

The Official Newsletter of the Ashdown Community

Message from the Editor

Dear Reader,

The Cultural Committee, in cooperation with the Ashdown Photographer and the Ashdown Art officer, held a photo contest with the theme "Unforgettable Moments" in January and early February. The contest drew 32 entries and hundreds of votes from fellow Ashdowners. The five winners were announced at Coffee Hour on February 17.

In an effort to learn more about the stories behind the photographs, 3am approached a sampling of contestants asking each of them about what inspired him to take the picture and what it personally meant to him.

Charming photos, funny photos, bewildering photos. Amusing stories, dismal stories, confounding stories. If it is true that every picture tells a thousand words, then for some of the photographs of the Ashdown Photo Contest 2011, here is a handsome helping of them for you.

Sincerely,
Liang Jie Wong
Ashdown Newsletter Officer

Tunnel To The Next Generation

taken at Kashi, China by Dheera Venkatraman

No matter what culture we come from or what part of the world we are in, we've all enjoyed those morning walks with the older generation of our family. Scenes like this remind me of those many moments where we receive the experienced wisdom of our elders, only to pass it on to others as we, too, grow old. It also reminds me of the contrast between our own ephemeral, fleeting human lives and the timeless nature of the brick and stone world we build around us.

This photo was taken at Kashgar (Kashi), Xinjiang, China, a city located at what is today the western extreme of China, not far from the borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The city served as an major trading post and transportation hub along the Silk Road between East Asia and the Middle East for centuries.



Friends Alike

taken at El Centro, CA by Gartheeban Ganeshapillai

The first snow storm of the year hit the Northeast around 20th of Dec in 2010. Washington Dallas International was closed for three days, Logan international managed to send out two planes on 20th, and one left to Los Angeles. I barely managed to get in to that on standby, after hours of camping at the airport, to spend the holidays with a friend. After a long day, and hours of travelling, I was in the warm bareland of Imperial Valley, California.

21st Dec, like nothing happened previous day, the dawn of the day started with a small excursion to the fields in the valley. In the backdrop of the beauty of the barren land, the warmth of two friends were quite unforgettable.

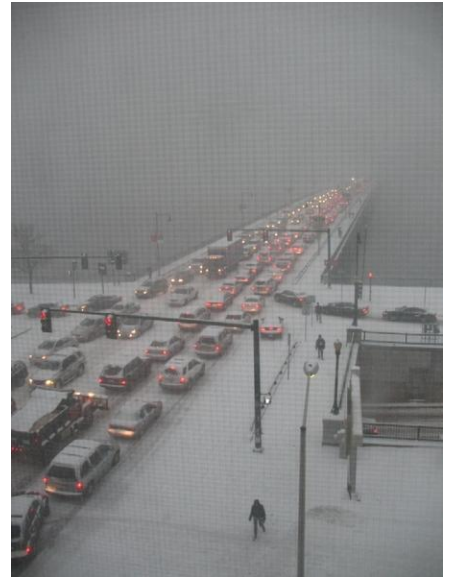


The Bridge Home

taken at Old Ashdown by Ta-Chung Ong

That photo, as you probably could tell, was taken on a rather miserable day. The weather fitted my mood perfectly, for it was near the end of what had become an absolutely awful very first semester at MIT. I just turned in my take-home finals the day before. I knew I did not do well (did not do well was putting it lightly, I sucked). All I wanted to do was to get out of Cambridge, basically so I could crawl back home to sulk. Perhaps my parents would be forgiving. Perhaps they might offer me a kind "we know you tried your best" that would sound horrifically patronizing (and made me feel even worse). Alas, I could not go home just yet, all because the undergrads had their finals the next day. Actually, at this very "unforgettable moment" they were expecting me to brave the blizzard (seriously?) to hold one last office hour, one last review session, so they could save themselves from certain destruction the next morning at 9:00am. Those kids, all they could do was to think about themselves. Couldn't they see that it was snowing so hard? So hard that the traffic had not moved for (I think) hours? There was an useless snowplow stuck behind everybody else. There was a helpless ambulance wailing and wailing (I hope whoever in there made it). And here I was, listening to their frustrated horns, stuck at my desk in my bare Old Ashdown (I will never refer to W1 as "Maseeh Hall") room, answering desperate emails from desperate undergrads.

