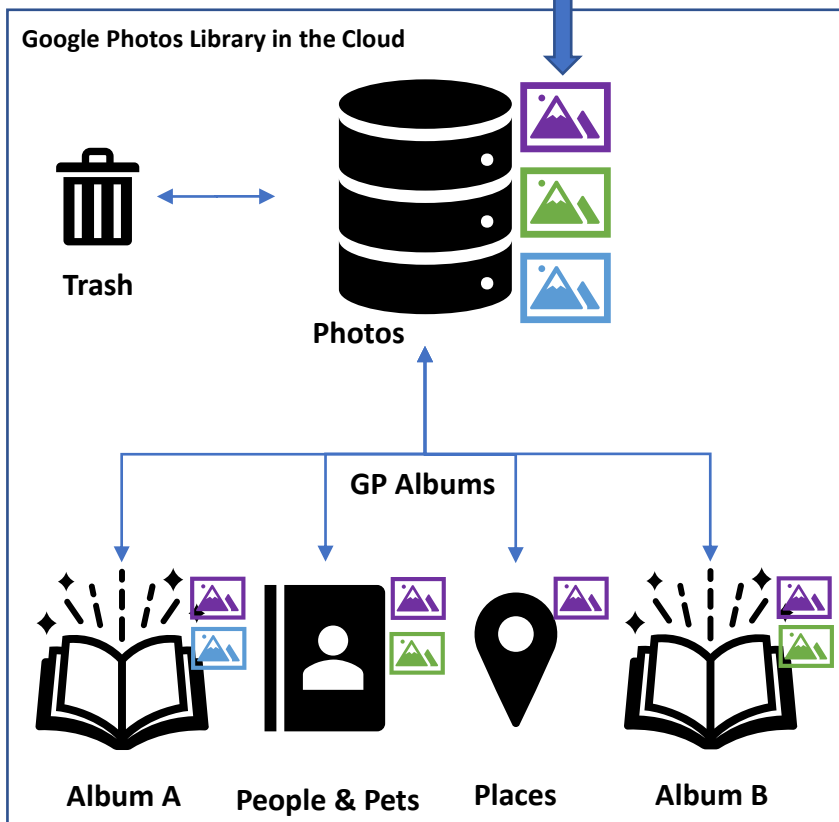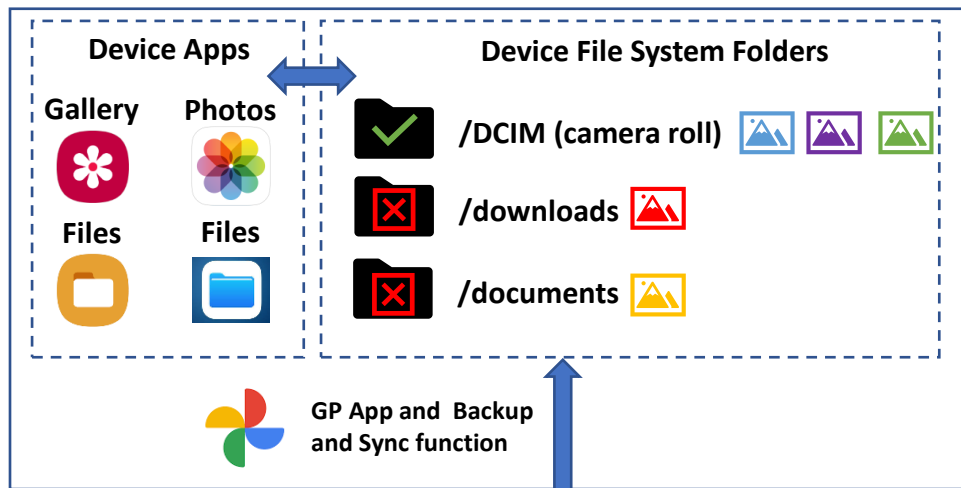
Synching Photos from Your Device to the GP Cloud

How do photos get from your device to the GP cloud?

- The GP app for Android and iOS contains a Backup and Sync function that (when enabled) copies all photos on your device to the GP cloud.
- There is also a Windows or MAC app called Backup and Sync from Google that you can install and enable to copy photos from your desktop to the GP cloud.
- The GP App can configure the Backup and Sync function to turn on or off specific device folders from the syncing/backup process.
- When the GP app syncs photos from the device to the GP cloud, it puts them in the active library under "Photos". This is the main view of all GP photos and it is sorted by date taken. This cannot be changed.
- Whether your device folder is synced, you can always manually upload photos into the GP cloud.
- GP tries hard to not add a duplicate photo into the GP cloud, but what it considers a duplicate photo and what you consider a duplicate photo may differ.
  - Two photos that look like the same scene or that may have been taken seconds apart by you or others are not duplicates to GP (even if you and all of your friends look at these photos and say "these are the same thing").
  - Your recourse is to delete one or more of them.

