

Praise for *Forgotten But Not Gone*

"... a lovely blend of striking photographs and spare, yet highly visual text about the places and people of rural America. This book looks back in a touching, yet realistic manner at a period of history that is quietly slipping away.... a book to be savored, page by page."

Raymond Bial, photographer and author of *Stopping By, Corn Belt Harvest, Where Lincoln Walked* and *County Fair*

About Judith Skillman

Judith Skillman's poetry has appeared in *Cimarron Review*, *Seneca Review*, *FIELD*, *Poetry*, *The Iowa Review*, *J Journal*, *Midwest Quarterly Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New Poets of the American West*, *Southern Humanities Review* and *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. She is a regular contributor to *Northwest Review* as well as to other journals and anthologies. She is author of 14 books of poetry as well as *Broken Lines--The Art & Craft of Poetry*.

About Ron Hammond

Ron Hammond's photographs have been shown at the *Fireplace Gallery* in Gresham, Oregon, *Benham Gallery* and *ArtsWest* in Seattle, *Green River College Gallery* in Auburn, Washington, *Larson Gallery* in Yakima, Washington, *Light Box* in Astoria, Oregon, *The Perfect Exposure* in Los Angeles and in many other solo, group, and juried shows. His work is in the collection of Seattle's *Pike Place Market Foundation*, the *Washington State Museum of History and Industry*, and the *Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center*. His other books are *Regular Customer: 50 Years of Market Photographs* and *The Last Human Freedom* (with sociologist Doris Bean).

Forgotten But Not Gone — Ron Hammond and Judith Skillman

Forgotten But Not Gone



Photographs by Ron Hammond
Poems by Judith Skillman

These photographs were taken in and around my home town in central Illinois. I was moved to collect them and print them in this fashion after reading Robert Fulghum's essay on visiting his own home territory in Texas:

"I know. You think I'm making this all up. But I'm not. It's true. Most of it. And no, it's not heaven on earth. It's boring as hell in its own way.... So why do I tell you, anyway? It's just this: that there are places we all come from — deep-rooty-common places — that make us who we are. And we disdain them at the risk of self-contempt. There is a sense in which we need to go home again — and can go home again. Not to recover home, no. But to sanctify memory."

Robert Fulghum

All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten
Villiard Books, 1988, page 28, used with permission

Dawson's Drug Store in Eureka, Illinois is gone. So is the old dog that darted out of the vacant lot next to *Susie's Restaurant* and bit my ankle. The vacant lot is gone, too. So, in fact, is *Susie's Restaurant*. But those are details. These photographs are my memories of the Midwest — corn fields and small towns seven miles apart (seven miles between water tanks when the railroad was built) — a landscape in which the tallest features are the prairie skyscrapers (grain elevators) and the water towers.

These photographs are my proof that the deep-rooty-common place is still there — *forgotten but not gone*.

Ron Hammond

These empty streets go on and on.
I can peer down furrows
and see my younger self kneeling
in Maryland berries, a pool of juice
gathering under my knee.
In a Cleveland suburb one afternoon
my dark-haired aunts gathered in
a ghostly laundry, still wet.
Uncles talked in hushed voices
about the odd funnel tugging at the horizon.
The air was green.

Silos, grain elevators, a piece of an engine
saved for years in a teenage mechanic's pocket,
a board house sprawled pregnant in the grass,
fringed by oaks. Their shade still cools the ground.
This is the place you take to
in a storm despite warnings,
your back glued to the solid trunk
of the field's single tree, a lightning rod.
The sky dark at midday,
filling with night clouds.