In the midst of all this, at some point I did pick up my camera and simply took a photo of the scene of white horror outside. I was probably just taking a break (Let's face it, I was in no mood to work on anything). All the cars were driving on the Mass Ave. Bridge as if they were just driving into nothingness. Cars disappearing into the fog, cars appearing from the fog. Maybe the title of the photo really should be "IHTFP". Or maybe the photo should be titled "Grad School, Symbolism of". Will I be alright driving on this (long) bridge that seemingly goes nowhere? There are people coming back from the other side. I guess they did alright. I didn't know anything about photography, the camera was set on "Auto" (I did know to turn off the flash, ugh I hate flash). I'd be going home in 48 hours, after I finish grading. I don't know. I guess we'll find out.



Serene Skyline

taken on a roller coaster in Singapore by Jingqing Zhang

The picture, 'serene skyline', was taken in the December of 2008, in a cabinet of the Singapore Flyer, the tallest observation wheel in the world, located in the center of Singapore. While the wheel was moving 30 min per circle, I was fortunate to hold the camera still enough to capture the fantastic evening of the city.

The color is just fabulous! While the sky is blended with blue and evening black, the skyline of the city is amazingly bright and colorful. The gorgeous golden color, decorated with the dark red in the center river as well as hues of blue and green scattered here and there, shows the city's undeniable prosperity. However, in this dark evening, it is just there for you, very very quietly sleeping ... leaving you the opportunity to watch and read it. The light stretches to the horizon, gradually merging with the color of the sky, and bringing people like me into dreams and fantasy.



Merry Christmas

taken at Disney's world, Orlando, Florida by Leila Pirhaji

During Christmas holidays, every one was celebrating the moments, singing Christmas songs while wishing peace for all the people in the earth!



Mother And Daughter

taken at Jiu Zhai Gou, Sichuan, China by Lu Feng

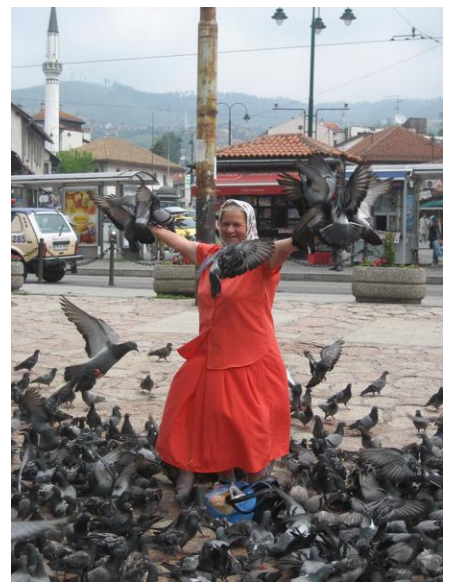
I took the photo when my family visited Jiuzhaigou National Park in Sichuan, China for vacation, which was our first family trip in seven or eight years. The park is famous for its water, and the waterfall in the photo - part of the Nuorilang Falls - is an example. I have always been more of a scenery photographer, and although Jiuzhaigou is excellent for that, I also wanted to try out different compositions with a newly acquired camera. As a result, when my mother and my sister were standing in front of the waterfall, I decided to make them the main characters. I truly love their expressions in the photo. Seeing Jiuzhaigou was not just about experiencing the water, it was also about my family.



Woman With Wings

taken at Sarajevo, Bosnia by Kevin S. Kung

Occasionally even the most common things can become strangely poignant under the right circumstances, especially during traveling. This photo illustrates one of these moments when I was standing in a town square in Sarajevo in a summer evening. There were many pigeons in the town square, and suddenly a lady walked up with a bag of feed and started throwing the food into the air. All the pigeons swarmed around her, especially near her hands. It seemed just as though she had grown wings and would just fly away with the pigeons there and then!



