

Picture Fast

For almost half a century, Fred Lindholm used his camera to capture and range and spirit of the sport. He's still thriving in Sun Valley.

BY ALEC BARFIELD

I met Fred Lindholm unexpectedly one afternoon last April. Scanning the classifieds of the *Idaho Mountain Express* earlier in the day, I was stopped by the following: *Lost iPhone: Found on Galena Summit. Call Fred. 208-xxx-xxx. As it happens, the phone was mine, dropped in the backcountry a week prior. Ecstatic upon recovering the device at Lindholm's home in Ketchum, I couldn't help but engage the man in conversation, which quickly turned to the vintage ski photos that paper the walls of his garage. Kindly, he offered to show me others. "Endless shit," he joked. Those images, more masterful than Lindholm would admit, bring us here: to the story of a photographer who captured the range and spirit of skiing like few before or after him.*

Lindholm, now a spry 85-year-old, moved to Sun Valley in 1961 to work as the resort's publicity photographer. He mingled with socialites, shot magazine spreads of celebrities and partied with a high-end crowd, known as "the Iron Curtain," who vacationed on the top floor of the Lodge. "But it wasn't an ego trip," Lindholm says, "because I was already established." By the time Lindholm made it to Idaho, his work was well known, established not by portraits of the rich

and famous, but by action shots of his friends, like Junior and Maxine Bounous, Ted Johnson and Jim McConkey, who defined the art of powder skiing at Alta, Utah.

Lindholm could ski with the best, and his career as a photographer was characterized by his ability to go where his models went. Whether it was being the first guy to jump into Baldy Chute at Alta or narrowly dodging crevasses in the Bugaboos, "I could get the shot," he says. That can-do attitude was reflected in his longtime nickname, "Snappy."

Lindholm's relation to snow stretches to his birthplace, the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen, just over 600 miles from the North Pole, where his father operated mines for the Great Norwegian Coal Company. As a young man in the early 1950s, Lindholm was stationed in Germany with the British occupation troops, but his sights were set on emigrating to the United States.

"I wanted to become a photographer," he says. "My father died when I was very young and he left me a camera, so I started shooting pictures and I was good at it."

The choice came down to New York or Los Angeles. "But there wasn't a hell of a lot of sun and beach in Spitsbergen, so I went to L.A.!", he says. To support himself

at the Art Center School, Lindholm drove a truck for Red Man Service before starting his professional career in fashion, mostly shooting bathing suits, near Laguna Beach. "I had a hell of a good time doing that," he says, laughing. "Then all of a sudden my phone rang and I was shooting ski pictures."

It was 1958 and Alta's resident photographer at the time, Peter Green, had been drafted. Lindholm had met Green while skiing in Utah and, as luck would have it, was offered a gig at one of the most picturesque resorts in the country. For three prolific winters, Lindholm worked in a little basement photo-shop in the Peruvian Lodge. "I had endless pictures on the walls and people would come in and buy my prints," he says. Lindholm's photos graced the covers and pages of *SKI* and *Skiing* magazines every month; his images also became ads for AT&T, Cal Aero Airways, Lucky Lager, and DuPont, to name a few.

While not one to romanticize his work, insisting that "a ski picture is just a ski picture," Lindholm confesses that some of his methods were unique. In particular, he says, "I used a Polaroid filter a lot to get the black sky, which many people objected to, but I found interesting." The filter also heightened the black-



(1965) This smiling portrait of Lindholm was taken immediately after an accident. According to *SKI* magazine: “Fred went along on an expedition into the Cariboods for some free skiing on untracked powder... All were present when Lindholm, taking an amazing picture of McConkey cornice-leaping, backed into a soft spot, sat down, and dropped 15 feet into a crevasse.” Reminisces Lindholm: “Let me tell you, another foot and I’d be down there dead. And in my nice sealskin jacket!”

(1965) “We were looking up at the lines and there he was,” says Lindholm of this unknown ski guide, who appears to nail a crevasse-riddled run deep in the Bugaboos. “Then all of the sudden, on the next turn, he lost his ski. This maniac went after it on one ski, way the hell down over all these snow bridges to recover it.”



and-white drama by bringing greater detail to the snow’s texture. Yet what fascinates Lindholm now was the camera he used then, a Hasselblad 1000F, which “was a beautiful Swedish camera, but not made for ski action. I have no idea why I did it, but of course it didn’t matter—it worked like crazy!”

Through the 1960s and into the ’80s, Lindholm also worked like crazy, “running all over, from Sun Valley to Seattle, to Los Angeles, to Aspen,” racking up miles, as well

as endless stories, in his signature Corvettes. “Jesus Christ, I had a duck come through my windshield once!” However, times changed. “When I had to take out insurance policies and get model releases,” he says, “I thought, ‘The hell with this!’ Let the kids shoot the cliff jumps.” Lindholm moved capably into architectural and eventually real-estate photography, which keeps him busy to this day. “I can’t believe it’s lasted this long,” he says of his long and successful career. “I’m still shooting

houses. I’m still skiing.”