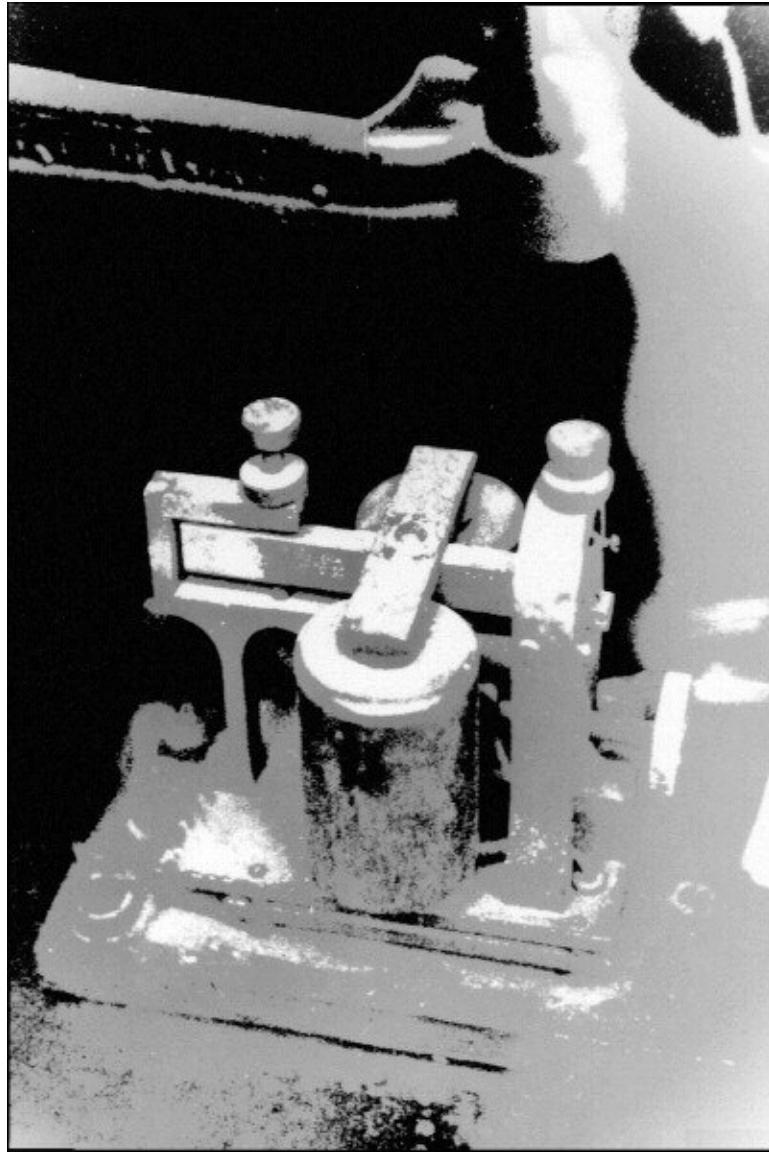
Judith Skillman

A few horses nuzzle their oats in shadow.
Water spills across the lip of a trough
as if an aging farmhand forgot years ago to shut off the main hose.
Maple trees silver, a lone barn falls into disrepair,
caught once and for all in the eddying flow -- Vote No.



Opinions about local politics run strong and are held tenaciously
This sign on an abandoned barn has been there for years

*O*nce distance was bulky, too wide a thing
to fathom. Messages arrived days late,
babies were born without fathers, soldiers
died privately and were buried in strange towns
by folks who adopted them as heroes.
Embalmed in an abandoned railroad station
the telegraph flares once more. Almost human,
it lets loose a tongue-clicking, spontaneous Morse-code:
the last SOS.



Telegrapher's key in the abandoned
rail station in Metamora Illinois

At the end of Main Street
a pair of tracks separate those who begin and end
their days under a sooty sky, and those whose money
is laundered. Above the tracks, a new constellation,
made of lamps. Joined dot-to-dot, it signifies the dark animal
who sleeps apart from whatever shady business
transacts itself behind solemn storefronts at midnight.



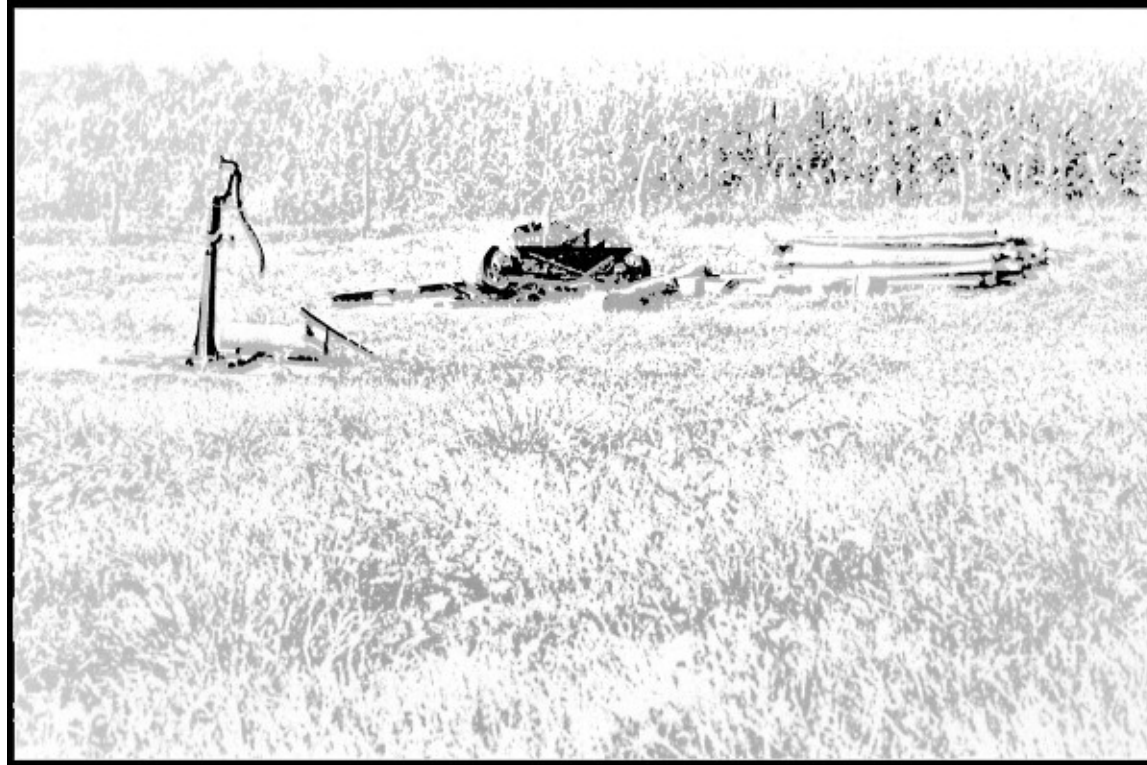
Main Street in Eureka Illinois at midnight

