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Finding Vivian Maier

By John Maloof

Paradoxical.

- Bold.

- Yeah.

Mysterious.

- Eccentric.

- Eccentric.

- Private.

- She was a very, very private woman.

I never had any idea

she took pictures.

She would take photographs.

Many, many photographs.

She would never have let this happen.

Is there anything that you wish
you had done differently than...

Sure. I wish I would have found
those negatives instead of you.

Ten dollars... Let's go harder.

Ten bucks.

Then I'll have to end in five.

So can I have...

It was winter 2007.

I'll have to go seven, anyone at seven?

Seven and a half. Ten.

And ten, gotta go \$10...

The auction house is across
the street from my home.

I found this box that was
loaded with negatives.

\$70. 75 there... \$80.

I was writing a history book, and I
needed a lot of historic photos.

And so I would, like, you know, take the
negatives and I'd look up into the light,
and I'd look for images of Chicago.

150, 160...

There were several boxes
that went with the set.

I just went for the biggest one.

39 is your buyer, 39 is your buyer.

I won it for, I think it was \$380.

The auction house told
me the photographer,

her name was Vivian Maier.

Google searched her...
nothing at all.
I mean, absolutely nothing.
So I just kind of
gave up for a while.
I looked at some of
the stuff that night,
and it was cool, but nothing
worked for the book,
so I just put it in the closet.
I just had to figure out, what am
I going to do with this stuff?
That's what sparked me
to start scanning it.
I have a reflex, where we'll
be driving somewhere,
and I'll just, like, spot
something from down the road
that I know what it is and
I know that it's valuable.
I grew up doing the flea
markets with my brother.
My father did it. His father did it.
I would do storage
auctions with my brother.
And he'd win some,
and we'd clean 'em out.
We threw out tons of negatives.
Cos there's no value in negatives
to most resale people.
And these negatives that
I discovered, what I saw at first,
I didn't know if it was really good.
I knew that I thought it was good.
I contacted a couple of galleries.
I didn't know where to go.
I made a photo blog and I
put about 200 images up.
I put a link on Flickr.
That post, it just went insane.
So I went on this mission to piece
together the rest of her work.
And then, I found the other
people who bought boxes,

and I bought their boxes.
And then I had all these negatives,
like, insane amounts of negatives.
You always want to know
who is behind the work.
I just knew her name
was Vivian Maier.
Was she a journalist?
Professional photographer?
"Let me just Google her name again
to see if there's anything up. "
And I found an obituary that was placed
just a few days before that search.
I found an address in her stuff.
And after some, like,
WhitePages searches,
I called, and I said,
"I have the work...
the negatives of Vivian Maier. "
And he was like,
"Oh, that was my nanny. "
That was his nanny.
Why is a nanny...
taking all these photos?
What they started
to tell me about her
was... was strange.
He said, "She was kind of a loner.
"She didn't have any
family that we knew of.
"She never had any love life
or children that we knew of.
"But she was like our mother. "
So it just caught my curiosity.
So what I said was, "Do you
have any of her stuff?"
And they said, "Well, I've been keeping
up the bills on her storage lockers.
"We wanna throw all the stuff out.
She was a pack rat. "
I said, "No, no, no, don't. "
He's like, "You don't understand.
She was a pack rat.
"We're gonna get a dumpster.

You're welcome to come and help us.
"If you see anything that you like that
we're gonna throw out, you can have. "
I just wanted to go find out
who she was. Just a quick thing.
I found this leather chest.
It was, like, taped shut with just,
like, box tape or something.
And so we cut it and we opened it.
And it was filled to the top
with rolls of undeveloped film.
I took one canister and
I shook it, and it rattled.
So I opened it and there
was teeth inside.
She had stuff wedged and hidden
in everything that she had.
Almost like... it's like a secret little
hiding spot for all of her little things.
A coupon, a note,
a flyer, bus passes, train cards.
Her hats. Shoes.
Her coats, her blouses.
I have uncashed income tax
cheques from the government
amounting to thousands of dollars.
I have around 100,000 negatives.
I have 700 rolls of
undeveloped colour film.
2,000 undeveloped rolls
of black-and-white film.
I realised everything needs to be
organised and scanned and archived.
But it was more than
I could handle myself.
So I thought, "Let's see what
the museums will do to help me.
"Maybe I could get this into MoMA.
Maybe I could get this into Tate Modern. "
I sent them... letters.
And here is the reply.
"Dear Mr Maloof,
on behalf of the curators,
"I would like to thank you for thinking of

the Department of Photography at MoMA.

"Unfortunately, the
museum cannot accommodate
"these photographs at this time. "

At that point,

I just figured, "I'm on my own.

"I'm gonna try to do an exhibition.

"I'm gonna do a book. "

It's an insane amount of work.

I'm kind of compulsive with stuff.

I just wanted people to
see this incredible work.

And I applied for a show at the
Cultural Center in Chicago.

They said this was the biggest turnout
for any artist they had ever had.

And then, the story just took off.

The history of street
photography is being rewritten.

- Vivian Maier.

- Vivian Maier.

- Vivian Maier.

- Saved from obscurity.

In death, she is getting the
fame that she never had in life.

John Maloof is still working his
way through all Maier's negatives.

My mission is to put Vivian
in the history books.

My first impression,
when I saw the work,
was the kind of delight when
a surprise comes your way
and you feel that somebody,
hitherto undiscovered,
suddenly makes their work
available and it looks good.

It looks like there's
an authentic eye
and a real savvy about human nature
and photography, and the street,
and that kind of thing
doesn't happen that often.

