

POINT REYES LIGHT

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November 29, 2007



GEOLOGY > Big quakes on the San Andreas are more likely after October's quake. /10



FARMING > New president of the Farm Bureau milks cows with his toddler. /10



BUSINESS > Crab season troubled by Oregonians and oil stalls Bolinas fishermen. /8



CALENDAR > After Hours/ Secret Lives opens at Gallery Route One on Friday. /24



Lights were mounted in the branches of a Monterey pine by the bank in Point Reyes Station on Tuesday. There will be a tree-lighting ceremony at the end of the week. Photo by Justin Nobel.

Bolinas farms cede stream rights to Coho

by **Jacoba Charles**

Three organic farms in Bolinas are collaborating with the Point Reyes National Seashore (PRNS) in an unprecedented effort to cede their summer water rights to Coho salmon. The project moved one step closer to completion on Monday, when the Marin County Community Development Agency finalized the first necessary permit.

"I think this plan is a revolutionary step for the coast of California to provide insurance for agriculture while also protecting fisheries," said Steve Kinsey, president of the Marin County Board of

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Jack Welpott, 1923-2007

by **Justin Nobel**

Jack Welpott, the legendary local photographer whose portraits of small town folk, landscapes and nude women have been displayed worldwide, from the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris to Toby's Feed Barn in Point Reyes Station, passed away on Saturday November 24. He was 84.

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Extended Sheriff's call /3

>> A Lagunitas resident watched a car do an odd wheelie, on its two side wheels, on Sir Francis Drake Blvd near Dead Man's Gulch.

OPINION /4

Private contractors spill dollars in cleanup

ESSAY /9

Is that a whale bone on the beach, or not?

ASK MISSY /19

Decency vanishes in consumer hype

A chunk of Reno, in Fairfax

by **Will Baker**

While St. Rita's Church in Fairfax is dark and empty on Friday nights, the lights are on in the old chapel next door, now the parish community center. Inside, about 60 players--most graying, but some younger--gather for bingo night, held weekly to raise funds for St. Rita Elementary.

"Bingo can be tedium. It can be like looking at your phone bill for three hours," admitted Mike Duke, who works at the general store in Rancho Nicasio and makes the trip to Fairfax every week.

Suddenly, Duke's face broadened with a sly smile.

"Unless you like it," he said confiden-

tially, in a lilting Alabama accent.

You remember bingo from childhood, but not like this. The bingo night in Fairfax has 19 rounds, each with different requirements for winning, some rather complex. In "Crazy Kite," you need four squares clustered together to form a larger square, with a diagonal of three squares that trails from it like a kite's tail, all on the same 25-square card. Worse still is the "Winnemucca Stamp": the winner must have four squares in a corner, on three different cards, on the same multi-card sheet.

While most come for bingo itself, some players get more fun out of the "flash"

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Jack Welpott got his first camera when he was 6 years old, and his career spanned from the 1940s through the end of the century. Opposite, clockwise from top left: "Mescalito at White Sands" was photographed in 1977, inspired by the ideas in Carlos Castaneda's books; In 1955 Welpott photographed "Carnival Woman" at the Indiana State Fair; Welpott took pictures of children waiting for a bus while he was attending a workshop led by Henry Holmes Smith, Authur Seigal and Russell Lee - all significant teachers for Welpott. Photos courtesy of Ben Nixon.

>> Jack

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For Welpott, photography was very much about the philosophy of life, said Leland Rice, a former student and close friend. "You might say he taught the personal adventure of trying to establish an idea as a visual image maker."