***B**efore self-service was in vogue,
there was always the chance
that the man who pumped your gas
would flirt with you, and you'd flirt back,
become another item
he could collect, a treasure
that would see him through the day.*



Alvin's garage in Eureka Illinois
Alvin collected automobile memorabilia
such as gas pumps and service station signs

As though in the lacy remains
of this house a young Helen Keller ran
around the table, grabbing food
from plates, until her teacher
pulled her by the arms into the yard,
grabbed the pump handle,
and signed the word 'water' into her hand.



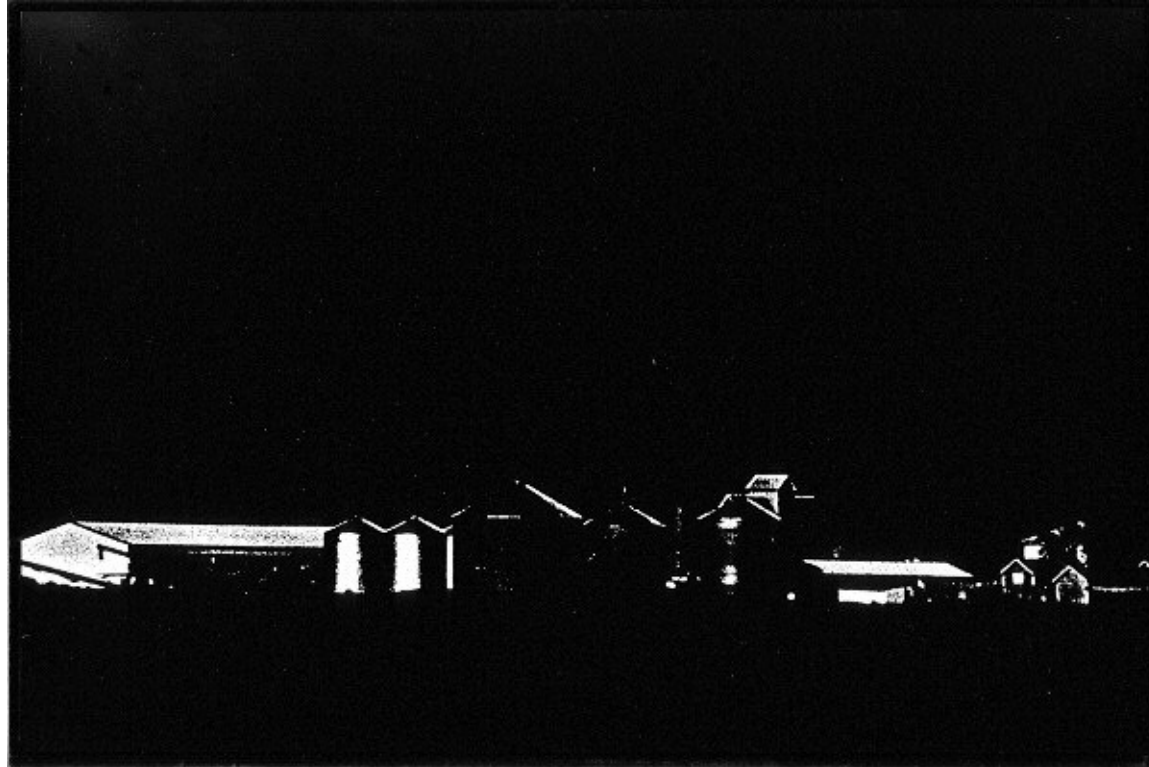
Once there was a house here
The pump fetched water from a shallow well

***P**eering out from the frame of an upstairs window
another child-ghost comes of age.
And perhaps a face peers in,
sees layers of flowered wallpaper peeling back.
A strip of linoleum curls away
from floorboards. In the vacant living room
a rocker squeaks as tomorrow's weather rushes in,
no longer detained by glass.*



This house has been abandoned for decades but refuses to fall down

An immigrant from Alsace pauses
with her bucket and rags,
indignant because the light is failing
and there is so much work left to do.
And yet it is beautiful, she has to admit,
the way the sun touches only the outlines
of things.



At sunset the light is oblique
because the land to the west is very flat

How this book came to be

The photographs reproduced in this book are posterized — they have only black, white, and two shades of grey. The result emphasizes the shapes of things and removes most of the details. That fits my fading memories of central Illinois where I grew up.

I used traditional litho film positive/negative methods in the darkroom to make them because I prefer the results to those obtained with computer-aided techniques.

These photographs were hung at Benham Gallery in Seattle, Washington. When my friend Judith saw them, she was, to my delight, moved to write a short poem to accompany each print. We had been seeking a collaborative project and this one just happened. That's the best kind!

Judith has never set foot in this part of Illinois. All she had to go on was the photograph and the title on the hang tag, yet her insights are so accurate as to be spooky. Poets are strange and wonderful people.

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