I see thousands of pictures. Day after day,

people send me their websites to look at.
And when I flick through them,
I feel most of them are undistinguished.
But Vivian's work instantly had those
qualities of human understanding
and warmth and playfulness,
that I thought,
"This is a genuine shooter. "
She had a great eye.
And she... Great sense of framing.
- Here... this is the first one. I can't...
- It's a muddy construction worker's butt.
Oh, my God!
She had a sense of humour.
And a sense of tragedy.
Beautiful.
Those photos of
children are beautiful.
Beautiful sense of light,
environment.
I mean, she had it all.
Was she very prolific?
Did she shoot a lot?
In total, there's probably
about 150,000 negatives.
She shot a lot.
She never showed her work to anybody?
That's what I'm trying to
figure out. So far, no.
I think people would
have loved her work.
I mean, I could even say,
Robert Frank with a square format.
Lisette Model...
Helen Levitt, definitely.
Diane Arbus.
Some of the street portraits.
Had she made herself known, she would
have become a famous photographer.
Something was wrong, something...
There's... there's a piece
of the puzzle missing.
That's beautiful.
I really want to know, why did

Vivian make these images?
What drove her to such compulsion,
to an obsessive degree,
to take so many pictures?
Why were they never shown?
I started to unbox all of her stuff.
I'm finding leads.
You know, receipts
that she had. But...
Her... Her receipts are
from the '70s and '80s.
And in the '70s and '80s in Chicago,
there was no area code.
And I started calling these phone numbers,
attaching every various area code.
773, 312, 708, 847, 630, 815...
Was she ever a nanny for
a San Franciscan family?
- Yes.
- Oh, my gosh.
Yes, she lived right next door.
I know Vivian Maier because
she was my childhood nanny.
For about four years.
Something like that.
Her job was as a
housekeeper and a nanny.
Vivian was my nanny.
Vivian came into our lives when we
needed a caretaker for my mother.
I was just staring at her,
and I had thought,
"Where did my sister find this
lady to baby-sit her kids?"
She was obsessed with just
saving bits of memories,
of moments in time.
The stuff that she collected all helped
me understand her a little better.
I have dozens of audio
tapes that Vivian made.
I have around 1508mm
and 16mm movies.
I found pictures of Phil Donahue.

Like, in his home,
petting a dog and at dinner.
I was a single parent in Winnetka,
Illinois, with four sons.
Along comes Vivian.
I met her in a diner,
to interview her
for this housekeeper job.
She took my picture.
I was a guy running back
and forth over my shoes.
I had to do a programme
every day, sometimes two.
I didn't want any trouble, I just...
You know, I just wanted clean socks.
She was with us less than a year.
I have a memory of
her taking a picture
inside a garbage can.
I thought, "Well, you know...
"They laughed at Picasso. "
I didn't know. I mean,
I didn't give it much thought.
I didn't think she was crazy.
Vivian took self-portraits.
In my mind, I don't know what
image I had of this person,
but it was definitely not
the image that I uncovered.
She came across as unusual.
She wore big... big coats,
with felt hats.
The kind of thing that might
have been popular in 1925.
She was always kind
of hiding her figure.
You know, wearing these heavy clothes.
And these boots.
They used to call her Army Boots.
She was very tall.
Seven feet...
- No! Seven feet!
- She was tall.
- Oh, she must have been about five nine.

- Six foot.
- She liked wearing men's shirts...
- She wore men's shirts.
She said the tailoring was better.
She'd have kind of a...
just a straight blunt cut.
She had hair that stuck straight up!
Now, looking back, I would
say she kind of dressed
like you would expect to
find women factory workers
in the Soviet Union in
the '50s or something.
That's how she walked.
You have to swing your
arms up like this,
and you have to do a...
sort of a Nazi march.
You'd see her on her
little motorised bicycle.
I mean, I remember sometimes thinking
she kind of looked like...
the Wicked Witch of the West.
Always had her camera
around her neck.
Always the camera around her neck.
She had, like, this great camera with...
I remember, it was a square.
Rolleiflex. You flip open the thing and you
look through the viewfinder directly down.
I lusted after a twin-lens Rolly.
And here, she had one.
And I looked at that camera,
and it looked like it was rather old.
You see, the Rolleiflex is
a great disguise camera.
Because it wasn't up here, where she
had to alert somebody on the street
that she was photographing them.
She could be sort of
secretive down here.
The camera was shooting from below.
And it gave her pictures a
kind of towering magnitude.

There's a picture of a guy.
He's just an ordinary street guy.
But he has a power and dignity.
And he's... he's standing there
and he's looking at her.
If you look at his eyeline,
he's looking right into her face.
And she probably looked down and focused
and then looked right up at him.
And he looked at her and
she fired the shutter.
Street photographers
tend to be gregarious
in the sense that they can
go out on the street,
and they're comfortable
being among people,
but they're also a funny
mixture of solitaries
at the same time as being gregarious.
You observe and you
embrace and you take in,
but you stay back and
you try to stay invisible.
She didn't like to
talk about herself.
Some people I meet
and they're very open.
She was not an open person,
she was a closed person.
She lived on the third
floor in our attic,
and one of the first things she asked
me for was please to put in a lock,
so that she could lock
her area securely.
It was a real serious lock.
She was mysterious.
She said don't ever open
this door, to her room.
I think she made friends with
me because she sized me up,
and thought I was strong enough
to lift a bunch of boxes for her.

I broke the springs of my car.
I think that gives you an idea
of how much weight I lifted.
She mentioned that she
brought her life with her,
which meant a number of boxes.
We said, "Sure, no problem. "
We had a garage.
There was a porch off of the room,
you know, sort of those sleeping porches.
And it was piled high with boxes.
We put them in our garage,
which, fortunately,
was a two-and-a-half car
garage, for two cars.
- And so we had this..
- It became a two-car garage.
It became... it became a
tight two-car garage.
Of course, we'll never know how much
the boxes were her photographs,
- and how much of the boxes were...
- John knows.
Well, but she had so many boxes.
I'd like to know why you would
hoard all of this great art.
Why would...
why wouldn't you share it?
What's the point of taking
it if no one sees it?
So sad, really.
Really sad.
If you could have just
shown her all the pictures
and held her down in a chair
somewhere so she couldn't...
put tape on her mouth so
she couldn't tell you no.
Obviously, the woman was so creative,
and it must have been galling...
to just, you know, be a maid.
Wash the floors,
making some lunch and dinner,
taking care of kids as a nanny.