Google User A's Device (e.g. Phone)

Device Apps

Gallery   Photos

Files   Files

Device File System Folders

✓ /DCIM (camera roll)

✗ /downloads

✗ /documents

GP App and Backup and Sync function

Google Photos Library in the Cloud

Trash

Photos

GP Albums

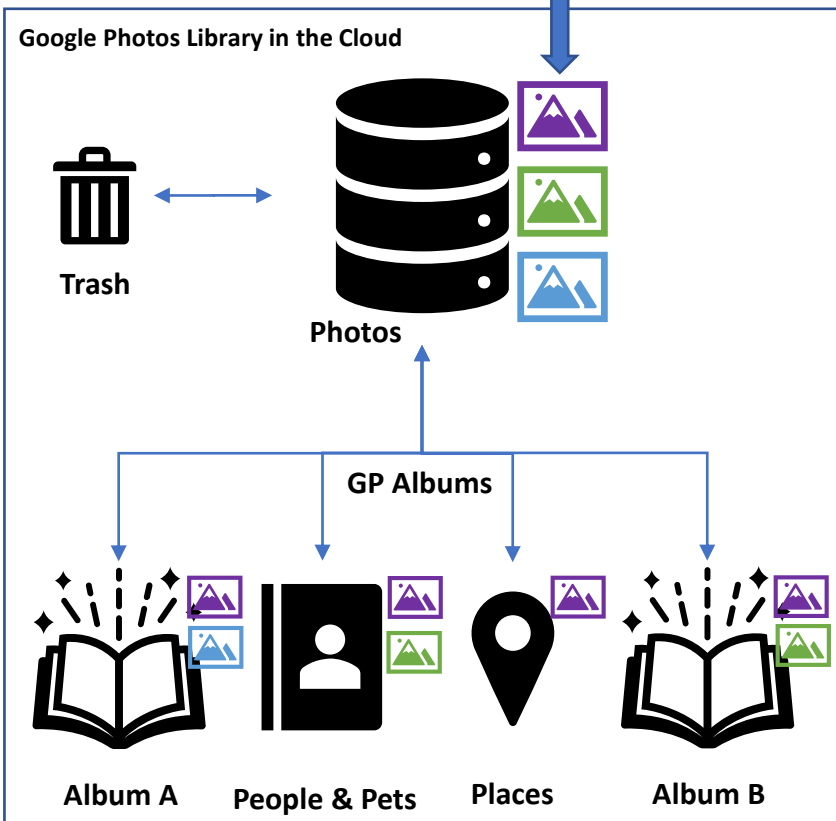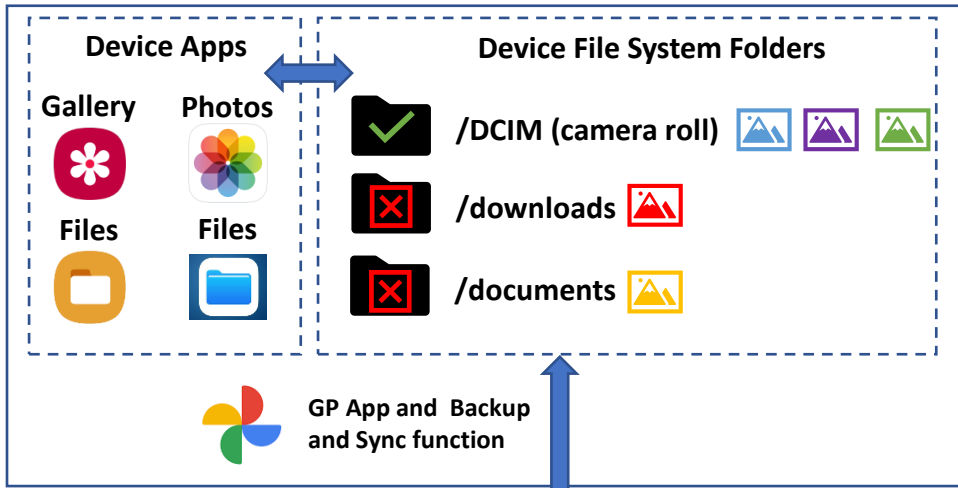Album A   People & Pets   Places   Album B

- The GP App can view photos in device folders and in the GP cloud.
- It can see photos on your device that have been backed up to the GP cloud and that have not been backed up to the GP cloud.
- It can see photos in the GP cloud that originally came from your device even if those photos are now deleted from your device.
- It can see photos in the GP cloud that did not come from your device.

- The native device apps like Gallery, Photos, and Files can only see photos in device file system folders.
- These apps may also create "albums", but they are not Google Photos albums.
- These apps cannot see anything in the GP cloud.
- These apps may even look and feel like the GP App and may exhibit many of its functions, but they are independent of each other.

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Photos

Files

Files

Device File System Folders

/DCIM (camera roll)

