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NEWS

Art and humor come together in photo contest

GARY KIRKLAND Sun staff writer

Published 11:01 p.m. ET Dec. 17, 2005 | Updated 9:27 p.m. ET Dec. 17, 2005

Since the inception of the Images of North Central Florida photo contest, I've been The Sun's equivalent of a border collie, barking at the heels of contestants and trying to herd the entries into categories. Then I step out of the way so the judges can dispense photographic justice.

And each year as I gather the collection, I can count on getting many good laughs and a few entries that leave me scratching my head, a sort of yin and yang of weird and wonderful.

So, when I open a digital photo file and see Michael Ross' entry showing his brother Merrill cheek to gill with a sheepshead fresh from the Gulf of Mexico, both with a similar crooked smile, I think maybe it's not high photo art, but still it's a hoot.

Another close-encounter of the critter kind, taken by Hank Conner, showed his buddy Lester Freeman with a very large dragonfly using his nose as a landing strip. That had to feel strange.

When I opened Emily G. King's photo of her dog dressed for Halloween, the picture I dubbed Darth Doggie, I let out one of those politically incorrect guffaws that disturbed my coworkers so much they were forced to get up from their desks and see what I was laughing at. Art? I don't think so. Funny? You bet.

When Becky Hamilton sent me the photo she called Monkey Boots, I was puzzled. Just which category do you put a stuffed sock monkey wearing knee-high black rubber boots? It's not really an animal, it's hardly scenic, and even our down-to-business real judges got a laugh out of it.

Then there was the real monkey. Over the years we've had lots of pet photos. Peggy Sue,

the Marmoset monkey playing outside the Lake Alto home of Debbie Hoyer, became our first-ever pet monkey that I can remember, certainly the first to share a name with a Buddy Holly song.

I also happen to be sucker for cute kid photos. So, when I see Mark Piotrowski's picture of little Alexander Hood, with his biceps pumped like those guys on the back of the old comic books, I find myself saying, "Hey, come look at this," to anyone in earshot. When I see Lynn Crutchfield's grandson Spencer Sharp giggling for the camera as he's swinging in his backyard that's covered by an overflowing Suwannee River, I think, "My grandson Brody would think this was cool." And there was something special about little Todd McMillan, rope in hand, red cowboy hat on his head and goats at his side. I understood just why photographer Mike Awe was compelled to send it in.

One of the puzzlers we received actually had a logical explanation. I was initially baffled by Mike Smallwood's photo of a drug store on Tower Road. But Smallwood moved to Gainesville from Kentucky, and when he pointed out the shape of the cloud hanging over the store, it didn't take much imagination to see that it was shaped like the Bluegrass State.

Then there were the head-scratchers. Horacio Sierra sent two pumpkin photos not just any pumpkins; rather, "our decomposing jack-o'-lantern returning to the Earth after Halloween in our northwest Gainesville backyard." Rotting vegetation, that was a first.

I wasn't sure what to make of the well-lighted PVC pipe sticking out of a block wall dribbling a crystal stream of water taken by Chris Schammert between the Citgo and the mattress store on the corner of NW 13th Street and 16th Avenue.

Somehow Schammert's and Sierra's artistic vision was lost on me. But, as I sat there taking them in, another thought came to mind. Didn't I once see something like this hanging in a modern art exhibit at the Harn?

Gary Kirkland can be reached at (352) 338-3104 or kirklag@gvillesun.com.