

Lost and Found

Stories for Vernacular Photographs

Story and Caption Contest Winners



ACKLAND

Lost and Found: Stories for Vernacular Photographs

December 13, 2019 – January 12, 2020

Auckland Art Museum

Since 2017, the Auckland Art Museum has worked with noted UNC–Chapel Hill alumnus and collector Robert E. Jackson (MA, '78) to assemble a collection of vernacular photography. Vernacular photographs are those that are made by individuals, typically presumed to be non-artists, for a wide variety of reasons, including snapshots of everyday subjects taken for personal pleasure. When collected, vernacular photographs typically lack contextual information—basic identifiers such as the names of the subjects, locations, and photographers, as well as the dates the photos were taken—and are, therefore, often discussed and appreciated solely in terms of technique, aesthetic composition, and their amateur or “outsider” status. *Lost and Found: Stories for Vernacular Photographs* flips this script, inviting the public to supply narratives for the exhibited snapshots. Just as these vernacular photographs themselves—relegated to flea markets, thrift shops, and eBay—are rediscovered by avid collectors and institutions, so, too, can the lost contexts and narratives of these photos be “found” by newly created stories and captions.

Of the seventy photographs in the exhibition—their formats as wide-ranging as cyanotypes and Polaroids—a selection of twenty were part of a “context contest” that was open to the public in advance of the exhibition opening. Once the exhibition opened, individuals were encouraged to submit captions and short stories in response to all seventy of the images online or in the gallery. Selected captions and stories were displayed alongside their generative photographs.

While the original stories behind them may never be known, *Lost and Found* invites viewers to celebrate the potential of these vernacular photographs to stimulate our collective storytelling imagination.

We hope you enjoy reading the creative responses of the contest winners.

About the Contest

As of January 6, 2020, *Lost and Found: Stories for Vernacular Photographs* had received 288 submissions from over 130 contributors.

Winning entries were chosen by selected members of the Ackland staff. Look for them in in the gallery alongside their generative photographs.

No author was permitted to win more than one prize, but many authors submitted multiple excellent entries. We encourage visits to the exhibition to see the full range of creative responses.

The entries appear in this document exactly as submitted without any subsequent copy editing completed by the Ackland.

This exhibition is supported in part by a grant from Arts Everywhere.



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Early Bird Grand Prize Winner

Author: Bill McCormick

Photo: 17

Entry:

Year One

We moved in, I unpacked a trunk, and there was the mirror. Norbert had put it way down at the bottom under a flatiron. I tried to pick it up, and it shattered right there in my hands. I nearly lost a finger.

Year Two

Norbert twisted his ankle at the grocery store and knocked into a stack of apple juice in glass jars. They said we couldn't come back until we'd paid for every last one. His shoes stayed sticky until they wore out.

Year Three

The church we went to burned down, but it wasn't because I was smoking after choir practice.

Year Four

Norbert lost three teeth when a mule kicked him. The mule ran away. It still hasn't come back.

Year Five

We thought things were looking up because we'd finally paid off the grocery store, my finger was fully healed, and the church had reopened. We went to the first service in the new building, but when we got home, all our furniture was gone.

Year Six

We went to a family reunion at my Aunt Blanche's, and she had all our furniture. She said we just have similar taste, and that's definitely not true

Year Seven

Norbert lost his job, and I agreed to let people take my picture in a see-through nightgown to make ends meet.

Year Eight

We got a new mirror. Our bad luck is over, but I'm not giving up my nightgown modeling gig.



Short-Form Entries (50 words or less) Over 18

1ST PLACE

Author: Jaclyn Lucas

Photo: 37

Entry: Take that, Dirty Dancing!



2ND PLACE

Author: Louise Brock

Photo: 13

Entry: Now 60 feet above the ground, Sam and Kyle reflected regretfully on the eager response they had made to the news ad reading: "Two strong, self-assured men needed for peak opportunity at Fortune 500 company. Ideal candidates will rise to the top on day one."



Author: Benjamin Filene

Photo: 16

Entry: Billy chewed gum the way he did everything – loudly, aggressively, and with the expectation that he could be on camera at any moment.



HONORABLE MENTIONS

Author: Stuart Bernstein

Photo: 10

Entry: Harvey Dent – The early years



Author: Paul Thompson

Photo: 19

Entry: Early visitors to Mars were astonished by the mild climate and abundant flora.