Lindholm makes a point to go backcountry skiing weekly in winter. As always, he brings his camera, saying that “it just comes naturally to me to shoot pictures of skiers and of snow.” And every so often Lindholm’s famous eye unearths an iPhone, high on Galena Summit, lost but not forgotten. ❄️

Alec Barfield is a freelance writer and skier who lives in Ketchum, Idaho. This is his first article for Skiing History.



(1969) “This wasn’t a publicity shot,” says Lindholm of a squinting Robert Redford atop Alta. “I just happened to snap a picture of him.” And while Redford, as the founder of Sundance Resort, has had a genuine impact on Utah skiing, Lindholm brushes off his own encounters with Hollywood: “I don’t want to dwell on Robert Redford and Steve Wynn, who had nothing to do with anything.”



(1962) Front to back: Comedian Jack Carter, jazz musician Louis Armstrong, and actor/singers Sheila and Gordon MacRae fool around at Sun Valley. Lindholm relocated from Alta to Sun Valley in 1961, where he worked as the resort’s photographer under the direction of Dorice Taylor. In Lindholm’s copy of her book, *Sun Valley*, Taylor wrote her old friend the following note: “To Fred, who made some years of my life happier and more horrendous than you can imagine. I loved every minute.”



(1991) The lead photograph for an article about Steve Wynn in the defunct magazine *Snow Country*, titled “Certifiable Ski Nut.” Lindholm shot Wynn, as well as some of his residences, multiple times over the years. Says Lindholm of the casino mogul, perched over Sun Valley, Idaho, “By this time, he was somebody.”



(1969) The dashing Roger Staub, gold medalist for Switzerland at the 1960 Squaw Valley Olympics, poses in front of ski celebrity Suzy “Chapstick” Chaffee. Staub worked as Vail’s ski school director in the mid-60s, while Chaffee did everything from modeling to ski ballet. Remembers Lindholm, affectionately, “She was a terrific looking, outgoing lady skier.”

(Late 1950s) “My old friend, U.S. Ski Team veteran Charlie McWilliams, once said to me, ‘Fred, you’ve got the eye.’ That was my favorite compliment: ‘You’ve got the EYE.’ There was not one picture with a shadow. Then I come along, shooting night shots...” In this photo, Lindholm eyes Ted “Silver Fox” Johnson, who would later found Snowbird, surging through blower powder at Alta.



(1958) Junior Bounous comes up for air on a powder day at Alta. Lindholm skied often with Alta’s assistant ski school director, as well as with Bounous’ wife, Maxine. “He was a terrific skier,” says Lindholm. Chuckling, he adds that a few of his shots of the Mormon couple were turned into liquor ads.





(1958) For this iconic photo of Alf Engen, recalls Lindholm, “I said ‘do a thing’... and he did a thing!” Director of Alta’s ski school, Engen could do just about any “thing” he wanted on skis. “He was such a famous four-way skier in America,” says Lindholm. “When things started happening again [after the war], Engen was the guy who won everything. I mean, he was a ski jumper too! Everything.”



(Early 1960s) Stein Eriksen showcasing his classic technique at Aspen Highlands, where he was the ski school director. Lindholm traveled back and forth from Aspen regularly back then. “You had to drive all your gear and that’s just what one did. Don’t forget 95 mph was cruising speed.”



(1968) “Not many skiers had their cover on a news magazine,” remarks Lindholm of Jean-Claude Killy. The Frenchman would go on to sweep all the alpine events at the 1968 Grenoble Olympics, which were held shortly after *Newsweek* released this cover, shot by Lindholm that same year in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

SHOTS OF A SLIDE

“Getting the shot” will never be easy. Today’s photographers, however, possess a wealth of advantages that were nonexistent just a few decades ago. When Fred Lindholm was Alta’s ski photographer from 1958 to 1961, his bulky Hasselblad couldn’t autofocus or operate at the prodigious shutter speeds of modern cameras. When he gazed into the finder, which required looking down instead of forward, “everything was backwards.” Despite the challenges, Lindholm captured never-before-seen moments, such as the series pictured here.

One day while skiing waist-deep powder, Lindholm and Jim McConkey witnessed a near-tragedy. Although not a terribly steep slope, the run uphill of Lindholm broke away, just a hair to the right of McConkey’s line from a minute earlier, and swiftly began to slide — with Alta’s chief snow ranger, Ed LaChapelle, smack dab in the middle of it (see photo 4). “We were messing around skiing, and he was nearby,” said Lindholm, who said LaChapelle was able to ditch his poles and ski out of it.

Snapping away on the reliable ‘Blad, Lindholm documented the entire event: a human-triggered wet avalanche on the verge of devouring its victim. “Can you imagine?” Lindholm says of that possibility. Still, he adds, “When you see what kids are doing now, it’s way more dangerous than anything I ever did.” But at the time, Lindholm’s avalanche photos were unprecedented, striking enough to be published in *Sports Illustrated*. Right after the avalanche series appeared in *SI*, Lindholm was hired to shoot the 1960 Winter Olympics, held at Squaw Valley in California, for *Life Magazine*. —A.B.