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/documents

GP App and Backup and Sync function

Google Photos Library in the Cloud

Trash

Photos

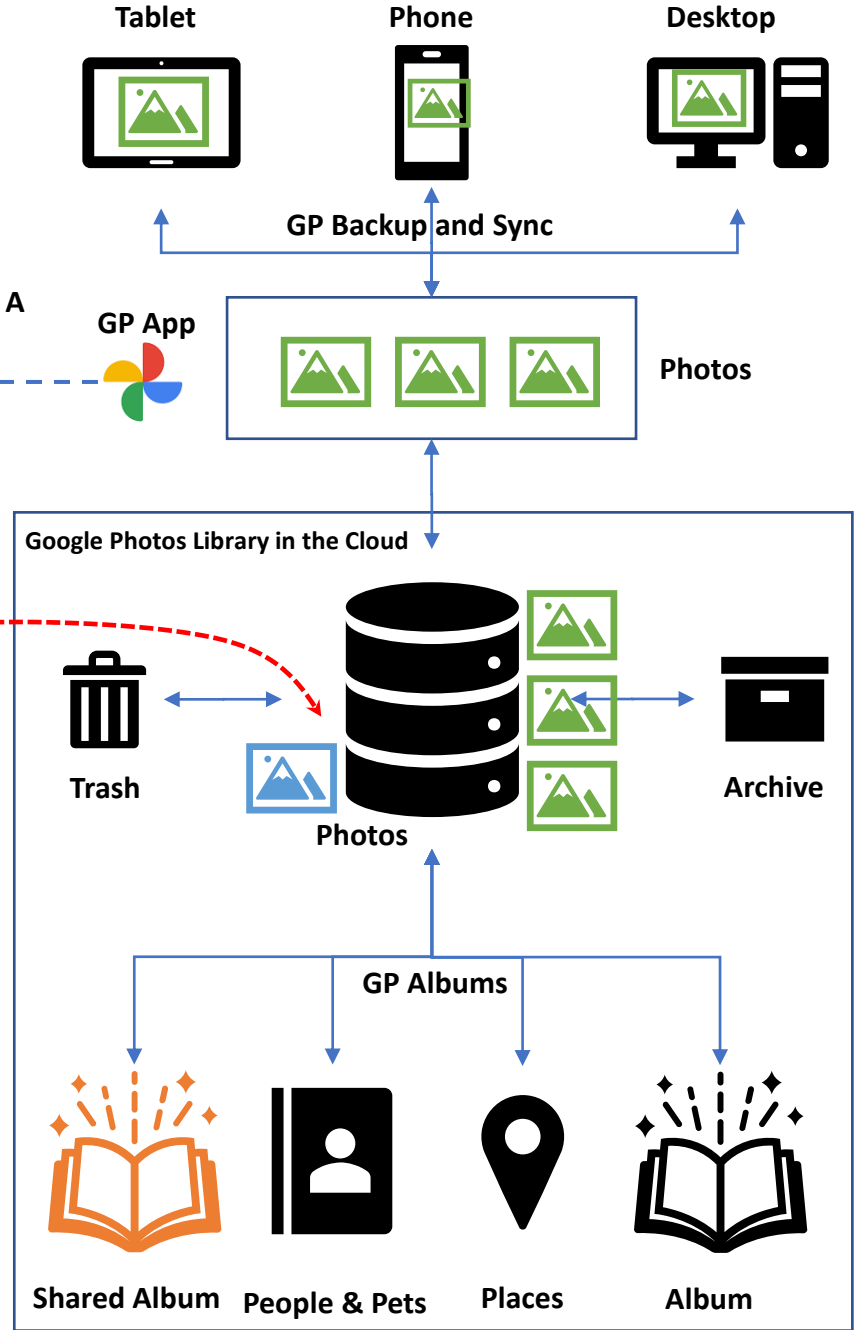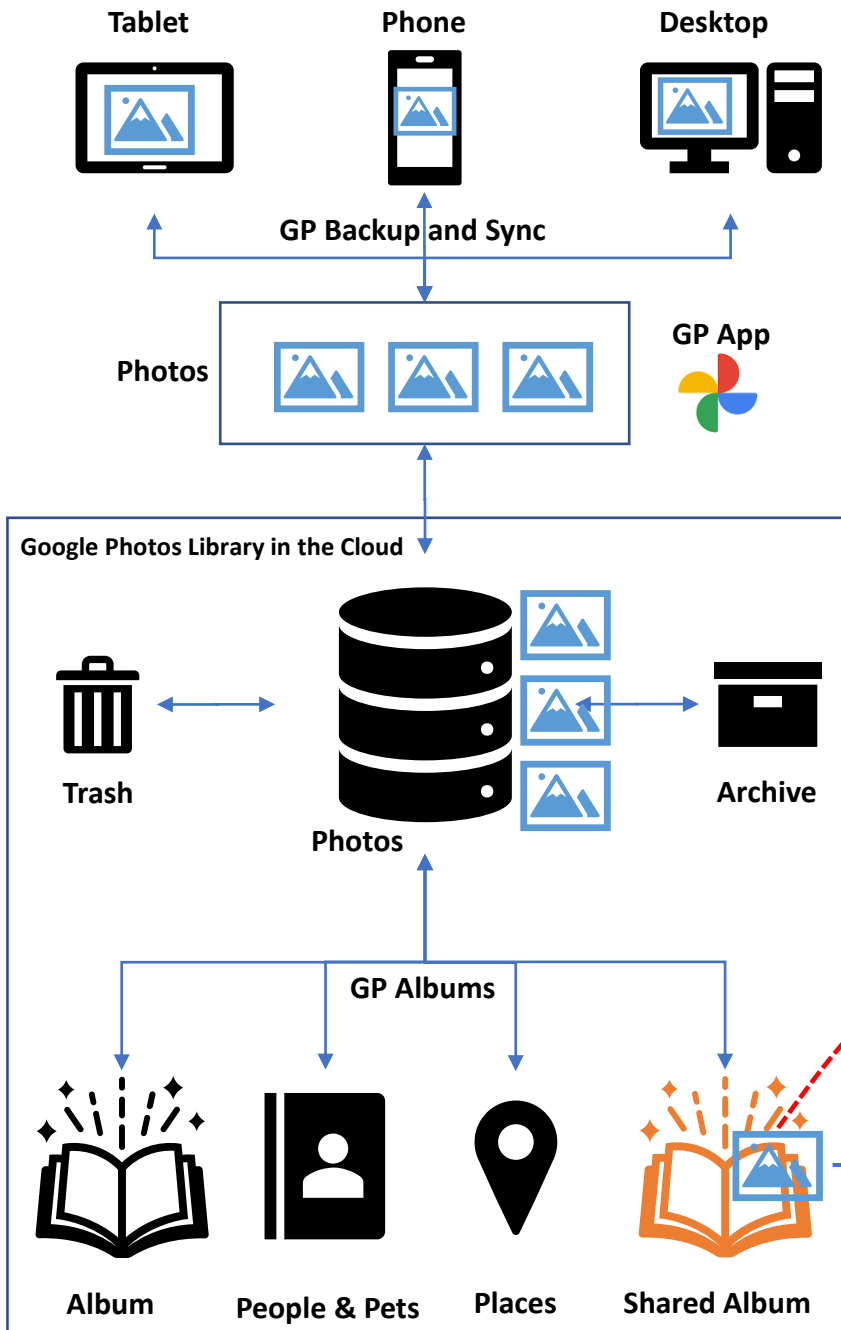GP Albums

