

On the Death of Virginia Maier
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Vivian Maier (1926–2009) was an American street photographer who primarily photographed the people and architecture of Chicago. She worked for forty years as a nanny while pursuing her photography, which she didn't share. Her work was discovered and highly lauded after her death.

In her old age, Maier was alone and destitute. For a time, she was homeless. She eventually lived in a rundown apartment in the Chicago suburb of Cicero, keeping her photographs and negatives in storage lockers. In all sorts of weather, she spent her days sitting on a bench in the local park dressed in her signature conservative calf-length skirt, jacket, hat, and sensible shoes reading books and newspapers and talking to herself in French (born in the U.S., she spent a good part of her childhood in France). She was seen going through dumpsters but declined offers of help or food.

Around Christmas 2008, she fell hard on ice and hit her head. Patrick Kennedy, who lived in the neighborhood, recalls that as paramedics prepared to take her away in an ambulance she reached to him and pleaded, "Don't let them take me, I don't want to go." She was hospitalized and expected to make a full recovery but weakened and was moved to a nursing home where she died on April 21, 2009. Her ashes were scattered in a wild strawberry field.