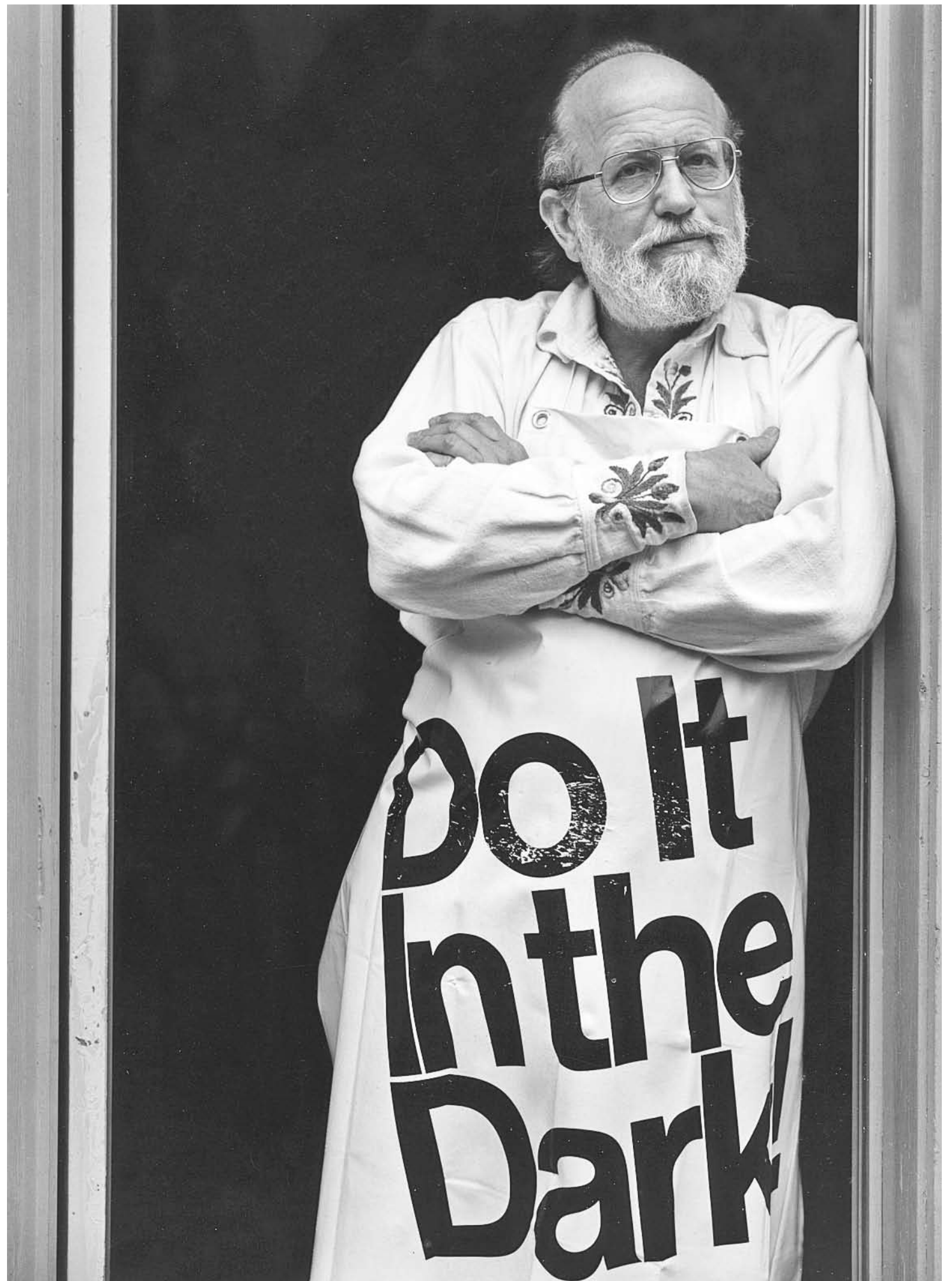
Jack Welpott was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on April 27, 1923. He spent his childhood in Bloomington, Indiana where his father owned an insurance agency. At the age of seven, he gave Welpott a box camera, which the young photographer carried with him everywhere. At one point his father lined up the family for a rigid pose. Welpott clicked the camera before his dad could get the shot off. The resulting photograph captured the family in motion and astonished them all.

When he was 14 his Uncle Cal gave him a better camera and his father helped him set up a dark room in the bathroom.

He attended high school in Bloomington, where he shared a homeroom with Jo Ann Fineman. He enjoyed photography but also painting and jazz, said Fineman. A photo of him in the yearbook shows Welpott on the piano, which he played through his seventies.