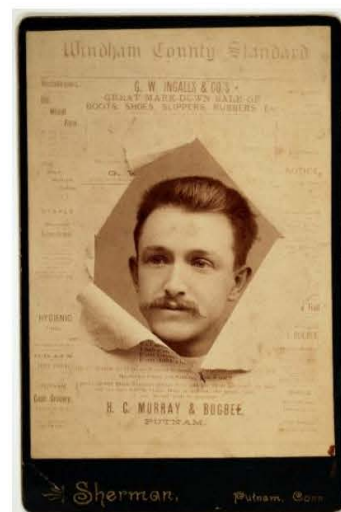
Under 18

1ST PLACE

Author: Rory Huseman

Photo: 57

Entry: "Here, my good fellow, is Johnny!"



2ND PLACE

Author: Ella Parrott

Photo: 32

Entry: I think that 2 friends were separated and there was a special wall that they went to and talked to each other.



HONORABLE MENTION

Author: Sam Cibulski

Photo: 28

Entry: My sister bought a new paper shredder and my nephew... well started shredding our family photos. I don't think he put it back together right.



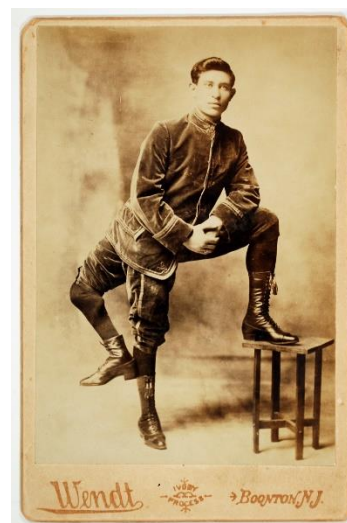
UNC-Chapel Hill Affiliate

1ST PLACE

Author: Elena Elms

Photo: 12

Entry: Well, no one can say I have 2 left feet.



2ND PLACE

Author: Psyche Lee

Photo: 5

Entry: Face-off

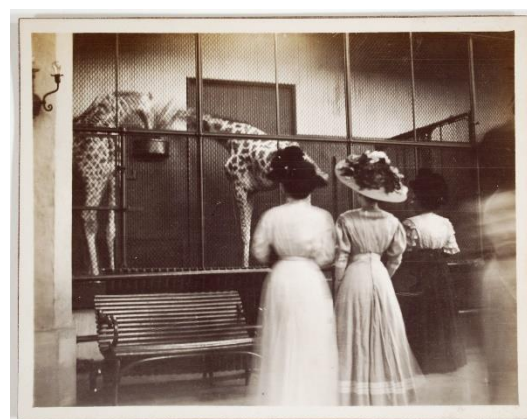


HONORABLE MENTION

Author: Kelly McMullan

Photo: 3

Entry: Take a seat ladies and give us some privacy please.



UNC-Chapel Hill Student

1ST PLACE

Author: Meredith Edelman

Photo: 69/70

Entry: Do I clash with the drapes?
Cool. Now I have to compete with the couch.



2ND PLACE

Author: Anonymous

Photo: 14

Entry: Dear photographer, have I told you about this wild trip we took? There was a brick road, some witches, and the strangest people I have ever met. Everyone kept talking about a change to a colorful world, but I'm a dog, it was all the same to me.



HONORABLE MENTION

Author: Peri Law

Photo: 5

Entry: "It's past midnight and my prince never came! I want a refund!"



Long-Form Entries (up to 300 words)

Over 18

1ST PLACE

Author: Melody Clayton

Photo: 20

Entry:

When it snows, the Goncharovs make a big production of sculpting a snowman that, by comparison, makes the joyous blobs of stacked malformed balls with protruding carrot noses and tattered scarves the rest of us make, look like the work of blind, one-armed, orangutans. To look at them, you would believe they were transported here from another century. A band of old Russian gypsies. One of them even plays a svirel, which I learned by sneaking a photo of them and doing an image search online. I am certain the Goncharovs do not use the Internet.

"Who is that supposed to be?" I'm hiding behind the curtains, watching them pose around their creation for one of our nosy neighbors who spends most of his time writing things on Nextdoor and policing the placement of trash bins.

"Who's who supposed to be?" Harold is watching football. He couldn't tell you a single thing about our neighborhood.

"This sculpture the Goncharovs made. Come look."

"At half-time."

"It'll be dark by then."

After some whining, he found me in the curtains. "Where?"

"Don't let them see you! My Lord," I said. "They're right across the street."

"What's the little girl holding?"

"Of all the things, that's what you're wondering?"

"Well what do you want from me? I don't care what these people are doing."

