BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

AN EXTENDED GUIDE · NO. 2478

Updated November 2026

"I Deleted My Photos" — Getting Them Back on an iPhone or Android

Where deleted photos really go, how to bring them back, and when to stop and get help

Plain-English photo help from:
Bill's Home Tech
Portage County, Ohio

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech
(330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com · Atwater, Ohio

Book a visit · billshometech.com/book

What's Inside

Everything in this guide, with page numbers. Skip to whichever chapter answers your question right now.

The 60-Second Version 4

The Short Version 4

Why Deleted Usually Doesn't Mean Gone 5

First, Five Calm Minutes 5

iPhone: Check Recently Deleted 6

iPhone: The Hidden and Recovered Albums 7

iPhone: Check iCloud on the Web 8

Android: Check Google Photos Trash 8

Samsung Phones: The Gallery Recycle Bin 9

Look Where You Shared It 10

Bigger Guns: Restoring a Backup 10

What's Realistic, and What Isn't 11

Beware of Recovery Apps and Websites 12

If the Phone Is Broken, Not Just Missing Photos 13

Set It Up So This Never Hurts Again 14

Common Questions 14

When to Call Bill 15

Everyday Cheat Sheet 16

Plain-English Word List 16

A Note From Bill 17

Your Visit — and My Promise 18

SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Deleted photos usually aren't gone right away. On an iPhone, open Photos, scroll to Utilities, tap Recently Deleted, and tap Recover. On Android, open Google Photos, tap Collections, then Trash, and tap Restore.

On a Samsung, check the Gallery Recycle bin too. All of these keep photos for about 30 days, so look today. If the bins are empty, check icloud.com or photos.google.com, and any texts, emails, or shared albums where you sent the picture.

Restoring a full backup is possible but erases the phone first, so get help before you try it. Be wary of paid recovery apps; on a modern phone they rarely work. Bill can help remotely for $49 or in person for $99, and he'll tell you honestly what's realistic.

1 The Short Version

That sinking feeling when a photo you love is suddenly gone is one of the most common reasons people reach for the phone to call for help. Take a breath. Most of the time a deleted photo is not really gone yet. Both iPhones and Android phones hold on to deleted pictures for a while, on purpose, exactly so you can change your mind.

This guide walks you through the places to look, in the order a pro would check them, and it is honest about the limits. Some photos can be brought back in two taps. Some can come back from a backup with more effort. And some, sadly, are gone for good. Knowing which is which saves you time, money, and a lot of worry.

- Look first in the phone's own "Recently Deleted", "Trash", or "Recycle bin". That is where most lost photos are found.
- Those bins keep photos for about 30 days, so act soon. Don't wait for the weekend.
- If the bin is empty, check your cloud copy (iCloud or Google Photos) and anywhere you shared the photo.

- Restoring a whole-phone backup is possible but erases the phone first. Stop and get help before you try that.
- Paid "recovery" apps rarely work on a modern phone, and some are scams.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Before you do anything else, stop deleting, stop "cleaning up", and don't reset the phone. The less you change right now, the better your chances.

2 Why Deleted Usually Doesn't Mean Gone

Phone makers know that people delete the wrong picture all the time. So when you delete a photo, the phone doesn't destroy it right away. It moves it to a holding area, a bit like the wastebasket next to your desk. The photo sits there for a set number of days and is only thrown away for good when that time runs out, or when someone empties the bin by hand.

If your photos are also saved to the cloud, there may be a second wastebasket online. And if you ever texted, emailed, or shared the photo, copies may be sitting in those places too, completely untouched by the delete.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> This is not your fault and it is not unusual. Accidental deletes happen to everyone, often while trying to free up space or when a grandchild is playing with the phone. The phone is designed to forgive the mistake for about a month.

3 First, Five Calm Minutes

Before you start tapping, a few quick checks keep a fixable problem from turning into an unfixable one.

1. Put down any "phone cleaner" or storage app you were using, and don't run it again.

2. Don't empty any Trash, Recently Deleted, or Recycle bin, even if it asks you to.
3. Don't reset, erase, or "restore" the phone yet. That can wipe out the very copies you need.
4. Make sure the phone is charged or plugged in, and connected to Wi-Fi.
5. Write down roughly when the photos were deleted. The 30-day clock started then.