At age 18, he was drafted into the military where he monitored Japanese radio transmissions in Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. Afterwards he attended Indiana University on the GI Bill. At first he majored in business, as his two older brothers had done, but soon dropped the program and began taking classes with Henry Holmes Smith, an abstract photographer whose style was influenced by The Bauhaus, an avant-garde 1920s German art school. Welpott was also influenced by photographers Minor White, Edward Weston and Alfred Stieglitz, among others.

Jerry Uelsmann was a graduate student with Welpott at Indiana. The two took road trips into the Indiana countryside in Jack's convertible Beetle to pho-



tograph rural life.

"We were trying in a personal way to come to grips with the environment that we were in," said Uelsmann.

One day, Welpott photographed an elderly woman in a print dress sitting on the front porch of her frame house with her twin sister.

"Jack got so excited," said Uelsmann. "There was a fascination with the small town scene."

Welpott shot with a view camera that made prints on 4 x 5-inch negatives. He devoted significant time to the printing process, resulting in photos that colleagues called "elegant and sophisticated."

"Jack's images were very thoughtful," said Uelsmann, "they address the eye and the mind."

At Indiana, Jack met Jean Franklin. They were married and had two chil-

dren, Matthew and Jan.

"Anywhere he was he would see something that interested him and take a picture," said Jan, who remembers her father as someone who loved life and loved people.

In 1959, Welpott moved to California to take a teaching job in the photography department at San Francisco State, where he remained through the early 1980s.



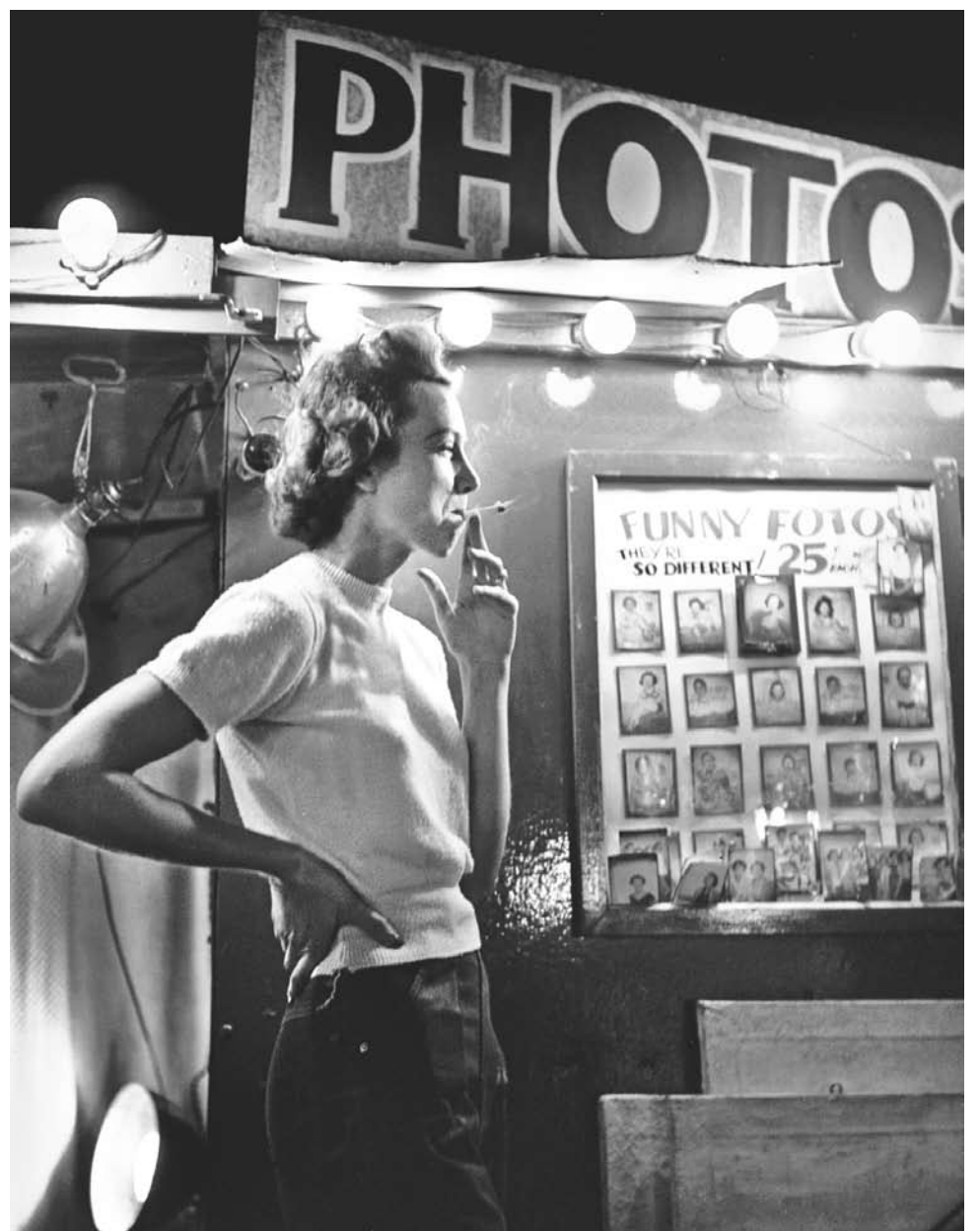
“He demystified photography,” said Rice, who studied with him in the late 1960s. “He had a very nifty way of nudging you in certain directions that led to a self-discovery.”