Album A

People & Pets

Places

Album B

- GP albums are not equivalent to device folders (e.g. phone, tablet or desktop).
- GP only has albums. Your phone/device has folders (and potentially albums).
- Even though GP may have uploaded/synched a photo from your phone automatically where it existed in a folder or album called "Christmas", you will not see that album in GP.
  - You would have to create it manually in GP and manually add the same set of photos to the album.
- Photos are independent from albums. You can delete an album and the photos associated with it remain in GP under the Photos tab.
- The same photo can be tagged for many different albums.
  - Photos do not exist inside albums like they do in file system folders on your device.
  - You are just associating photo names with album names in GP
  - User A can create multiple albums such as Album A and Album B. The same photo can be tagged to appear in multiple albums. (e.g. the purple photo appears in 4 different albums)
- GP itself might use its powerful AI to create its own albums under the People and Pets area and under the Places area. These are based on facial recognition and photo location.
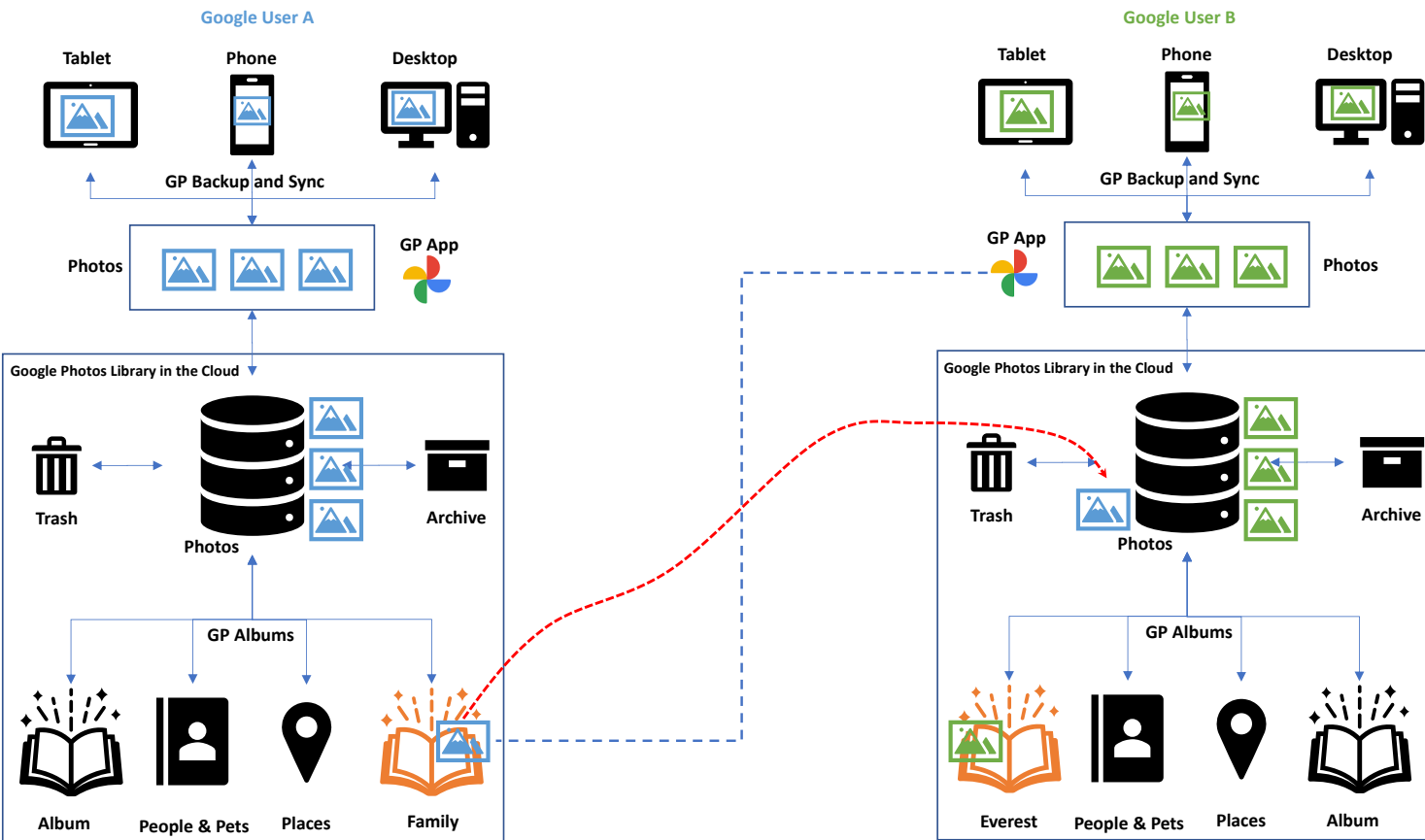
Sharing