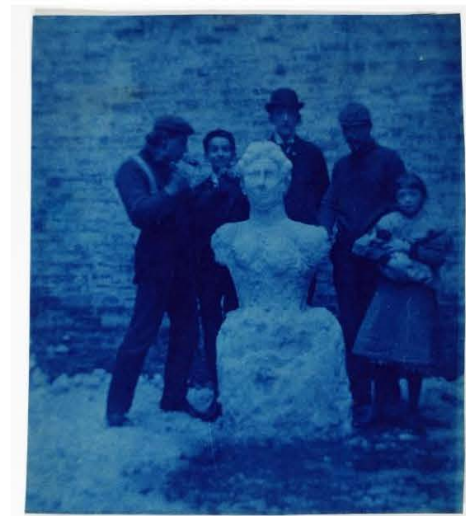
"I want to know what that is a sculpture of, Harold."

"A woman."

"Duh. Any particular woman you reckon? Venus maybe?"

"Actually, it looks a lot like you. Put some curtains behind it, it's a dead ringer. Would explain the bottom. They only ever see your top half staring over at them all the live long day. Can I go back to my game now?"

When one of them pointed at me, I knew Harold was right.



2ND PLACE

Author: Rishi Agrawal

Photo: 54

Entry:

With nothing but a suitcase, twelve dollars, and our grit, my brothers and I left the safety of our home in Dublin for a better life in America. We struggled mightily for the first few years, me scrubbing pots and pans at a two-bit saloon and my brothers breaking their backs at the foundry. But we saved every penny we had until we could afford our own shop on the west side of Chicago. Business was slow at first but our reputations grew and the quality of our products speak for themselves.

Long after we are gone, people will remember our name – the Meatmarks of Dublin, Ireland. And we will be known as the best florists in America.



HONORABLE MENTIONS

Author: Elizabeth Steiner

Photo: 7

Entry:

Miss Bunburry rested gently on the front desk, smiling, a dish covered by white lace beside her.

"Borden's School for Ladies has certainly prepared each of you for entering the world of marriage. I've listened to your recitations, witnessed your physical transformations," titling her chin up here to elongate the neck, "tasted your delicious meals. There is not one of you ill prepared. Certainly your father's have guaranteed fine proposals."

Then starting at her lips, her fingers trickle down the swan-like neck and run circles around the upper breasts. The room tightens. We can all feel the mood swing to stiffness. "I'm certain some of you wonder why my class has no title. Wondering even, what more must I know?" Here, she melts off the table's side, wriggling upward and over, so that she is leaning over the desk looking towards the class. Ripping the lace away quickly, "I'm here to teach you how to keep a husband, my dears."

Motioning us forward now, we rush. Our frantic hands grabbing at the fruits revealed. Twirling and nipping and laughing too loudly, we enter our lesson.



Author: Chris Vitiello/Poetry Fox

Photo: 30

Entry:

and when mikkell died finally
 cursing god
aunt rose let the boys haul his
 body out
 and she immediately
started cleaning the house
 to get every vestige
of the bastard out of it
had the fellas
carry their bed out onto the lawn
 once they were back
 from the undertaker's
and she doused the mattress and
burned it to foul ash and spat in
 the ashes



Under 18

1ST PLACE

Author: Anonymous

Photo: 9

Entry:

His voice is a chorus, a dozen songs layered one upon another, building into a great raucous that drowned out all other sound and thought. I observe him, and the observed does not twitch under my scrutiny, although he should. Most do. It is a strange string-like tension; he knows I am here, and yet, I do not know if he is here. As if sensing my unease, he laughs, and the cackle echoes, tainting all corners of the room. No one else looks up. He is an apparition, a ghost, a monster more real than any other. A chorus, a dozen songs layered one upon another, a great and terrible and oh-so-addictive. A simple melody, floating on a breeze, heralding the downfall of humanity.



2ND PLACE

Author: Robert Wallace

Photo: 15

Entry:

This happened a long time ago in a little town along the East Coast of Michigan. Most days I get by without thinking about it. The other days, a feeling of nausea permeates my entire body as if I'm in the deep throes of flu.

My brother was ten then, and I ten months older. By then Gary had already grown much taller than me. This was before our mother left and things began to fall apart for all of us.

It all started in our backyard. We—Gary and I—were tossing the football back and forth, waiting for Samantha to arrive. She came barreling around the corner on her Schwinn Stingray bike, sliding the tires on the newly mowed grass. She had a splotch of cherry Kool-Aid around her lips and when she smiled her red mouth looked like a clown's mouth. The football tossing became a threesome and then our mother was outside with a camera, and she tried to get us to gather together, but we weren't having any of that. At some point she must have taken the photo, but all she got was me with my arm in motion and the ball in flight. Gary and Samantha were nowhere to be seen. My hair was long then and much redder than it is now.