Some of the early photos
I have are from 1951.
One of them said on the back,
"The Walkers, Southampton. "
I was surprised to see the photographs
of my grandparents' house.
We always called it Tides' End.
It's amazing to see it,
so dilapidated.
This was flowers.
We'd have lunches out
here, and tea, and...
It was wonderful.
Vivian probably spent the summer.
She was probably a
nanny out of New York,
tagging along with a family
and with the children.
In those days, your father
worked in New York,
and came out by train on Friday,
and went back on Sunday.
I don't think that's
changed very much.
If you go to the beach club today,
and, go down on the sand,
you'll see the nannies there.
Some of these women
have been lucky enough
to make their way up here
to the United States.
The girl who helps me, this is
her fifth or sixth year here.
- What's her name?
- Olivia.
Delightful. Delightful person.
I love her dearly.
She speaks very little English,
and I speak very little Spanish.
We get along beautifully.
It's been written about
that she had few friends,
and I consider myself
one of those friends.

I liked her a lot.
She was a terrific person.
I lived in Highland Park, I had a lot
of small children, I was home a lot.
One of my children was friendly with
one of the boys she took care of.
The children, they were always
at each other's houses,
and she would come by.
We had good conversations with kids
swirling around us all the time.
I had a very freewheeling,
open household.
There weren't a lot of rules.
You know? Don't get
killed in the street.
She loved the children and
the children loved her.
She was wonderful to the children.
I think, probably loved them as much
as she probably loved anybody.

- Knock, knock!
- Who's there?
- Apple.
- Apple who?
- Apple knock knock!
- Who's there?
- Apple.
- Knock, knock!
- Who's there?
- Knock, knock.

Knock, knock who?
Oh, God!
Well, gentlemen...

I think she was quite lively, and a
wonderful person in her younger years.
I mean, she must have been a delight.
I can see how they worshipped her,
because she was doing the adventures
that, normally, a parent
would probably not do.
Life was more adventurous
with her around.
She was very opinionated about how

children should spend their time,
and mainly how they should spend
it was out and about with her.
She would load up the stroller with
the baby and her bag, and both kids,
and off they would go on outings.
And they had their routine.
There was a Marshall Field's
in downtown Evanston,
and it had a candy counter
on the first floor.
Well, that was always the first stop,
because there were always free samples.
She would avail herself very
heartily of the free samples.
Meaning, like, dump...
You know, she'd dump the
whole tray of Frango Mints
into her purse and walk away!
We stopped going
there all of a sudden,
but I believe that she was kicked
out of Marshall Field's, permanently.
A really clear memory
is her setting up
to take photos of all
these naked mannequins.
Some of them were headless,
some of them were toppled over a little bit.
There'll be probably an
amazing photograph.
But as a child,
it was taking forever,
standing there on the
corner of the street,
waiting while this weird lady takes pictures
of these naked, headless mannequins.
Then they would go out and they
would look in the alleys for junk,
because that was
what she liked to do.
She would come home with
pieces of metal, old furniture,
and we would look at it.

"Is this art? Is this not art?
What is this? Oh, this could be useful.
"This could come in handy sometime. "
My brother Robbie, he was riding
his bike home from school,
and he got hit by a car.
He was sort of laying in the middle of
the street, and an ambulance was coming,
and he... and he says,
and I don't know if this is true,
but he always said that Vivian was taking
pictures of him laying on the ground.
It wasn't, like,
"Oh, Robbie, are you OK?"
It was more just,
"Oh, this is a good photo op!"
My mother drove up and saw
my brother lying in the street.
She said, "Oh! I thought
the dogs got hit. "
Vivian was just kind
of above the fray.
And I remember thinking,
"There's Vivian, taking pictures, as usual".
She was aware of what was going on
in politics and society at the time.
She would bring this
cassette recorder...
and she goes to the supermarket,
and she's asking people in line...
- VHi, Carl.
- Hi.
I got you with my machine.
I was wondering if you had anything
to say about all this political scene.
- Well...
- About Nixon and so on.
I think it happened the way it
should for the best of the country.
And maybe it'll be a warning
for future politicians.
That's right. That's right.
But what did you think
of the impeachment?

- Come on!
- Am I on tape?
- Yes, you are. Come on.
- I don't know.

Well, you should have an opinion.

Women are supposed to be opinionated, I hope. Come on.

There's one movie that she made that has a note in it.

And it says, "1972,

Chicago murder of mother and baby.

"Market where she found ad for baby-sitting job

"which had led to disappearance and death.

Then you see her walking to the supermarket.

She's walking in the baby-sitter's footsteps.

You see her walking to the neighbourhood.

I just wonder if that's where the crime happened.

She goes to the funeral home.

She's kind of... a journalist of the era, like a...

But... usually, you do that to show people.

You know, to show,

"This is what happened. "

She just did it.

One day in 1977, I was driving on Sheridan Road

and someone flagged me for hitchhiking.

Plenty of people do that.

Turned out to be Vivian Maier.

When I met Vivian, back in 1972,

I was in grad school at Northwestern, and I worked in the language lab.

And it was not at all unusual for eccentric people to be coming through the lab.

She was French. She had lost

most of her accent, I would say.