The Pigeon Hole Principle

taken at Ranchi, India by Shashi Mittal December 31, 2010.

The last day of the year. After having a delicious lunch in the afternoon, I was working on the dining table on a problem from my research. A mathematical problem. Unsurprisingly, I was unable to focus on the problem; home does not provide the conducive environment for doing research. Taking a break, I went to the balcony of our fifth-floor home to enjoy the warmth of the sun.

Pigeons. Sparrows. Mynas. Parrots. All kind of birds can be seen around our home. Watching the chirping birds playing around happily and freely in the winter sun is a real treat to eyes. Lost in my thoughts and still thinking about the problem, my sight suddenly fell on a pigeon hole in the adjacent building, where a pigeon was sitting inside it and another outside it. It immediately reminded me of the simple but surprisingly powerful principle in mathematics, the Pigeon Hole Principle. I was immediately struck by the simple yet profound illustration of the principle in the nature. I rushed indoors, took out the pocket camera from my suitcase and ran to the balcony where the pigeons were still sitting in the same position. And I felt really lucky to capture that unforgettable moment.



Skiing In The French Alps

taken in the French Alps, by Dragos Velicanu

The photo was taken at the top of Les Orres ski resort in the southern French Alps. The sign coupled with the sea of clouds and landscape in the background inspired me to take this particular shot. The sign says in french "avalanche danger" with a barely visible "forbidden zone" covered in red tape. I found the contradiction between the avalanche warning and the abundance of ski tracks just beyond the sign amusing. The reddish sea of clouds barely visible through the peaks that give a "top of the world" impression were what I primarily wanted to capture as an unforgettable moment.



Newegg

taken at Key West, FL, by Jin Huang

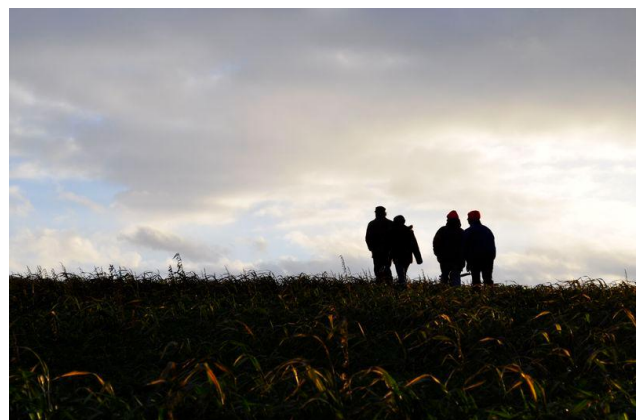
We had a wonderful Christmas trip to Key West, Florida. At the end of one day, we were watching the sun set at the south end of America. As the sun approached the horizon, it transformed to a shiny golden egg. We took this picture as if we were picking it up, saving this unforgettable moment and concluded the amazing day.



Family Walk On The Golden Route Towards The Celestial Abyss

taken at Spring Mills, Pennsylvania, by Mihai Aurelian Diaconeasa

At that time I was enjoying a short holiday at one of my friend's family house in Spring Mills, PA. That late October evening, we went for a hike on the hills around their house. It was really easy to take the shot, because the sun was out on the right and lighting up their bodies. You can see the parents in the foreground with the red hats on, looking up at their children walking confidently ahead towards their own future, an unknown future. What inspired me was the family's warmth and unity in a quiet and twilighted environment (mystical). Also, the warm, green/golden vegetation colored by the sun created a nice contrast with the cold, immense body of the sky.



Peace

taken at Kui Buri, Thailand, by Thapana Chairroj

I feel that the picture has captured an "unforgettable" moment of an indelible vacation experience with my girlfriend. At the time that I took the picture, I was envisioning a picture that features my girlfriend with a breath-taking scenery at the back of the picture. And I'm pretty satisfied with the shot I took.