> **WATCH OUT**
> If a pop-up or a stranger on the phone says your photos will be lost unless you pay right now, stop. That is a classic scare tactic. Real Apple and Google messages don't demand payment to save your pictures.

4 iPhone: Check Recently Deleted

On an iPhone, deleted photos and videos go to an album called Recently Deleted. They stay there for 30 days, and then they are gone for good. In recent versions of iOS the album lives near the bottom of the Photos app, in a section called Utilities.

1. Open the Photos app.
2. Scroll down to the section called Utilities. On some versions you tap Collections or Albums first.
3. Tap Recently Deleted. The phone asks for Face ID, Touch ID, or your passcode. That lock is normal.
4. To bring back one photo, tap it, then tap Recover.
5. To bring back several, tap Select, tap each photo you want, then tap Recover (on some versions it is under the More button with three dots).
6. Go back to your main library and check that the photos are there.

> **TIP**
> Each photo in Recently Deleted shows how many days it has left. Rescue the ones with the fewest days first.

GOOD TO KNOW

If your iCloud storage is full, Apple notes that items may not sit in Recently Deleted for the full 30 days. One more reason to look today rather than next week.

5 iPhone: The Hidden and Recovered Albums

Sometimes a photo didn't get deleted at all. It got hidden, or it fell out of the library after a glitch. Two other albums in the same Utilities section are worth a quick look before you assume the worst.

Hidden

A photo that is hidden disappears from your main library but is not deleted. It's easy to hide a photo by accident with a long press. Open Utilities, tap Hidden, unlock it, and if your missing photo is there, open it and choose Unhide.

Recovered

Newer versions of iOS sometimes find photos that are still on the phone but no longer part of the library, usually after an update or a hiccup. When that happens, an album called Recovered appears under Utilities. If you don't see it, that simply means the phone found nothing to recover.

WATCH OUT

Be careful in the Recovered album. Apple says that deleting a photo from Recovered removes it right away. It does not go to Recently Deleted, and it cannot be undone. If you're unsure, leave it alone.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

6 iPhone: Check iCloud on the Web

If your iPhone uses iCloud Photos, your library lives in iCloud as well as on the phone. That cuts both ways. Deleting a photo on the phone deletes it from every device that shares the library. But it also means the iCloud website has its own Recently Deleted album you can check from any computer.

1. On a computer, go to icloud.com and sign in with your Apple Account.
2. Open Photos.
3. Find Recently Deleted in the list of albums.
4. Select the photos you want and choose Recover.

GOOD TO KNOW

Not sure whether you use iCloud Photos? On the iPhone, open Settings, tap your name at the top, then iCloud, then Photos. If the switch for syncing this iPhone is on, you do.

If you share an Apple Account with a spouse, or you have an iPad or Mac signed in to the same account, check those devices too. Occasionally an older device that has been switched off for a while still holds a copy.

7 Android: Check Google Photos Trash

Most Android phones use Google Photos. Deleted photos go to the Trash (called Bin in some countries). In September 2026 Google shortened how long backed-up photos stay in Trash from 60 days to 30, so the safe rule now is the same as on an iPhone: about 30 days, then gone.

1. Open the Google Photos app.
2. Tap Collections at the bottom (older versions say Library).
3. Tap Trash or Bin.
4. Press and hold a photo you want back, then tap any others.
5. Tap Restore. The photos return to your library and album.

TIP

You can also check from a computer: go to photos.google.com, sign in with the same Google account, and open Trash from the menu. It's the same Trash, just on a bigger screen.

GOOD TO KNOW

Google's Trash shows the days left on each item. If a photo was never backed up, it only lived on the phone, so check the phone's Trash rather than the website.

8 Samsung Phones: The Gallery Recycle Bin

Samsung Galaxy phones have their own photo app called Gallery, and it has its own Recycle bin, separate from Google Photos. If you use Gallery, check here first. Samsung says items stay in the Recycle bin for 30 days.

1. Open the Gallery app.
2. Tap the menu button (three lines).
3. Tap Recycle bin. On some models it is called Trash.
4. Tap Edit, select the photos you want back, and tap Restore.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you deleted a picture using the My Files app instead of Gallery, look in My Files' own Recycle bin too. Each app keeps its own wastebasket.