She affected what, at the time, struck me instantly as a fake French accent. Some people have said that she had a fake accent. No, this is... this is not true. My degree is in linguistics. I have a PhD in linguistics. The truth is, it was a fake accent. I happened to see the film The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and, probably not for nothing, they were right... And I have... There's the lilting sound of it, you know? "Uh, I don't really know what you want me to do, but you have to do it, "come over later, and then everything will be OK." Her voice, it seemed like it went up and down, - you know what I'm saying? - Oh, yes. Ooh! Her vowels were longer in duration than French vowels. I mean, you know, this is the... I did... My master's, thesis was on vowel duration in French. So I had a little bit of background. I believe it's someone who had polished their English accent, having then lost some of their French accent. You don't want to see a copy of my dissertation, so... - Well... - No! You don't, really. I asked her her name. She kind of paused. I remember that. And she said, "Call me Smith. " I mean, it was very clear she didn't want to tell me her name. I thought, "This is weird. " She had been a customer of ours.

She was a pain in the neck,
to be truthful.
We held things for her
for as long as a year.
We would say, "What's your name?"
"I'm not going to tell you. "
"Well, we can't keep
it without a name. "
"All right. Miss V Smith. "
You know, "Ha-ha-ha, Miss V Smith. "
It was patently obvious that
she was not Miss V Smith.
And we'd say, "OK, phone number. "
"I don't have a phone. "
"Well, how are we going to get in
touch with you if we need to?"
"Well, you won't. "
Why was she giving us a fake name?
We didn't think as much about it...
as you are.
Now, she spelled her
name differently.
There's B as in boy Maier.
Every possible combination of
ways you could spell Maier.
M-E-Y-E-R. M-A-I-E-R. M-A-Y-E-R.
We always called her Miss Maier.
Miss Maiers.
She said, "Call me Viv. "
You would never have
called this woman Viv.
- Vivian.
- Nobody called her Viv?
No. Vivian.
Why wouldn't you wanna
tell people your real name?
I asked her what she did, and her answer
was another thing I'll never forget.
"I'm sort of a spy. "
That's exactly what she said. I can
still see her and hear her saying it.
It was so odd.
I think the only person who says that is
somebody who's definitely not a spy.

Why would you say that?
Maybe she wanted to be somebody else.
A lot of us do that.
If she did not have this
job as a baby-sitter,
her lifestyle would have
been very understandable.
The real question is, why did
she do this kind of work?
Her intelligence and
her views on things,
there was something very precious
to her about keeping them secret.
Vivian may have looked down,
so to speak, on the employers
who were hiring her for this
low-paying kind of work.
She identified with the poor.
I mean, she said she
doesn't go to a doctor,
she doesn't have any
medical insurance,
and I said, "Are you...
are you worried about that?"
And she said, "The poor
are too poor to die. "
She told me that when she
first came to New York,
she went to work in
a sewing sweatshop.
She realised one day that
she wanted to do something
where she could be outside and
in the world, out and about,
and see the sun,
so she took up nannying.
She felt that it gave her a
certain amount of freedom.
Somebody else was providing
the shelter for her.
She wasn't having to work so
hard just to make ends meet,
so she had some free time for
her photographic endeavours.

Vivian told her employer,
"I'm going to travel the world. "
"I'll be back in eight months. "
She went to Bangkok,
India, Thailand...
Yemen...
All of South America.
She travelled by herself.
Just her and her camera.
There are thousands of photos
from her world travels.
Do you think Vivian would like the
attention that she's getting?
I think she had a very...
I don't know... I don't think so.
I think she was more of
a very private person.
I don't... I think she...
she might have seen this
as... as kind of an
intrusion, you know?
I can't help but to feel a
little uncomfortable or guilty
exposing the work of a person
who did not want to be exposed.
She was so secretive.
I think that she would like
her artwork to be honoured,
but I don't think she personally would
have liked being in the limelight.
I don't.
She would never have let this happen,
had she known about it.
No, she never would have let it.
She... That was her babies.
She wouldn't have put
her babies on display.
But I don't think she took
all those photographs
for them to just dissolve into dust.
I think she took those
photographs to be seen.
I find the mystery of it more
interesting than her work itself.

I'd love to know more
about this person.
And I don't think you can
do that through her work.
So she didn't tell you anything
about where she came from,
her background?
You didn't know anything?
Nobody pried into that?
No. I... I... Not really.
Did you know anything about Vivian?
- Her family, her past?
- No.
It's amazing, isn't it, that you're friendly
with someone for, like, ten years,
and that you don't know anything
more about them than this much?
We always thought she was French.
Now, she's kind of, what... Austrian?
I mean, she's from Als...
from Alsace-Lorraine or something?
She's from New York.
From New York? What do
you mean, from New York?
- Well, she was born in New York.
- She was?
- She was born in New York.
- No. Really?
Oh, I thought she was born in Europe.
I thought she was French.
How did she acquire that accent?
So, where's Vivian from?
She's from New York City,
born February 1st of 1926.
Speaking from a
professional standpoint,
compared to what
I've done in the past,
this is ranked up real high
on the list of difficulty.
The families usually
have some consistency
as to where they're located,
I at least have them in public record,

where I can find information about them.
Not like this one.
The whole family is a mystery family.
There's a few things that
we know about Vivian Maier.
One, we know that she was
never married. She was a spinster.
She had no husband,
she had no children.
Her parents are both dead.
Vivian did have a brother,
an older brother.
Clearly, he's probably dead.
All of them seemed to be private.
All of them seemed to want nothing
to do with the rest of their families.
All of them seemed to be disconnected
from the remainder of their family.
She had one aunt, who was to leave
everything to a friend in her will.
Not to family, but to a friend.
And this is the reason why.
She says here, and I'm quoting
directly from her will,
"I make no provision for
any of my relatives,
"for reasons best known to me,
"which I have disclosed to a
few of my intimate friends. "
At the time of Alma's death in 1965,
Vivian was obviously alive,
her only niece.
Whatever her hangup was,
it went to her grave with her.
Vivian's father was out of
the picture very early on.
So the census records show that
Vivian's living with her mother.
But I did know that she lived
in France for a while,
and that her mother was from France.
So my guess was that there
was family in France.
Because the thing is, the 1949

