

## RANDOM SAMPLES

# FINDING JOY IN THE WHATS, WHYS OF QUIRKS AROUND US

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Every life needs to have a quest. I'm not talking about a spiritual journey or the pursuit of some intangible goal. I'm talking quite literally.

Sir Galahad sought the Holy Grail. Frodo Baggins sought to destroy the One Ring. I seek out concrete gorillas and squirrels stuck to screen doors.

Allow me to explain.

My quest started a number of years ago at book club. We had just finished reading the truly awful novel *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood. (I still haven't totally forgiven the person who suggested it.)

The one redeeming thing about the novel was a subplot about two characters' efforts to make a film called *Random Samples* in which they would arbitrarily piece together footage of unusual or offbeat objects they found in the world around them.

It seemed like a fun idea. I was still relatively new to town, but I'd been here long enough to know that Toledo is overflowing with oddities, and that's without even considering the political scene.

So a friend and I decided to spend an entire afternoon cruising around the city in search of our own random samples. We took no maps, planned no route. We simply grabbed a camera and hit the road in search of whatever eye-catching quirks we might find.

It was appropriate, I think, that we rolled along in my friend's 1987 white Camaro named "Carlos." He'd bought the thing for \$300 at a police auction and talked about it as if it was his best friend. Pretty random, we thought, and took a picture.

### PHOTO GALLERY

[See pictures of Ryan's local Random Samples](#)

We snapped rolls of other unexpected sights: gigantic mesh horse statues grazing at the University of Toledo, a building downtown with its facade blown off, a smiling concrete gorilla standing guard at the end of someone's driveway.

What were their stories?

Some of these we'd seen before and wondered about, like the building on Sylvania Avenue with the enormous "THYROID" sign out front. (It's gone now, sadly.) Others we were noticing for the first time even though we passed them every day.

When the afternoon was over, our quest was not. We continued to collect pictures from our daily lives - a squirrel scrambling around on my screen door as I sat just inches away on the other side, an old car in a parking lot hand-painted to celebrate Independence Day. These were my favorites, the ones that captured fleeting moments just begging to be explained.

There are many more that have escaped me. How I wish that I'd had a camera with me when my youngest brother, without explanation, gave our mom a frozen steak - wrapped nicely in a box with a bow - for the holidays one year.



These random samples may not sound like much. They're not newsworthy in the traditional sense. They're not over-the-top enough or grotesque enough or crazy enough.

But there's an intriguing question behind each one of them, and to me they've become a symbol for what's most interesting in this world. Stockpiling them has become a way of celebrating life's originality, of capturing the beautifully weird moments mingled in with the mundane all around us.

My hope is that this bi-weekly column will serve as an album for my growing collection of random samples, whether they be people or places or happenings that are just a little bit different from our cookie-cutter surroundings, ones you've probably seen or heard of but never taken the time to know.

There are scores of these all around us just waiting to be found by one adventurous quester or another. All it takes is a little bit of looking - and maybe the help of a well-traveled Camaro named Carlos.

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