Many Samsung owners use both Gallery and Google Photos without realizing it. If the photo isn't in one bin, check the other.

9 Look Where You Shared It

This is the step people forget, and it rescues a surprising number of photos. Deleting a picture from your photo library doesn't reach into your text messages, your email, or the places you posted it. If you ever sent the photo to someone, a copy may still be sitting there.

- Text messages: open the conversation, tap the person's name at the top, and look for the photos section. You can save a photo back to your library from there.
- Email: search your sent mail for the date, then open the attachment and save it.
- Shared albums: if you'd added the photo to a shared album with family, the shared copy may still be there.
- Facebook or other social sites: open your own profile's photos and download the picture.
- Family members: ask whoever you sent it to. They may have it in their own library.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> A photo saved back from a text or a social site may be a little smaller or lower quality than the original. For most family pictures that's perfectly fine, and far better than nothing.

10 Bigger Guns: Restoring a Backup

If none of the bins or shared copies have your photos, the next option is a backup of the whole phone made before the photos were deleted. This can work, but be clear about the trade-off before you start. Restoring a backup puts the phone back the way it was on the day of the backup. Anything newer, like photos and messages since then, can be lost unless it is saved somewhere else first.

On an iPhone

Apple's process for restoring an iCloud backup starts by erasing the iPhone (Settings, General, Transfer or Reset iPhone, Erase All Content and Settings). Then, during setup, you choose to restore from an iCloud backup. A backup made on a computer

works in a similar all-or-nothing way.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you use iCloud Photos, your photos are kept in the iCloud Photos library and not in the iCloud backup. So restoring a backup will not bring back photos that were deleted from iCloud Photos. Check the Recently Deleted album instead.

On an Android phone

An Android phone's backup is normally restored only when the phone is set up from scratch after a reset. Photos are usually handled by Google Photos rather than the phone backup, so the Trash steps earlier are the realistic route.

WATCH OUT

Please don't erase a phone to try a backup restore on your own unless you're sure what's in the backup and that everything newer is saved elsewhere. This is exactly the moment to call me first. A five-minute check can save a whole year of pictures.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

11 What's Realistic, and What Isn't

It helps to know where the honest limits are, so you can stop searching at the right time and not spend money chasing something that can't be found.

Situation	Realistic chance
Deleted within the last 30 days, bin not emptied	Very good: recover from the bin

Sent by text, email, or posted online	Good: save the shared copy
Older backup exists from before the delete	Possible, with care: restore erases the phone first
Bin emptied or over 30 days, no backup, never shared	Very poor
Photos on a removable memory card (some Androids, cameras)	Sometimes, with recovery software, if the card is not used again

Modern iPhones and Android phones scramble (encrypt) their storage. Once a photo has truly been deleted from the phone itself, ordinary recovery software has almost no chance of getting it back. That's not a lack of skill on anyone's part. It is how the security works.

> *Recovery is never guaranteed. The best odds are always in the first 30 days, in the bins built into the phone.*

12 Beware of Recovery Apps and Websites

Search for "recover deleted photos" and you'll find dozens of programs and apps promising miracles. Some are legitimate tools for specific jobs, like memory cards. Many others are disappointing at best. A common pattern is a free "scan" that shows a long list of files you can supposedly recover, followed by a payment screen before anything is actually returned.

- Be wary of any app that wants payment before you can see whether your actual photo is recoverable.
- Never give your Apple Account or Google password to a recovery website or a stranger.
- Don't install software that asks for full control of your computer or phone just to "scan" it.

- Fake "storage full, your photos will be deleted" messages are a known scam. Check storage in Settings instead.
- If you've already paid or given out a password, call your bank and change the password right away.

WATCH OUT

A professional data-recovery lab is a real option for a physically broken phone or memory card, but it can be expensive and still isn't guaranteed. Get a written quote and ask what happens if nothing is recovered.

13 If the Phone Is Broken, Not Just Missing Photos

A cracked screen or a phone that went swimming is a different problem. The photos may be perfectly safe inside. The challenge is getting to them.