photos and the 1959 photos
are the same village.
So I know she was returning
to the same place.
So I started looking up all the
stuff that she had from France,
I started looking at the
photographs of France,
looking at the little towns
and the church steeples,
and how this church steeple looks and
how that one looks in this little village.
And I would go on the internet and
look up little villages in France,
and try to match the steeples.
It's like matching a fingerprint.
I knew I had at least one of
the villages that she was in.
Found.
Saint-Julien and Saint-Bonnet,
in this remote little sheep-herder
village in the French Alps.
Population 250.
She might have been offended
that you found her little town.
That was none of your business.
She might say, "God, oh, God.
"Why did he do that?"
For some reason,
my curiosity is overwhelming
to find out more about Vivian.
I'm uncovering an artist.
If I'm leaving this
giant boulder unturned,
because I don't go here,
it would be a mistake.
- Vivian took this.
- Are you sure?
Yes. 100 per cent.
I have this same print.
Vivian took this picture.
This is her print.
Oui.
He says, "Aren't you happy?"

Her box camera.

I have... I have a similar one.

- No, that's her mum's camera.

- Vivian's mom?

Oh...

- That's Vivian?

- Yes.

Wow.

Another thing I found in
Vivian's stuff was this letter.

It was written in French, and it's talking
about a photography lab in France.

- And you can do... like this.

- Oui.

The letter starts out,

"Dear Mr Simon... "

D'accord.

Previously, we thought
Vivian had no intentions
of having anybody else print
her work or show her work.

This letter proves that
assumption wrong.

Vivian knew she was a
good photographer,
and she knew that these
photographs were good.

She wanted to show them to people.

She may not have had that
happen while she was alive,
but we're doing it now.

I stopped scanning myself,
because I just couldn't keep up with it.

There's a lab in New York with
technicians scanning her work,
Monday through Friday, nine to five,
at a rate of about a
few thousand a week.

I've been developing the
black and white films,
so I have about a couple of
hundred left to develop.

It's a very complicated
and tricky procedure,

because you have to get
the formula correct,
and there's only one
chance to get it right.
It's... it's magical.
We don't know what she
would have printed,
what she would have chosen or edited.
We're seeing work now for the first
time that Vivian never saw herself.
When you contacted me, I wasn't
sure if I wanted to get involved
in a project with posthumous prints.
I just didn't think it would be
the right fit for the gallery.
This is the room where we
store our photographs.
I think there are about between 25
and 30,000 photographs in here.
I mean, it's more than most museums have.
Vivian Maier, we've had
more interest in this work
than perhaps any other photographer
I've ever worked with.
It's a big problem trying to get
her work into institutions.
The problem is that the
art world establishment
still won't recognise Vivian's work.
Museums usually deal with
the final product, the print,
that was made by the artist
in the artist's life.
They don't want to interpret an
artist's work from where they left off.
That's bogus, because Gary Winogrand
had a desk full of rolls of film
that he never developed.
So they're developing 'em.
Eugene Atget's work was
printed after his death,
and then ended up being
acquired by MoMA.
I mean, it's frustrating,

because it's being done and...
but nobody wants to do
it for Vivian's work.
She did print some of her work,
but it... it was largely not
the best edit of her work.
She was a masterful photographer,
but printing was not her thing.
That's common, though. I mean,
Cartier-Bresson hated printing,
and Robert Frank
wasn't a good printer.
But they hire printers.
They hire somebody to print for them.
Good work is good work, and it's
recognised that this is really great art.
I do think her work needs to be
appreciated by... by the world.
These are the new prints.
Cool. Yeah, these are great.
Thank you for showing me.
They're yours.
The only way this work can move forward
is if there's money that is made.
The sale of prints will
be a part of that.
Of course, I wish that I could
give her money, you know...
She's gone. I mean,
there's nothing I can do.
She always had a money problem.
God knows, she probably
could have used the money.
Too bad she wasn't discovered
ten years earlier.
Marble!
Yeah, you two.
Here's the picture.
Miss Maier's right in the corner.
I won't call her Vivian because...
She'd have your guts for garters
if you called her that.
Not Mrs. Not Vivian.
She was Miss Maiers.

She was my governess from
when I was five years old,
up until I was about 11 years old.
I've got in my baby
book the exact date.
It's like March of '67
until about 1974.
Inger and I were best friends, and so I
would spend a lot of time with Miss Maier.
She would take us down to the city,
and we would just walk.
In the worst parts of town,
she'd walk very quickly,
and so my little legs had
to fly to keep up with her.
She would swing her
arm just like this.
And then her stride was just massive.
Inger used to just beg
her to slow down,
and she would just
drag her alongside.
Poor thing.
She'd take pictures of everything.
She would see a subject.
Something that would interest her.
She'd open her camera,
she'd focus it...
These poor, you know, people,
she would literally ask them
to... to, like, pose for her.
She didn't tend to pose people.
She's like, "Stand there, wait. "
It was just the way it was.
"Impoverished people. Take picture!"
Or somebody crying, it was just, bam!
They... You know?
Like, "Oh, my God,
what is this woman doing?"
We'd joke about hitting her
over the head with a camera,
because she embarrassed us so much.
It was imposing and rude.
They felt, I'm sure, that they