Google User A

Tablet   Phone   Desktop

GP Backup and Sync

Photos   GP App

Google Photos Library in the Cloud

Trash   Photos   Archive

GP Albums

Album   People & Pets   Places   Shared Album

User B views Photo owned by User A via the Shared Album of User A

GP App

User B can optionally copy User A's Photo to User B's GP Library

Google User B

Tablet   Phone   Desktop

GP Backup and Sync

Photos

Google Photos Library in the Cloud

Trash   Photos   Archive

GP Albums

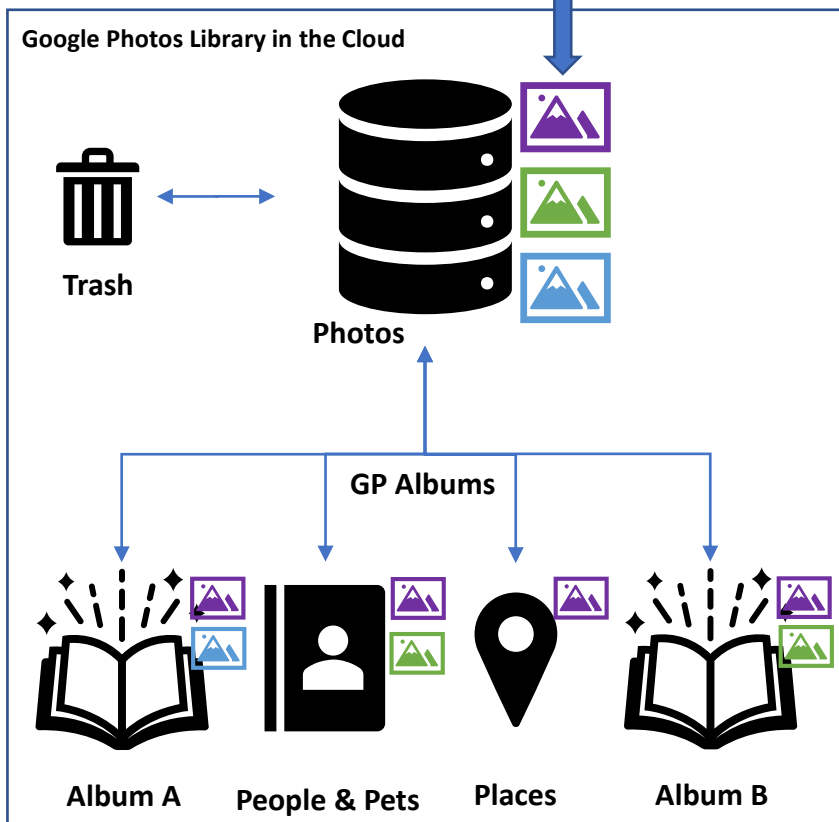Shared Album   People & Pets   Places   Album
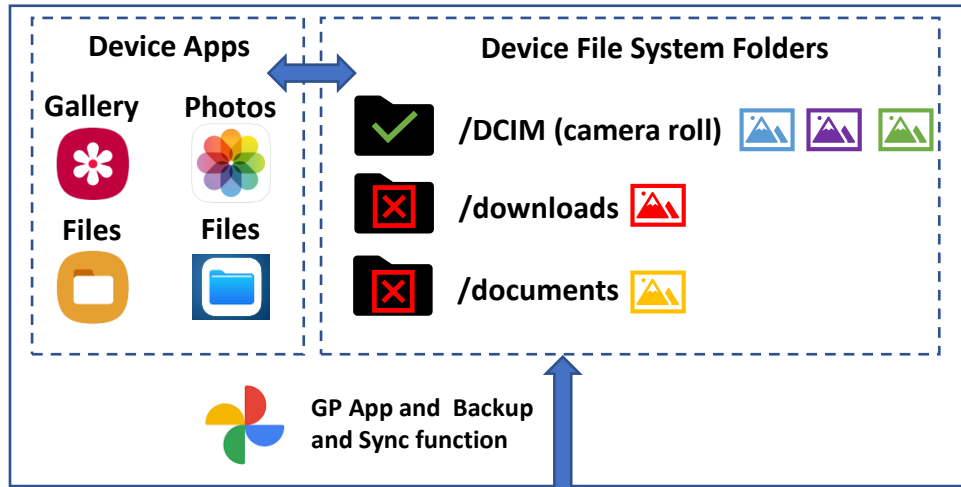
GP Shared Albums

- A non-shared album can become a shared album by sharing it and changing options
- You can share albums with other people. They will not be able to delete your photos that might be associated with that album.
  - User B is viewing the blue photo from User A's shared album called "Family". – – – –
- The other person can download your photos when they view the album, or they can add your photos in that album to their GP library.
  - User B copied the User A's blue photo to their own Photos library. – – – –
- The album owner can edit the album and change the sorting and a few other things related to the album.