- If the phone still turns on and you can unlock it, back it up or let iCloud or Google Photos finish syncing over Wi-Fi as soon as possible.
- If the screen is black but the phone rings or buzzes, it may still be syncing in the background. Leave it on Wi-Fi and on the charger overnight.
- If it got wet, turn it off and see the water-damage guide below before trying to charge it.
- If the photos were already in iCloud or Google Photos, they are safe even if the phone is not. Sign in on another device to check.

TIP

For water damage, see my guide "Dropped in Water — First Aid That Actually Works" at billshometech.com/guides/dropped-in-water-first-aid-that-actually-works-skip-the-rice.

14 Set It Up So This Never Hurts Again

Once your photos are back, take ten minutes to make sure the next accident is a small one. The goal is simple: every photo should live in at least two places, so that one slip of the finger can never erase the only copy.

- Turn on iCloud Photos (iPhone) or Google Photos backup (Android) so photos are copied automatically.
- Make sure there is enough cloud storage. A full account quietly stops backing up.
- Every few months, copy your favorites to a computer or an external drive as a second safety net.
- Print or share the truly irreplaceable pictures with family. A copy in someone else's hands is a backup too.
- Be careful with "phone cleaner" apps. Your phone's own storage tools are safer.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> My guide "The 3-2-1 Backup Plan — In Plain English" (billshometech.com/guides/3-2-1-backup-plan) explains the simple rule the pros use. If your phone is always full, "'Storage Full' on Your iPhone — Safe Ways to Free Space" (billshometech.com/guides/storage-full-iphone-safe-ways-free-space) shows how to make room without deleting the wrong things.

15 Common Questions

I emptied Recently Deleted. Is there any other way?

Check iCloud on the web, your messages and email, any shared albums, and family members' phones. If none of those has a copy and there's no backup from before the delete, recovery is unlikely.

My photos vanished after an update. Did I delete them?

Probably not. Check the Hidden and Recovered albums, make sure you're signed in to the right Apple Account or Google account, and give the phone time on Wi-Fi to

finish syncing.

Can the phone store or the carrier get them back?

Carriers don't keep copies of your photos. A phone store can help with backups and settings but can't undo a permanent delete either.

Will turning off iCloud Photos bring my photos back?

No, and it can make things more confusing. Leave the setting alone until you've checked Recently Deleted on the phone and on icloud.com.

16 When to Call Bill

If you've checked the bins and the shared copies and you're still missing something important, or you're not sure which step comes next, that's a good time to call. Restoring backups is where a careful second pair of hands matters most, because the wrong button can erase more than it brings back.

I can often help remotely for a flat $49: we connect over the internet, check every place your photos might be, and set up backups so this doesn't happen again. If it's easier to have someone at the kitchen table, an in-home visit anywhere in Portage County is $99 flat. Either way, I'll tell you honestly what's realistic before any big step. Recovery is never guaranteed, and I won't pretend otherwise.

- You're thinking about erasing the phone to restore a backup.
- A whole album or years of photos disappeared at once.
- The phone is broken or water-damaged and the photos may not be in the cloud.
- Someone online or on the phone is asking you to pay to "recover" your photos.
- You'd like automatic backups set up properly so you never have to worry again.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy. Look in the bins first, and act within 30 days.

I want to...	Do this...
Undo a delete on iPhone	Photos › Utilities › Recently Deleted › Recover
Undo a delete on Android	Google Photos › Collections › Trash › Restore
Undo a delete on Samsung	Gallery › menu › Recycle bin › Edit › Restore
Check the cloud copy	icloud.com (Photos) or photos.google.com (Trash)
Find a copy I shared	Look in texts, email, shared albums, or ask family
Restore a whole backup	Stop first: it erases the phone. Call for help.
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

WORDS TO KNOW

Plain-English Word List

Recently Deleted — The iPhone album that holds deleted photos and videos for 30 days before they're removed for good.

Trash / Bin — Google Photos' holding area for deleted items. Items are kept about 30 days.

Recycle bin — Samsung Gallery's holding area for deleted photos. Samsung says items are kept 30 days.

iCloud Photos — Apple's service that keeps your photo library in sync across your devices and iCloud. A delete on one device deletes everywhere.

Backup — A saved copy of a phone's contents from a certain date. Restoring one replaces what's on the phone now.

Encryption — The phone scrambling its storage for security. It's also why truly deleted photos are so hard to recover.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

Call or text (330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.