were being mocked in some way.
I'm surprised she didn't get shot.
My mom put her foot down and wouldn't let
Miss Maier take me into the slum areas.
She loved to read the paper, she liked
it that we took the New York Times,
and she read it every day,
and she always had an eye for the
bizarre, the grotesque, the incongruous.
She wasn't interested
in sweetness and light.
She liked headlines that revealed
the folly of individuals.
Stories that would enable her
to basically say, "I told you so. "
"I told you so. "
Some man murders his wife and
then gets caught in cold blood,
"I told you so. "
I mean, these things that
revealed the folly of humanity.
If you look at her art,
she sees the bizarreness of life,
the incongruity of life, and the
unappealingness of human beings.
There were little things,
all the time,
that she was just plain...
in microscopic ways,
just chipping at me.
All the time.
I would go down,
with my allowance money,
to the crafts store,
and buy myself a thousand little tiny,
you know, like rainbows and...
Glass tchotchkes.
Viv would look at my trove
of tchotchkes and hate it.
She would get a big mop bucket
and she would fill it with hot,
soapy water, yes, and ammonia.
And she would have the
ammonia be such a strength

that you couldn't be near the bucket.
Clearly, to need that much ammonia,
you would surely be cleaning
something very, very dirty.
She would take her arm,
and just swipe all the
tchotchkes into the bucket.
They're crashing and grinding
together, and smashing,
and they're all covered in ammonia...
Me, I sort of just quietly tolerated
whatever was happening to me in my life.
My brother acted out,
and I don't think that she had good
ways of coping with his behaviour.
She, sort of ditched us.
We were all taking a walk together,
and she ducked down an alley
and just disappeared.
The police finally found us.
I think she wanted to scare us.
I remember getting lectured by the police.
"You can't leave your baby-sitter. "
And me saying, "No, no!
"My baby-sitter left me!"
There were some accidents...
which I knew weren't accidents,
everybody knew weren't really accidents.
All of a sudden,
there's a kid screaming
in the basement with the door
shut and the lights off.
Yeah. That kind of thing.
She was mean. I don't
know how else to say it.
I don't know, she had,
like, a dark side.
I remember one time she said...
"These men, they'll have
you sit on... on their laps.
"And then you'll feel
something poking you. "
And I can't remember the
context of when she said that,

but it just was, she had this,
like, anger in her towards men.
And now, I know exactly
what she was talking about,
but as a kid, I really... I knew what she was
saying was dark, and a little not right.
I've seen her more than once jump
back in fear, you know, from a man.
She said several times
over the several years,
men, all they were out
to do is ruin you,
stay away from them,
be careful of them,
you know, that all they want is sex.
She was always afraid
of being touched.
I remember she was
standing up at this dump,
taking a picture of
some sort of incident.
The man apparently
thought she was falling.
He reached up, and all she saw
was a man reaching for her,
and she decked him.
She thought he was attacking her,
and gave him a concussion,
and sent him to the hospital.
I would bet money that she was...
brutalised in some way,
attacked in some...
I mean, or, you know...
molested, whatever.
I hate to say that, but something
happened to her that was awful.
Because nobody would act,
like, the way she did.
I remember some of the more strong
emotional things, I'm afraid.
It takes... It's harder to
remember some of the other...
I don't know if you want to go
into this, but I will. I will.

I mean, there were things that happened to me that were not good. Miss Maier was force-feeding me. Forcing me to eat, because I wasn't finishing my plate. My parents found out, and my dad got angry, but... My dad found out exactly how it was... She would hold me down, she would shove the food in my throat, and then she would choke me until I would swallow it. And she would do that over and over again. There was very much of a dark side to her that I have not gone into. She would lose it sometimes. The first time she hit me was when I was five years old, because I was trying to learn to tie my shoelaces. And I wasn't doing it right. And she got very frustrated with me, and so she started slamming my head into the side of this bookcase. I mean, she wouldn't hit me in the face, obviously, I didn't have bruises there, but she'd grab me by the wrists and swing me around the room and slam me into things when she got really upset about something. And I was eight years old before I could break her grip. After that, she didn't do that again. I was strong enough. I mean... she was a brilliant person, and I think she really cared, and I think she tried. And I don't know if any of the others will ever talk about that, if they... if it ever happened to them. I don't know, maybe she got

it together. I'm hoping she did.
I really hate saying
these things about her,
because I've always felt guilty
about not keeping Viv for longer.
My husband and I were talking
then about having a foster child.
Viv said "If you want to take care of
somebody, why don't you take care of me?"
And then she kind of laughed,
but she meant it.
I think she really wanted to be brought
in to be a member of our family.
But that... wasn't really
what I had bargained for.
So there it is.
Then this little house...
Miss Maiers lived upstairs.
My father did provide a room
for her above his office.
I only... only had a
chance to see it once.
Back when I...
I snuck up behind her.
Cos she kept a padlock on it.
So, yeah, this is totally different.
This was the forbidden zone.
No one was allowed to see
where Miss Maiers lived.
Huh.
Miss Maier went in there and she left
the door open enough for me to see,
and the room was literally filled,
floor to ceiling, with newspapers.
See how the floor is sloped?
I told my dad, and he said,
"That's why the floor is sagging so much. "
He ended up having to put
a steel post in his office,
because the floor was sagging
and he didn't know why!
It was just totally full.
This floor was Viv's domain.
It occurred to me that maybe I would need

to go up there when she wasn't home,
so she grudgingly gave me a key.
And... And so I went in.
You could tell where
she had been walking,
and it was just this narrow path that
you could just barely traverse like this.
And where would the bed
have been right here...
stacks of newspapers,
almost to the ceiling.
You may think I'm exaggerating.
No. I am not.
Just stacked. Stacked, stacked,
stacked, stacked, stacked, everywhere.
High, you know, high stacks of paper.
How she even could
get to the paper...
I don't even know how much
she even looked at the paper.
I began to see that she was stacking
newspaper elsewhere in the house.
In the basement, and in the back,
we have a little back entryway,
and she would stack
newspaper out there.
Now, the idea was always that there
were articles she wanted to save,
for the day when she did get around to
cutting out the parts she wanted to keep.
I... It concerned me,
but I thought, "Whatever.
"Whatever. "
I gave her a ride to her
place of employment.
I looked at her desk,
and piles of stuff there.
She was certain that her employers
were coming into the room she had,
and going through her items.
She would rig the books
and so forth on her desk,
so that if they were
moved half an inch,