In an hour, Samantha would be lying at the bottom of Rush Lake, a swimming hole that all our parents had told us to never swim in because it was unsafe. Gary and I were there, watching helplessly from shore, because we were the ones who had dared her to go in.



HONORABLE MENTIONS

Author: Zora Maple

Photo: 17

Entry:

"Oh dear, I've run out of makeup again," the woman uttered, staring into the mirror she held up to her smooth clean face. All the woman saw in her mirror was a doppelganger of herself. An illusion caused by countless hypnotic broadcasts. Broadcasts coming from television, from the radio, from newspapers, from posters. Using fear and low self-esteem, using the vulnerability of young ladies. Using the message of 'look at this wonderful perfect face! Look at how beautiful this clothing wearer appears to be! You can be this way for a bit of money, and nothing more!' But there is more. The woman had given in to the advertisements and commercials. She believed they would help. She believed it would fix a problem she didn't have. All these false ideas of beauty, telling her and countless others that they needed a physical product to improve their looks. The woman had no idea what the product really did to her.



Author: Glenn Thompson

Photo: 28

Entry:

This photo tells an interesting tale. March 18th, 2032. That night, the largest art heist occurs at the Ackland. With the guards knocked out, the thieves entered the building to take the art. The hacker of the group pushes open his laptop. The firewall was disabled and he deleted the log files of his entrance. After deleting the security footage, he wipes the Ackland's database clean. The next morning, an associate walks in to see the police arguing over the missing millions. All of his things of personal value, stored on the computer were gone. He asked the police to help him recover only one thing. A picture of his deceased wife. After a day of work, all that was recovered was a corrupted image of his once beautiful wife.



UNC–Chapel Hill Affiliate

1ST PLACE

Author: Siera Schubach

Photo: 3

Entry:

Elegant creatures

Barred in

Slender necks, batting eyelashes

Figures made for running

Stopped by metal

Bone

Laces

Watching as the world passes

Faces blurred

Wasted

Still

Staring at giraffes

In the cage of a zoo

Both wondering what it's like

To be free



UNC-Chapel Hill Student

1ST PLACE

Author: Nova Cruz

Photo: 16

Entry:

"Sweet Sixteen"

My bubblegum boy,
My sweet summer love,
My happy, happy heart:
I love you.

Is that too obvious?
There are no better words
So, once again:
I love you.

Cherry lipstick on mother-of-pearl,
Sips of Cola from cool glass bottles,
The summer breeze whispers:
"I love you."

There were stars in our eyes,
There was sun in our hearts,
The first time you said it:
"I love you."

But like the leaves,
The mighty always fall,
No matter how much
I love you.

The wind grows cold,
The sky bleeds out,
The sun is setting on our
"I love you."

No more picnic days,
No more ferris wheels,
The last time you said:
"I love you."

My bubblegum boy,
My sweet summer love,
Never forget:
I love you.



2ND PLACE

Author: Anonymous

Photo: 31

Entry:

The last picture I ever took of my father sits on my desk. If I look at it for too long I find myself overwhelmed with aching disappointment and then I have to sit down. I still hear the photograph, the sound captured on film, laughter and meaningless chatter and shrieks of glee from my sister at whose engagement party we briefly convened, and cackles from my brother as his hand breaks into my shot and the gravelly bass of my father's voice. "Smile." I still remember how I felt, warm and fuzzy from champagne and excited to see my family, in the same room for the first time in eons and tired from shaking hands and laughing and asking how are your kids, how is your wife, how is your work. I know that split second in time like the back of my hand. But I cannot remember his face. Everything else in technicolor and his face obscured. By his camera. By a finger. By the passage of time that carries me further and further from him.



HONORABLE MENTION

Author: Sarah Glas

Photo: 17

Entry:

She was staring at me; I knew she was. I felt that familiar prickle in the back of my neck and an overall sense of terror. I didn't know who she was, and I didn't know what she wanted. All I knew was that she went where I went, following me closely, but still at a distance. She was an intruder, a copycat, and I needed to get rid of her. I had had enough. I had just gotten home from a friend's house, and passed the mirror in my front foyer. I saw her from the corner of my eye and fear bolted through my body. The time was now; this could go on for no longer. I pulled the mirror off of the wall and held it in my hands, taking a shaky breath. I looked and realized that she had done the same. I wiggled my eyebrows, blinked rapidly, smiled. She did everything I did, at the same time I did it. And then it hit me: either she was really good at mimicking me, or she was me, and I was confused.