Crossing A Canyon, In A Cable Car, Halfway Through A Day Of Mountain Biking 75 km From The Cloud Forests Of The Andes Down Into The Amazon Basin In Ecuador

taken outside of Banos, Ecuador by Brian Pearson

The summer after I graduated from college, I had some money saved up and absolutely no responsibilities. I already knew that I was accepted to MIT and ready to begin a new life in Boston. While all of my friends were busy looking for jobs, I decided that instead of moving back in with my parents for the summer, I would just blow all of my savings on a three month trip around the world. I convinced one of my best friends to join me and we booked our airfare a mere week before setting off. The airfare was the only thing that we had actually planned before leaving. Along the three months we started in Peru, then travelled through Ecuador, Brazil, Egypt, Turkey, Bulgaria, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and South Korea before returning a mere three days before I had to move across the country from Southern California to Boston.

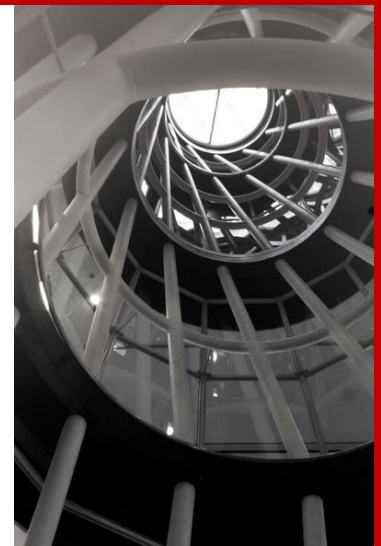
Along the trip there were dozens of truly unforgettable moments including catching wild caiman and piranhas in the Amazon, sailing for three days down the Nile in a tiny felucca, scuba diving in the Red Sea, riding motorcycles and exploring caves in the Cappadocia region in Turkey, hiking through the mountains and rice paddies of Northern Vietnam, and many more. On this particular day, we were in the Andes in central Ecuador. We had spent the previous night on a bus and arrived in the city of Baños early in the morning. After breakfast, we rented some mountain bikes and decided to ride from the Andean highlands, where we were, down into the Amazon basin. The plan was to just continue down hill along the road until we were tired. Then, we would hitchhike our way back up to the top of the mountain to return our bikes. The entire ride was along the side of this huge river canyon with dozens of waterfalls along the way. At the beginning of the ride, we went punting (a cross between bungee jumping and extreme swinging) off of a bridge that was 75 meters above the river below. Then a few hours later we found a small cable car that spanned the canyon right above a large waterfall. We decided to take a break from the riding to get an up close and personal view of the waterfall. This photo is a snapshot of the moment when we are directly above the waterfall. It was truly an unforgettable moment.



Space Structure

taken at Sendai, Japan, by Kevin Young Lee

The Sendai Mediatheque, open since 2001, was designed by the Japanese architect Toyo Ito, who gained international fame through this project. The conceptually rigorous and cleanly executed building became a case study for many aspiring architects during my undergraduate education in architecture and is still commonly referenced even today. Making my way to Tokyo, Japan this past January, I decided to take an overnight bus to Sendai, about five hours north of Tokyo. After a night of restless sleep and bumpy roads, I finally arrived at the Mediatheque, and it was nothing short of what I had expected. This photograph portrays one of the structural "tubes," which also serve as vertical circulation through the building, light wells, and ventilation shafts. It was taken from the third floor of the building and represents, to me, the most spatially complex condition in the building.



Archiving

was taken on Mass. Ave, Cambridge, MA by Brian Hua

My photo captures a motionless girl standing on the sidewalk of an extremely busy street, staring at the steps of a school that never sleeps. The photograph title, "Archiving," is actually a term that I use to describe the surprisingly common times in normal discourse or daily life where you stop and let everything around you seep in and fill you. Archiving is when you recall all the things that inspire you in that moment or throughout that day, and you "archive" these thoughts in your mind so that you don't forget them ("Unforgettable Moments," if you will). The girl in the photograph is actually my girlfriend, Angela, who visited me in Boston for a few days. I wanted to show that even in the busiest of places, there's always time to stop, take a breath, and archive.