she would know that
when she got back,
or so, that was Vivian's story.
And she was also certain that people
were looking through binoculars
and could see through
the window of her room.
She was progressively getting
more and more reclusive,
more and more of a hoarder.
Everybody was saying, resoundingly,
"Oh, my God, you've got
to get rid of your nanny. "
I don't think that Mom
and Dad really realised
the extent to which she was
living with mental illness,
cos she was.
She was. She was. She...
She...
Yeah. It was...
it was a little past eccentric.
My neighbour said, "I'm painting the
bathroom, do you have newspaper?"
I said, "Sure!" There was a huge
stack right by the back door.
I gave him a big chunk like this,
I said, "Sure, go ahead. "
Well, when Viv came home, she saw
that that stack of newspaper
was shorter by three feet,
or two feet or whatever,
and she was angry and horrified.
"Who took my papers?
Who took my papers?"
And she just went berserk.
I mean, she went crazy.
She was... I remember an outside
scene with screaming and yelling,
where she's yelling at this guy,
telling him to bring them back,
but some already had paint
on them, or were ripped.
"Now they're all covered with paint!

Now I can't use those papers!
"They're covered with paint now.
How could you give him my papers?"
So I said... I just said, "Viv, those aren't
your papers. Those are my papers."
"And there are too many
papers in this house!"
I remember my parents telling me,
"Viv's not gonna be with us any more."
"She's gotten too crazy. "
Like, not that she
wasn't already crazy,
but that the craziness has increased to
a level that we can't tolerate any more.
I remember so clearly having
to say to her, "Viv...
"I think you're going to have
to look for another job. "
How hard it was to say that to her.
But you know what? I don't
think she was even surprised.
She looked back at me, and
she said, "Do you?" she said.
"Do you?" she said. "Well...
"then, what I want is
two months' notice,
"and two months' pay,"
or something like that.
She gave me her sort of...
what she wanted,
as if she had it on the tip of her
tongue and she'd figured it out.
And I didn't know whether
that was because
she had been dismissed from
positions often enough
that she knew what to say,
or whether she had,
in a way, anticipated it.
My husband and I and our
children, after she was gone,
do you know, we just jumped in the
car and drove up to Michigan,
which is something

we never used to do,
just because it was a huge emotional
thing, not to have her...
See, I'm still weeping about it,
because I really cared about Viv.
And I think she cared about us,
and it was just one of those things,
where she was a person
who didn't fit in very well.
She just had those
edges that couldn't...
And I think we...
Well, I flatter myself,
I think we were one of
the most sympathetic,
accepting and congenial
families that she worked with.
I don't know that.
I think it may be true.
And we couldn't make it work.
In 1996, we were getting my
mother's house ready for sale,
and when I told Vivian, I said, "You can
stay here for a couple of months.
"I won't put it on the market yet,
you know, we have to get things ready,
"and, you know, I'm not...
I'm not kicking you out, you can stay. "
Vivian was to be there,
you know, and to show it,
but she was not at all helpful
with the real estate people.
She just didn't want to let them in.
They were calling me, saying she
won't let them show the house...
You know, "We've gotta...
You've gotta do something, Judy. "
So I would call her and say, "Vivian,
you have to let people see the house. "
They did manage to get in,
and they did manage to sell.
I think we closed the
last day of the year.
The lawyer called and said, "Judy,

we're just afraid she's not gonna be out. "

And I said, "She'll be out.
Don't worry. She will be out. "

The last time I saw her,
I'm still unhappy about.
It must have been, like...
probably 2000.

I was in Wilmette, going to the beach
with my daughter and her children
and four other children
of her friends.

It was a hot summer day, like,
August, like, 100-degree day.
And all of a sudden, we see this
woman walking down the street.
And immediately, we were like,
"There's Vivian. "

I hadn't seen her in 30 years.
But we recognised each other at once.
And we both... "Oh, hi,
how are you, Vivian?"
and, "How are you, Carole?"
and "It's been so long. "

We were like, "We'll, it was great,
you know, to see you,"
and, er, we said, "We have...
we have to get going. "

And she was like,
"Please don't leave. "

She was like, "Carole!"
That's my mother's name.
"Carole, please don't leave. "

And you're with a bunch of kids,
and they're swirling around you,
and they want to go to the beach.
It's a hot summer day, you know.
You're, like, stuck.

And she kept saying "Talk to
me, let's talk, let's talk. "

And I kept saying, "I can't do it, Vivian.
I have to go, I have to go. "

She kept saying, "But you're
my friend, you're my friend. "

And...

I dropped the ball.
That's all I can say.
I feel badly about it.
And the, er... despair in her
voice about seeing a friend...
And I feel that I let her down.
So I proceeded to go to
the beach with the kids.
I said, "Follow us," but she
didn't wanna do that, so...
that was the end of that one.
I do remember once she wouldn't
tell me where we were going.
"I don't want to tell you.
It's a surprise. "
She took me to the stock yards.
It didn't come into my
consciousness that,
"Oh, this is where they
go to kill the animals. "
There was a, trailer full of sheep.
I do remember guys poking
at them with sticks
to get them out down this long ramp.
After they were done
offloading the sheep,
they started throwing
out a dead sheep.
The one that got trampled.
That was the first
time I ever saw death.
Looking back, thinking about it,
it didn't bother me.
It was just kind of odd,
I couldn't understand it.
I've always been a critter person,
and these are my guys, the sheep.
The end of her life was something that
I worried about when she worked for me.
I thought, "How can
this end for her?"
I don't think it had a happy ending.
I was very glad that these men that she
took care of when they were little kids

kind of came to her rescue.