- With GP's "Shared Albums" the other people you shared your album with can add their own photos to the album.
  - The photos they add to the Shared Album are visible to you, but those photos are not in your library (e.g. the Photos tab).
  - and therefore their photos are not subject to GP's AI creations or facial rec unless you specifically copied them to your library.
- If you share an album with a non-google email address they get a link (url) to view the album.
- If you share an album with a google email address, they get a link but also will see the album listed in their GP app under the Sharing tab.
  - Anyone having this url link can see the photos, not just the person you shared the link with.
- If you look at one of your photos and see location information (that GP or you added), that location will appear to the person you shared the album or photo with (unless you specifically disable it).

**Google User A's Device (e.g. Phone)**

Device Apps

Gallery Photos

Files Files

Device File System Folders

/DCIM (camera roll)

/downloads

/documents

GP App and Backup and Sync function

Google Photos Library in the Cloud

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Photos

GP Albums

Album A People & Pets Places Album B

- A photo deleted or removed from a GP Album does not get deleted from the active Photos library. (e.g. removing the green photo from Album B – it stays in the active photos library and the People and Pets album)

- A photo deleted from the active Photos library gets moved into Trash for 60 days and can be undone. Also, if that photo was being synchronized via the GP App function called Backup and Sync, then that photo is also deleted from the device folder. (e.g. if the GP app is used to delete the blue photo, it gets moved from the active library to trash, removed from Album A, and deleted from the device /DCIM folder)

- A native device app such as Gallery or Files can delete photos from device folders and the GP cloud copy of that photo is unaffected if it was previous synchronized to the GP cloud. (e.g. if Gallery is used to delete the green photo from the device camera roll folder nothing happens to the green photo in the GP cloud).

- The GP App function "free up space" can be used anytime to delete photos in device folders that have been synchronized to the GP cloud. (e.g. the 3 photos [green, blue, purple] would be deleted from the device /DCIM folder but would remain in the GP cloud active library and any albums they appear in).