This photo is actually a composite of three sequential photographs each with long 15 second exposures to capture the movement of the street (imagine how still and how long Angela had to stand motionless in order to remain sharp!). The passing cars appear as streaks of light while the walking individuals exhibit a ghost-like effect. A little bit of touch up and you have the final photograph!



Leap Of Faith

taken in the Skies above Wisconsin by Nicole Casasnovas

Have you ever had one of those moments when you ask yourself "why did I agree to do this in the first place?" This thought definitely crossed my mind as I sat on a small airplane which was steadily climbing to a height of 10,000 feet. As a habitual adventurer and a bit of an adrenaline junkie, I jumped at the chance to go skydiving with some friends a couple of summers ago. Let me briefly guide you through my "leap of faith" so that you know what made this a fantastic experience.

There I was in western Wisconsin getting ready to jump off a plane. I remained cool and collected throughout the entire time we were training and preparing for the jump.

Then, we got on the plane and that's when I started to have doubts. Was I really ready to jump out of an airplane? What if I got hurt or worse? These and similar thoughts went through my mind right up to the moment when Jay, my skydiving instructor, asked if I was ready to jump. The time had come. I would have to ignore my sense of preservation and let go of any inhibitions. Holding on to the side of the airplane door, I stared at the fields and towns below and finally took the plunge.

As the photo shows, I was screaming and laughing all through my free fall. The feel of air rushing around you and the sensation of not being bound to anything can only be described as pure freedom. When Jay and I pulled the chute and cruised around the skies, I was ecstatic. I remember talking about how much I loved the free fall and listening to Jay share how he once skydived over the Great Barrier Reef. How cool is that! We made some nice loops through the sky and cruised down to finally land on solid ground. As my friends greeted me, I thought about how some risks are definitely worth taking. We all celebrated and talked about what was certain to be an "unforgettable moment" in all our lives.



Moose Far, Far Away,

taken at Grand Teton National Park by Chia-Ling Pai

Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park, the must go places in life, are famous for their gorgeous natural landscape and extraordinary wildlife. A group of us from MIT arrived Yellowstone National Park at the end of August in 2010, and began our six-day adventure from here towards the Grand Teton National Park. A side project of this trip was to collect photos of new animals everyday. We had elks and bisons on our first day, which made us very excited at the moment. But soon after a few days

there, we found these are the most usual animals, and we saw a bunch of them in an everyday basis. The following days, we found horses, deers, ravens, pronghorns, beavers, and other animals. Two most expected animals but still missing were the moose and the bear.



Finally, in the evening of Day 4, the shotgun saw some crowds on the bridge while I was driving. We made a quick decision and urged friends on our cars to get off and see what happened there. People said there was a moose far far away in the green over the river. We were so excited that our collection was almost completed, but we can barely see the moose on our naked eyes. Luckily, we borrowed a well-set, high-level, professional microscope from a nice old couple next to us to see the moose clearly. But we wanted to save this moment as our memory (and to complete our collection). We tried to take a photo of the moose with a good camera, but it didn't work as good as we saw it from the microscope, not to mention that we didn't even bring our tripod.

Someone in crowds proposed the idea of combining the camera with the microscope. We tried it right away, but it was hard to catch the moment of in focus of our camera because our hands kept shaking due to the weather. I forgot to mention the unpredictable weather of the park. We had raining days, sunny days, and snowy days combined in a random way in this trip. It happened to be an extremely cold day now. We had different people in turn keep trying with their cameras with a frostbitten shaky hand. Some gave up at early stage and some kept persistent occupying the kind couple's microscope. In the end, I was the one who succeed. I guess I was the most stubborn person who believed this method would work and kept bothering the couple with my iphone plus their microscope. Without the nice couple, we cannot catch this unforgettable moment. Thank you.

Contact the Editor

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