They got her an apartment
and paid for her rent.

- Do you... do you live in the area?

- Yes.

Do you remember a woman who
used to sit on this bench a lot,
wearing a big floppy hat?

Was she the French lady?

Yeah, I remember her.

People who still, live around here,
yeah, we remember her.

She was here a lot,
sitting on the bench.

But I don't think anybody
really talked to her.

There's a lot of eccentric
people around here,
and I just thought
she was one of them.

You knew that, just leave her alone.

Sometimes she'd be at the dumpsters.

You'd ask her, you know, "Do you
need help?" or "Do you need food?"

And she would just kind
of yell at you in French.

How'd you know her?

Just from seeing her
in the neighbourhood.

- And you'd sit with her?

- Well, I'd always sit on her bench,
and she'd sit there, and it took weeks
or months before she'd even speak to me.

I was there in the alley all the time,
going through the garbage,

so I had a bunch of old clothes, and
I had a wool hat, one time, I gave her.

And she took it, she said, "Oh, that's
great, I'll wear that when I sleep".

She was very short with people.

She was funny, though. Nice lady.

When I was riding my bike,
sometimes I'd cross her path.

And she'd yell to me,

"Get a bell! Get a bell!"
And sometimes, I'd be out
in the alley in the winter,
and she'd see me without a hat,
and she'd yell, "Get a hat! Get a hat!"
- She was about that bell on the bike.
- Yes.

Well, who would have known that
she was actually a great artist,
and she'd come to dumpster diving?

- That's the sad...

- I mean, sitting on the park bench,
literally, she'd go across the street,
she'd get a can of food...

What did she have one day? It was,
like, corned beef hash or something.

I remember, right out of the can,
not even warm it up, with a spoon.

And said it was delicious.

She was much more
damaged than I thought.

And I have a lot more
empathy for her...

I just think...

What a lonely lady.

You know? Incredibly lonely.

And misunderstood.

So... Yeah, I think... I mean,
now, if I were to see her today,
after this, I wouldn't be
as hard on her, probably.

Somebody called me and said,
"The old lady in the park,
she fell, she kind of passed out.

"The ambulance is out there. "

So I went across the street,
and at that point,

they were loading her onto
the little cart there.

And she was telling the people,
the paramedics and such,
that she did not want to go,
she wanted to go home.

And they said that

she has to go with.
And she looked at me as if to say,
"Can you do something?"
But, nothing I could do about it.
I asked the paramedics,
they said, "No, she has to go. "
And then, but that was it.
I mean, they put her in the
ambulance and took her away.
And after the fact, a lot of
people in the neighbourhood said,
"Whatever happened to the old
lady?" and nobody ever knew.
You have to try to draw,
from the evidence you have,
some understanding of the individual.
I think her pictures
show a tenderness,
instant alertness to human tragedies
and those moments of
generosity and sweetness.
I see her as an incredibly watchful,
observant, caring person.
And probably why she was a nanny
was that she had those capacities.
In 1962, when she took
a lot of the pictures...
the kids would always
play in the ravines.
It's the most beautiful
spot in the world.
You know, instead of this
straight-edged suburban community,
you always went there cos you wanted
the kids to have a little touch of nature.
You know, wild nature.
There was a patch of wild
strawberries somewhere in there.
And I think she liked it so much,
that's why they buried her there.
It's a place that they
remembered she was happy.
Now, you tell me how
you can live forever.

Come on.

She might have gotten to the
end of her life and thought,

"Why didn't I try to get
that work out there?"

Some people's character prevents them
from pushing that little bit you
need to push to get the work seen.

You know, she didn't defend
herself as an artist.

She just did the work.

A canon is often established.

And so, when someone comes in,
there's always the sense that
they're secondary figures.

But I don't feel her as secondary.

When I look at the pictures,

I always feel something primary.

I think that the work is so good that
it's really winning over a lot of people
who were...

were dismissive of it previously.

Where it'll wind up, who knows?

Much of the art world establishment
still hasn't accepted

Vivian Maier's work.

But people don't care. They're not waiting
for that validation from institutions.

They're claiming Vivian

Maier's work for themselves.

Her work is now in

galleries in New York.

It can be seen in LA.

One in particular that

I bought, which I love,

there's an abject

poverty in the frame,

but there's also a happiness
in spite of it all.

Her work is being seen

around the world.

London, Germany, Denmark.

They're embracing it,

and they're embracing Vivian Maier.

Oui, oui, oui.
Oui, ca c'est sur.
Maybe this is the best
way of all for her.
To have it happen after she's died.
That would probably
make Viv happiest.
Cos in her own life, the attention, I think
she would have found overwhelming.
Viv was supposed to be
downtrodden, right?
She was, like, a nanny.
That's not considered to be a pretty
high-ranking position in life.
Not married.
Not any social life to speak of.
She didn't have these
measures of status
that people aspire to.
But she didn't have to
compromise one bit.
She did what she wanted.
That's what she taught me, is that she
got the life she wanted. She had it.
I understand a lot more about her.
But why was this person so private,
yet so prolific in an artform
that she never shared?
Who knows?
She did it so it
wouldn't be forgotten.
And... and here, it's not forgotten.
As she was photographing,
she was seeing just how close you
can come into somebody's space,
and make a picture of them.
That tells me a lot about her.
It tells me that she could go into
a space with a total stranger
and get them to accommodate
her by being themselves,
and generate this kind of moment,
you know, where two presences were
actually kind of vibrating together.

And then she's gone.

Well, I suppose nothing
is meant to last forever.

We have to make room for
other people. It's a wheel.

You get on, you have to go to the end,
and then somebody else takes your place.

And now I am going to close and
quickly run next door to do my work.