-The Woman Didn't Know What Her Reflection Was



Image Credits

3: Unidentified artist, American, *Women at the Zoo*, c. 1909, gelatin silver print, 4 1/8 × 5 1/4 in. (10.5 × 13.3 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2018.23.9.

5: Unidentified artist, American, *Girl in Cinderella Costume*, 1960s?, color photographic print, 3 13/16 × 4 11/16 in. (9.7 × 11.9 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2018.23.24.

7: William T. Ross, American, active 1880s–1890s, *A Group of Seven Women Eating Cherries*, 1880s–90s, cabinet card photograph, 4 1/4 × 6 1/2 in. (10.8 × 16.5 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2019.33.10.

9: Whalen Photographic Studio, American, active late 19th to early 20th century, *Gentlemen of the Jury*, late 19th to early 20th century, cabinet card photograph, 4 1/4 × 6 1/2 in. (10.8 × 16.5 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2019.33.27.

10: F. Lewis, American, active late 19th to early 20th century, *Photographs of a Woman and Man Spliced Together*, 1880s or 1890s?, gelatin silver print on carte-de-visite, 4 5/8 × 2 15/16 in. (11.7 × 7.4 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2018.23.1.

12: Frank Wendt, American, active c. 1899, *Man with Three Legs*, c. 1899, cabinet card photograph, 6 7/16 × 4 1/4 in. (16.4 × 10.8 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2019.33.33.

13: Unidentified artist, American, *Men Climbing Smoke Stacks*, 1930s, gelatin silver print, 3 3/8 × 2 3/8 in. (8.6 × 6 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2017.24.4.

14: Charles A. Saylor, American, 1838–1921, *Portrait of a Dog*, 1880s–90s, cabinet card photograph, 6 7/16 × 4 3/16 in. (16.4 × 10.6 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2019.33.47.

15 (cover photo): Unidentified artist, American, *Girl Throwing Football*, 1971, color photographic print, 3 7/8 × 5 7/16 in. (9.9 × 13.8 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2018.23.27.

16: Unidentified artist, American, *Man Blowing Bubble Gum*, 1960s?, gelatin silver print, 3 1/4 × 4 1/4 in. (8.3 × 10.8 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2018.23.26.

17: Unidentified artist, American, *Woman and Mirror*, 1940s, gelatin silver print, 4 1/2 × 2 3/4 in. (11.4 × 7 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2017.24.7.

19: Unidentified artist, American, *Couple Wearing Swimming Masks*, 1940s/early 1950s, gelatin silver print, 4 1/2 × 2 3/4 in. (11.4 × 7 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2017.24.11.

20: Unidentified artist, American, *Group with a Snowman*, 1890s or 1900s?, cyanotype, 4 5/8 × 4 1/8 in. (11.7 × 10.4 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2018.23.7.

28: Unidentified artist, American, *Woman Behind Glass*, 1963, gelatin silver print, 4 1/2 × 4 1/2 in. (11.4 × 11.4 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2018.23.23.

30: Unidentified artist, American, *Woman with Portrait Sitting on Porch*, 1920s, gelatin silver print, 3 1/2 × 2 1/2 in. (8.9 × 6.4 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2017.24.2.

31: Unidentified artist, American, *Man Taking a Photograph with an Onlooker*, 1950s, gelatin silver print, 4 1/2 × 3 1/4 in. (11.4 × 8.3 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2017.24.14.

32: F.T. Bannister, American, active late 19th to early 20th century, *Minnie and I at Eighteen Years*, late 19th to early 20th century, cabinet card photograph, 6 3/8 × 4 1/8 in. (16.2 × 10.5 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2019.33.3.

37: Unidentified artist, American, *A Man Balancing on the Head of Another Man*, 1950s, gelatin silver print, 5 × 3 1/2 in. (12.7 × 8.9 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2017.24.15.

54: Oliver P. Scott, American, active late 19th to early 20th century, *Three Men in Front of a Meat Market*, 1889, cabinet card photograph, 6 7/16 × 4 1/8 in. (16.4 × 10.5 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2019.33.2.

57: Sherman, American, active 1880s, *A Man Peering through a Torn Newspaper*, 1880s, cabinet card photograph, 6 7/16 × 4 3/16 in. (16.4 × 10.6 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2019.33.19.

69: Unidentified artist, American, *Man in a Blouse and Skirt*, late 1970s–80s, chromogenic color print, 4 1/2 × 3 3/8 in. (11.4 × 8.6 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2017.24.17.1.

70: Unidentified artist, American, *Man in a Blouse and Skirt*, late 1970s–80s, chromogenic color print, 4 1/2 × 3 3/8 in. (11.4 × 8.6 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ackland Fund, 2017.24.17.2.

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