- There is no easy way to delete a photo in the GP cloud and have the synchronized photo in a device folder not be deleted. (e.g. you cannot use the GP app to delete the purple photo from GP cloud and keep it in the device).
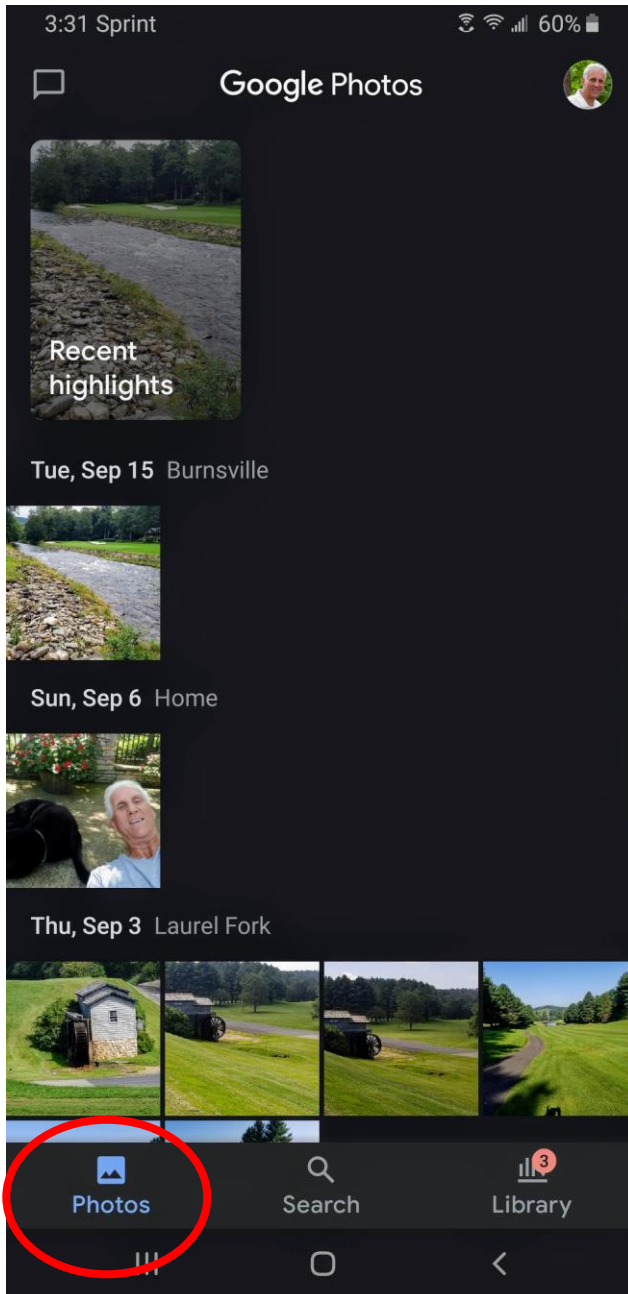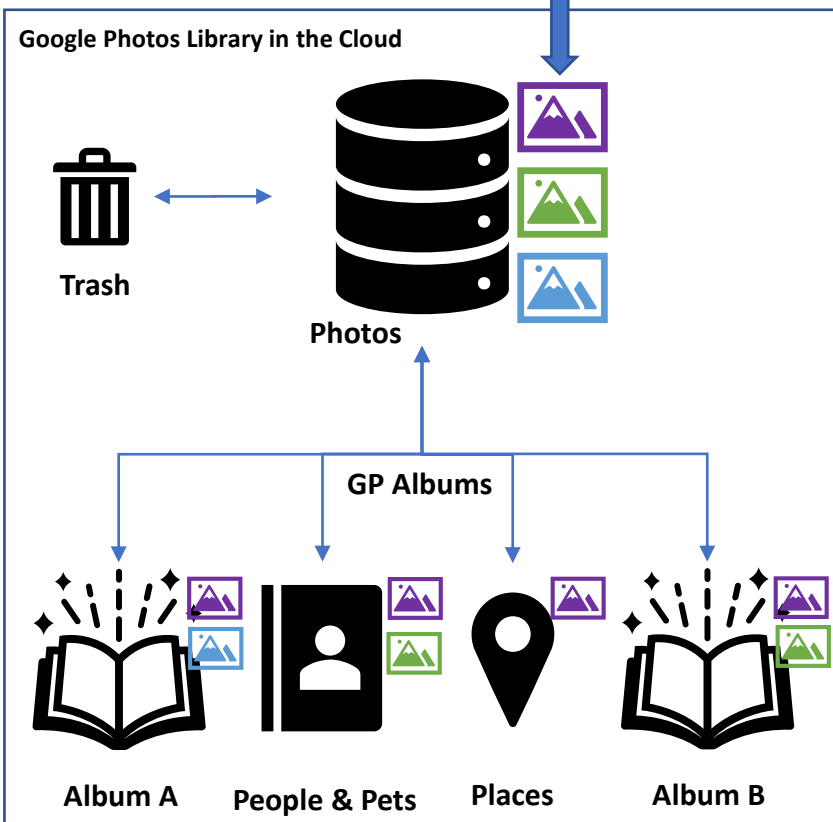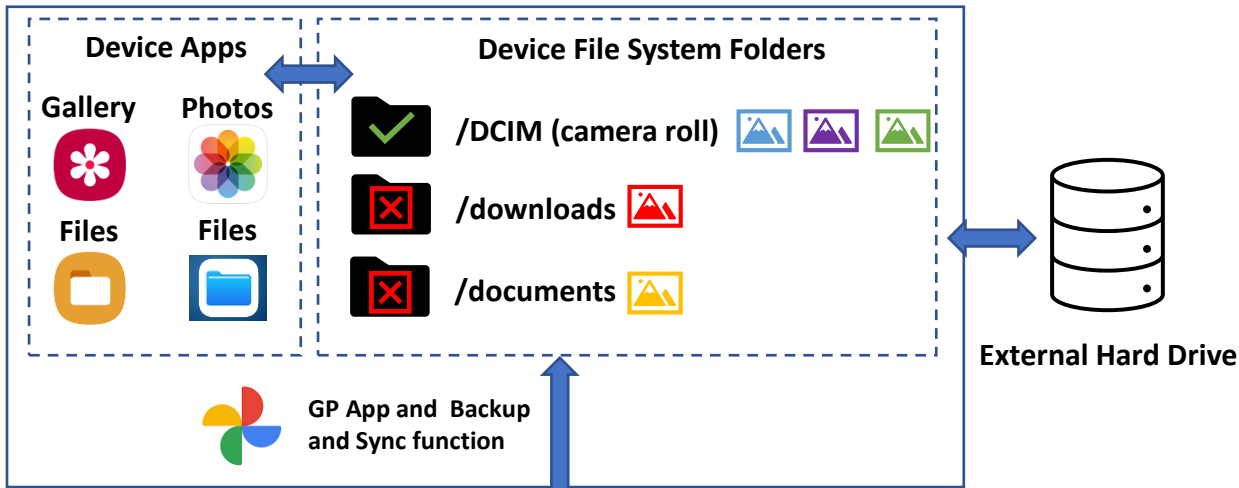
- Contains all non-archived photos in your Library
- You can't get rid of it.
- It is the main/default view in GP and it is always sorted by date taken (you can't change this).
  - Date taken may be different from the date uploaded and date created.
- It contains *all* things that are images, not just what you might consider a photo or what you might want it to contain or not contain.
  - Yes - screenshots, memes, photos of receipts, etc.
- Only way to move a photo out of it is to Archive the photo or Delete the photo.
- All GP AI based operations (facial recognition, creations, etc.) occur on these photos (and conversely not on Archived photos).
- Search finds photos in either Photos or Archive,
- If you want a view of Photos based on date added to GP:
  - https://photos.google.com/search/_tra_
  - or click in the Search box and look for Recently Added
- You can pinch/zoom this view to see more or fewer photos. The date range will change as GP groups photos.
- You can scroll the right side, up or down, or grab the slider to move backward or forward in date/time.
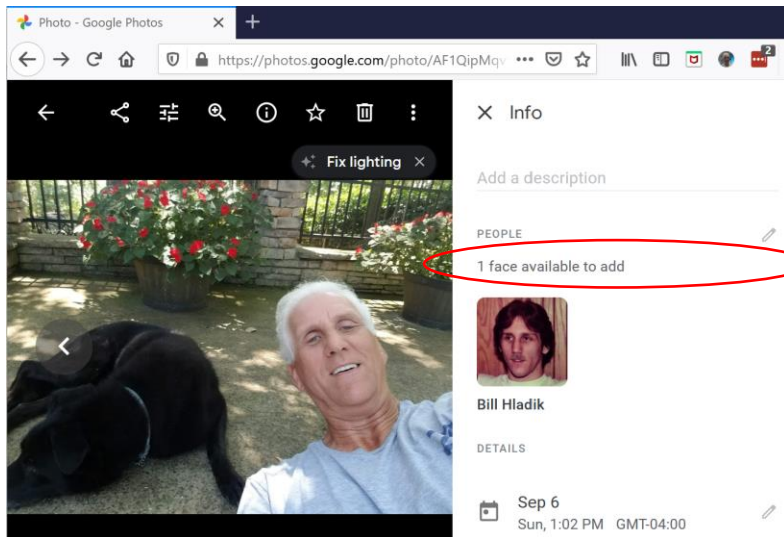
Backing Up Photos

