nothing at all and that felt better, like not being aware of the wind blowing on a very windy day.
Your mind someplace else,
No wind there.

I was living by myself in a very strange apartment where I was taking care of an aviary for some people who were in Mexico. I fed the birds every day and changed their water and had a little vacuum cleaner to tidy up the aviary when it was needed.

I ate dinner by myself on Christmas day. I had some hot dogs and beans and drank a bottle of rum with Coca-Cola. It was a lonesome Christmas and President Kennedy's murder was almost like one of those birds that I had to feed every day.

The only reason I am mentioning this is to kind of set the psychological framework for 390 photographs of Christmas trees. A person does not get into this sort of thing without sufficient motivation.

Late one evening I was walking home from visiting some people on Nob Hill. We had sat around drinking cup after cup of coffee until our nerves had become lonesome.

I left around midnight and walked down a dark and silent street toward home, and I saw a Christmas tree abandoned next to a fire hydrant.

The tree had been stripped of its decorations and lay there sadly like a dead soldier after a losing battle. A week before it had been a kind of hero.

Then I saw another Christmas tree with a car half-parked on it. Somebody had left their tree in the street and the car had accidentally run over it. The tree was certainly a long way from a child's loving attention. Some of the branches were sticking up through the bumper.

It was that time of the year when people in San Fran-

What Are You Going to Do with 390 Photographs of Christmas Trees?

I don't know. But it seemed like the thing to do in that first week in January 1964, and I got two other people to join me. One of them wants to remain anonymous, and that's all right.

I think we were still in shock over President Kennedy's assassination. Perhaps that had something to do with all those photographs of Christmas trees.

The Christmas of 1963 looked terrible, illuminated by all the flags in America hanging at half-mast week after week in December like a tunnel of mourning.
Ciscor get rid of their Christmas trees by placing them in the streets or vacant lots or wherever they can get rid of them. It is the journey away from Christmas.

Those sad and abandoned Christmas trees really got on my conscience. They had provided what they could for that assassinated Christmas and now they were just being tossed out to lie there in the street like bums.

I saw dozens of them as I walked home through the beginning of a new year. There are people who just chuck their Christmas trees right out the front door. A friend of mine tells a story about walking down the street on December 26th and having a Christmas tree go whistling right by his ear, and hearing a door slam. It could have killed him.

There are others who go about abandoning their Christmas trees with stealth and skill. That evening I almost saw somebody put a Christmas tree out, but not quite. They were invisible like the Scarlet Pimpernel. I could almost hear the Christmas tree being put out.

I went around a corner and there in the middle of the street lay the tree, but nobody was around. There are always people who do a thing with greatness, no matter what it is.

When I arrived at home I went to the telephone and called up a friend of mine who is a photographer and accessible to the strange energies of the Twentieth Century. It was almost one o'clock in the morning. I had awakened him and his voice was a refugee from sleep.

"Who is it?" he said.

"Christmas trees," I said.

"What?"

"Christmas trees."

"Is that you, Richard?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"What about them?"

"Christmas is only skin deep," I said. "Why don't we take hundreds of pictures of Christmas trees that are abandoned in the streets? We'll show the despair and abandonment of Christmas by the way people throw their trees out."

"Might as well do that as anything else," he said. "I'll start tomorrow during my lunch hour."

"I want you to photograph them just like dead soldiers," I said. "Don't touch or pose them. Just photograph them the way they fell."

The next day he took photographs of Christmas trees during his lunch hour. He worked at Macy's then and went up on the slopes of Nob Hill and Chinatown and took pictures of Christmas trees there.

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 11, 14, 21, 28, 37, 52, 66.

I called him that evening.

"How did it go?"

"Wonderful," he said.

The next day he took more photographs of Christmas trees during his lunch hour.

72, 85, 117, 128, 137.

I called him up that evening, too.

"How did it go?"
“Couldn’t be better,” he said. “I’ve almost got 150 of them.”

“Keep up the good work,” I said. I was busy lining up a car for the weekend, so that we would have mobility to take more Christmas tree photographs.

I thought we should get a good sampling of what San Francisco had to offer in the way of abandoned Christmas trees.

The person who drove us around the next day desires to remain anonymous. He is afraid that he would lose his job and face financial and social pressures if it got out that he worked with us that day.

The next morning we started out and we drove all over San Francisco taking photographs of abandoned Christmas trees. We faced the project with the zest of a trio of revolutionaries.

142, 159, 168, 175, 183.

We would be driving along and spot a Christmas tree lying perhaps in the front yard of somebody’s lovely house in Pacific Heights or beside an Italian grocery store in North Beach. We would suddenly stop and jump out and rush over to the Christmas tree and start taking pictures from every angle.

The simple people of San Francisco probably thought that we were all completely deranged: bizarre. We were traffic stoppers in the classic tradition.


We met the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti out walking his dog on Potrero Hill. He saw us jump out of the car and immediately start taking pictures of a fallen Christmas tree lying on the sidewalk.

277, 278, 279, 280, 281.

As he walked by, he said, “Taking pictures of Christmas trees?”

“Sort of,” we said and all thinking paranoiacally: Does he know what we are doing? We wanted to keep it a big secret. We thought we really had something good going and it needed the right amount of discretion before it was completed.

So the day passed and our total of Christmas tree photographs crept over the 300 mark.

“Don’t you think we have enough now?” Bob said.

“No, just a few more,” I said.

317, 332, 345, 356, 370.

“Now?” Bob said.

We had driven all the way across San Francisco again and were on Telegraph Hill, climbing down a broken staircase to a vacant lot where somebody had tossed a Christmas tree over a cyclone fence. The tree had the same candor as Saint Sebastian, arrows and all.

“No, just a few more,” I said.

386, 387, 388, 389, 390.

“We must have enough now,” Bob said.

“I think so,” I said.

We were all very happy. That was the first week of 1964. It was a strange time in America.