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One Image

## Show and tell

Every photograph is not so much a picture of the world as a piece of it. Some people don't believe this. Others do.

Patrick Pound

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Every photograph is not so much a picture of the world as a piece of it. Some people don't believe this. Others do.

When I was asked to write a little piece around a single photograph I thought: no problem. I plucked a box from a shelf. It was full of images taken by other people. I thought an anonymous snap would be a good place to start. Some people like vernacular photographs. Others don't.

Every photograph we take is in addition to the vast album of images that float about, unhinged, in the world. For years I have been gathering other people's images. The selection process of these random images is, of course, always personal. My little collection is arranged in categories. Each category is full of photographs. There is a set of portraits. There are images of people in groups of two, three, four, five, and then crowds. There are photos of people with their names written on them. There are photos of floral clocks — not as many as I would like — but a category, nonetheless, in waiting.

There are pictures of cars, and of pets, and of people with pets and cars. There are photographs of people holding a single thing — a fish caught, a gift received, or something else — something worthy of being photographed. There is a whole set of photographs of amateur models with the impressions of their socks, or their waistbands, embedded on their skin. There are images which previous owners have marked to show where they are in the picture, or in which cabin they stayed, or just which bunch of flowers on a grave is theirs. There are, of course, also photographs of people holding cameras.

FLASH

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Some of the photographs are clearly staged. Others are optical accidents. In one a large group of people sit in a long row, each, but one, on the other's knee. In another, a man appears to be a giant amongst men. In some it is not so clear.

There are numerous images which feature the shadow of their photographer. These stand like accidental Lee Friedlander photographs. But all of these are the snaps that I can't show you. These are the photographs you can't see.

How to choose a single photograph, a photograph to stand in for all the others? A picture that speaks for the set — a typical example seems unlikely. To collect is to impose an order, and perhaps to delay things — all at once. It's a clinical and sentimental game. To select a single image from a set is to interrupt this implied order, to end the delay, and to stop living — for a moment. This is what photographs do. They too stop the living in their tracks.

All photographs are hearsed in death. They stand in the wake of things. They are an immediate record of the past — the first look back. They have lives of their own.

The camera positions the world as a puzzle. Each photograph taken offers the possibility of completing a set; as if to photograph is to work at a solution, of a type. It is as if we could only get all the pieces together we could solve the puzzle. This is a condition of taking and collecting snaps. Having failed at explaining the world we are reduced to collecting it — happily.

You see my reluctance to single out an image.

So which photograph to show you — to show you exactly what I am talking about? This photograph is an extract. It is a single image taken from an album. The album is filled with images taken at an International Girl Guide Jamboree. The album is filled with photographs of children. Many of the children are clearly not well. Every one of the photographs is lovingly captioned. Each of these captions is in Braille. This picture is from a photograph album of a blind person. I have chosen to show you an image of a nurse. The photographer's shadow is clear. The Braille caption says God knows what. As a single example it is, at least, a little catalogue of indexes.

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