Google User A's Device (e.g. Phone)

Device Apps

Gallery   Photos

Files   Files

Device File System Folders

/DCIM (camera roll)

/downloads

/documents

External Hard Drive

GP App and Backup and Sync function

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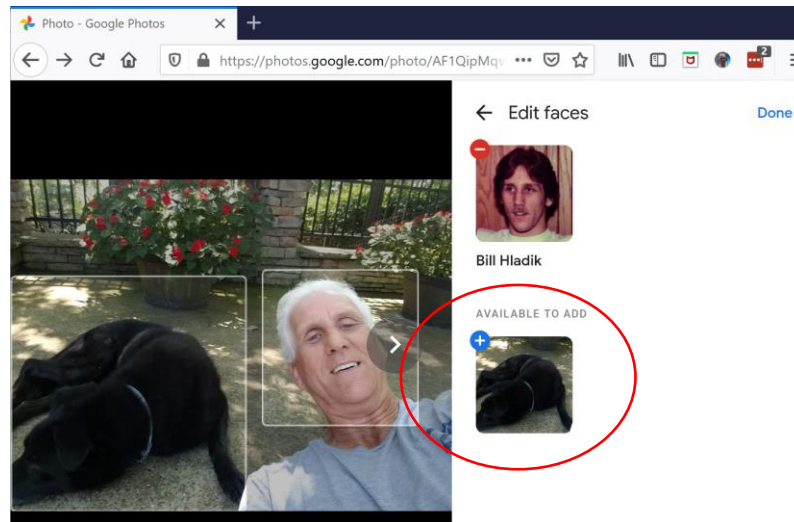Album A   People & Pets   Places   Album B

- Yes, GP backs up all your photos to the GP cloud. DO NOT rely on that being the one and only place the photos exist.
- If you use the GP function "Free up Space" and you have performed no other type of backup, then the photo only exists in GP cloud.
- It is best to copy the photos to some other place:
  - An external hard drive.
  - Another folder on the device that is excluded from GP's backup and sync process.
  - Your desktop (again in a place not visible to GP).
- You can periodically use http://takeout.google.com to create downloadable zip files of all photos in your GP cloud.
- You can use the GP app function called "Download" to download photos in batches of up to 500 photos at a time.

The photo contains me and Casper the dog. My face is recognized and automatically tagged under my People & Pets album called "Bill Hladik". Casper's face is recognized as a face but not yet tagged under any People & Pets album. I can click it and assign it to my "Casper" album.

- This is one of the most powerful features of GP assuming you have not disabled it in Settings via the "Group similar faces" option.
- Any photo in GP's active library (Photos tab) with a recognizable face of a person or pet will appear in a People and Pets album.
- There you can hide certain people or pets you don't care about.
- For the ones you do care about you can assign a name.
- All photos (past and future) having what GP recognizes as that same face will be grouped together in that special GP album.
- Viewing the album will show a list of all photos having that face.
- If you have a photo that you know contains a face of person X, and GP has failed to recognize it:
  - You cannot force the recognition.
  - It might be the photo is too grainy or the resolution is too low.
  - The angle of the face might be off or obscured in some way. Just because you can recognize grandma doesn't mean GP's AI can.
- If GP mistakenly groups Tom and Sarah together as the same person, you can remove the wrong one and leave that face as unrecognized.
- Say you have 10 photos with dog Casper. GP has grouped them, and you have assigned the album name "Casper" under the People and Pets area:
  - All photos of Casper should auto assign and group into the Casper album.
  - Occasionally a photo of Casper may not automatically group into that album.
  - View the photo, look at the photo information, you might see "n faces available to add". Click that and tell GP this face is Casper.
  - If there are multiple photos like this, there is no way to find them all by search. You must manually view the Casper album and understand that several photos you know you have of Casper are not present in the Casper album.