Welpott cared deeply about teaching his students. He brought in world class photographers to speak with them, hosted classes in his North Beach home, behind Bimbo’s, a famous strip club, and even arranged for his students to show

their work at the Focus Gallery, which was the only San Francisco gallery devoted to photography at the time.

Throughout the 1960s, Welpott gained recognition abroad and in the summer of 1973, Uelsmann, Welpott, and his second wife, photographer Judy Dater, were invited to teach a workshop in Arles, France, hosted by the well known photographer Lucien Clergue.

The group stayed in a French home



with several workshop models. During off time they rented motorbikes and visited spots where Van Gogh once roamed. Welpott enjoyed photographing the models, whom he would pose nude around the house and in the front yard, much to the astonishment of the neighbors.

“As you age, sometimes you meet friends you’ve known from the past,” said Uelsmann. “After you reminisce and talk about the weather, there’s nothing to talk about. But with Jack we picked up right where we left off. There was never a lull in the conversation.”

During the 1970s and 1980s, Welpott’s work was displayed around the world, including shows in Switzerland, Japan and France.

In his later years he lived on the Inverness Ridge with his third wife, Brooke Gray, owner of Flower Power in Point Reyes Station. She passed away in 1998.

In an interview at the age of 72, Welpott was asked what lay ahead in his future as a photographer.

“I’ve often thought that I should quit doing this, and sit back and watch the flowers grow or something, but I can’t seem to do it,” he said. “Even though at this age I’m slowing down some, I still gotta go in there and do this damn thing. I suppose it will always be that way.”

Towards the end of his life, photographer Ben Nixon cared for Welpott. Just months before he died, Nixon ac-

companied Welpott to a favorite local spot, Bear Valley Meadows. Welpott surveyed the landscape from his motorized cart and photographed trees and bushes with his digital camera for a series called “photogenic drawings.”

“His work was one of the important things that kept him alive,” said Fine-man. “It gave him a sense of energy and enthusiasm.”

“To make a photograph as honestly as one can generates artifacts that bear witness to one’s personal truth,” says Welpott, in a statement featured on a website dedicated to his work.

“I like the way it locks you into the moment, the eternal present. Sometimes there is the physical sensation of light. The world becomes luminous. You get a chance to unite with reality. I have come to realize that it is more than an act of monitoring the world. Sometimes I feel like I am penetrating a void to a parallel universe.”

Jack Welpott is survived by his daughter Jan Marie Danielle, her husband Rob Daniele, their two sons, Nicholas and Kevin; his son, Matthew Welpott, step-daughters Karan and Jenny Grey, and numerous colleagues, friends and students. A celebration in honor of his life will be held in Bolinas in January. Donations can go towards the publication of a retrospective book to be published by Indiana University Press. Contact Linda at (812) 855.2175.