



# See how this BC professor has changed over decades of daily selfies

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KARL BADEN

**The first photo that Karl Baden took of himself in 1987 (left), and a picture from this week.**

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

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Thirty years ago, a 34-year-old Karl Baden set up a tripod, stood in front of a white backdrop, and snapped a photo of his face.

Since that date — Feb. 23, 1987, a Monday — he has repeated that process 10,958 times.

Once per day. Every. Single. Day. (Except for one time — more on that later.)

Baden, now 64, is a photography [professor at Boston College](#) and lives in Cambridge.



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He calls the project “[Every Day](#).” It has been exhibited in art galleries and garnered increased attention in recent years with the advent of the term “selfie.”

“When the idea of the selfie came along, I didn’t start calling them selfies, but as far as I’m concerned people can call them whatever they want,” Baden said by phone Thursday.

He said the idea for the project first came to him more than a decade before he started it. But he held off at first because, “I made the mistake of telling my friend.”

His friend said the idea sounded “stupid.”

“She was kind of flippant about it, and I was more impressionable then,” Baden recalled. “But it was an idea that wouldn’t leave my brain. It rattled around my head for



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13 years.”

## changed over decades of daily

He said he doesn't remember putting any conscious thought into the date he started the project. But looking back on it, he said, there may be some explanation for why he started when he did.

“In retrospect, it was the day after Andy Warhol died,” Baden said. “Growing up as a kid just outside of New York in a family that respected culture — my mother was an art teacher — I was very familiar with Warhol and his work ... [and] his aesthetic was very much around repetition.”

Baden said his project is certainly about repetition and takes a mix of “commitment and obsession and insanity.”

“What I'm interested in is making a picture that's as similar to the day before and all those before that,” he said. “The idea is to make everything that I can control as similar as possible so that the only variable in the project is what I can't control which is the aging process.”

Baden said he has used the same 35mm camera (he has two identical ones in case of malfunction), the same light source, tripod, and white rollup backdrop.

The whole setup is portable, so he can take photos if he's traveling.

It takes him about five minutes each time when he's not on the road, or about 15 minutes if he's away from home.

“It does not get in the way of my life in any meaningful way,” Baden said. “It's like brushing my teeth.”

He's also kept his hair style the same and avoided tattoos or growing facial hair.

In the first picture Baden took, he was wearing a shirt. But he said he's been shirtless for the rest on purpose.

“It's about what I look like; it's not about how I dress,” he said.

And, he doesn't smile.

“I try to maintain as neutral an expression as possible,” Baden said. “I don’t want any kind of artifice or emotion to get in the way of pure information.”

The one day that he didn’t photograph himself, Oct. 15, 1991, Baden said he simply forgot before he left for work, remembered in the car ride there, but forgot again.

But he didn’t abandon the project. “I decided that mistakes were a part of the process,” said Baden.

He said he was committed to the project even during the early 2000s, when he underwent chemotherapy treatment and surgery for cancer.

“Doing the project was even more important to me during that time,” he said.

He said that before he went into surgery, he wrote out an elaborate list of instructions for a friend to take his picture if he wasn’t able to in the days after. Baden said it turned out he was able to take the photos himself in the hospital.

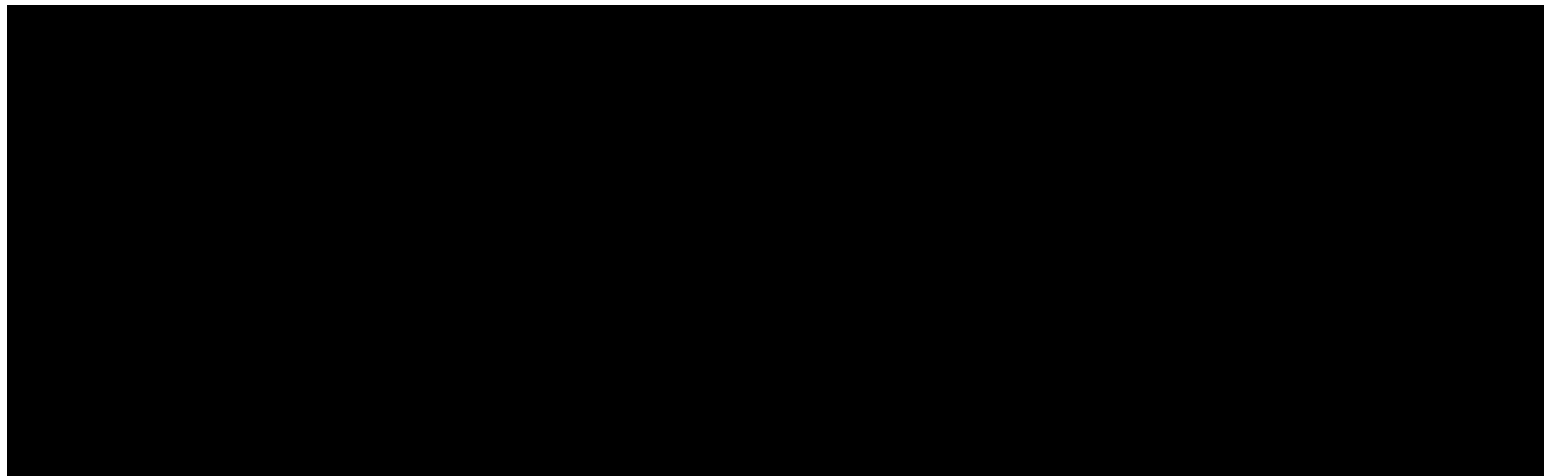
Baden’s cancer has been in remission for more than a decade and a half. He made [a video](#) of the pictures he took during his treatment and recovery.

“I don’t look well, and then I recover,” said Baden.

He said he has no plans to stop the project.

“I plan to do this until I am no longer able,” he said. “If I become incapacitated, I will probably try to hire someone to do it. After 30 years of this, I would want make sure there’s someone who can do it.”

It Ain't Over Yet: 24 years, 8 months, 11 days, in 2 minutes



The above video shows more than 24 years worth of Baden's daily pictures. It is the most recent such video Baden has made. He said he is working on making a new video that shows pictures for the past 30 years.

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