

## **My Story**

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### **Early Childhood**

I was born and raised in Roxborough and Andorra, Philadelphia. These are two neighborhoods that are surrounded by the Wissahickon forest. My childhood was filled with exploration in the woods, making tipis with sticks, building bridges with stones, fishing in the stream, and lots of biking.

I've grown to enjoy adventure at a very young age. I remember when I first found the Schuylkill River Trail at around 12 years old. My love for biking is what sparked this discovery, as I wandered through the neighborhood, and found myself lost on a day-to-day basis while biking around. Looking out towards the beautiful landscape filled with trees and a nearby farm at an elevated view, I finally felt this sense of wonder and awe with the natural world looking out at the endless horizon.

It was here that I learned to take a new turn, following my intuition, and exploring the world openly. Just nearby this farm, I discovered a really steep hill that I then proceeded to ride down at a very fast pace. As I weaved and turned, filled with excitement, I didn't even consider how hard it would be to ride back up and get myself home.

At the bottom of the hill, I discovered the Schuylkill River. I noticed a trail, started to ride my bike, and just kept following the path. I looked into the distance and could see nothing but trees and an endless path in front of me. I reached the first trailhead and read that I was a few miles away from home and did not know where I should go. I decided to turn back and make my way uphill as much as I could. I quickly realized that it was nearly impossible for my small and tired body to push myself up this slope. I made it to the top and felt the sense of accomplishment, filled with curiosity upon my discovery during this adventure.

Alas, I would make many more trips down that hill and push myself further and further along the trail until one day I reached Valley Forge national Park. This is a very beautiful location here in Pennsylvania with rich history and lots of terrain to explore. While I rode along the dirt path, I realized that I popped my tire. Being extremely far away from home, I resorted to calling my mother and having her pick me up. She was shocked that I went such a far distance, and was immediately on here way to bring me back home. I threw the bike in the trunk and started explaining to my mother why I rode this far and how I discovered this amazing trail. My mother never lectured me and told me not to go back, but was rather encouraging and simply wanted me to become more prepared for next time I ride. She wanted to make sure that I'm safe and independent. From here, I continuously brought my bike for these long, 20 to 30 mile rides throughout my early childhood.

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## **Becoming an Artist**

When I got to high school, I enrolled myself in a web design course. I started learning Photoshop, and found my love for the creation of art and design. I was pretty good at it at first until they started to introduce the coding parts of the class. My skillset was in typography and graphic design. My love for art certainly outweighed any interest in the coding and science behind web design. Because of this, I signed up for the graphic design course the following semester, and honed my skill with Photoshop further.

When I was 16, they introduced photography to the graphic design class. I was instantly hooked. I picked up a Nikon FM film camera and returned to the woods, where I spent my childhood, exploring and biking. I would ride my bike for many miles with the camera, making snapshots of trees and nature, and also recording video with a digital Canon Rebel T3i.

I found that my passion for exploration and photography was the perfect combination that kept me interested in life. I always wanted to go out and explore with my camera and make something as a way for me to express myself and find joy in the world.

## Discovering Street Photography

I mostly enjoyed black-and-white film, and spent a lot of time simply honing in on the fundamentals and technicalities of photography throughout my teenage years. I picked up the camera settings, exposure, lighting, and composition rather quickly. It was then that my great uncle took notice of my passion for photography and showed me his camera collection which included a Leica M3 with various lenses.

He took me to the mall nearby his home and showed me the fundamentals of using the Leica. He first took me to the carousel where he explained to me how to use shutter speed. He informed me that as the carousel is moving quickly I can either freeze the action or create motion blur. He told me that when I moved the shutter to 1/500 of a second, the action will be frozen, however, if I use 1/30 of a second, the carousel will be blurred and create a distortion of reality.

We then moved to the Build-A-Bear workshop as he explained to me how to see. He never directly introduced me to street photography, but this was the moment where everything clicked for me. He pointed to the advertisement of the teddy bear on the wall and observed as the children moved in and out of the shop with their bears in hand. As the people passed by the advertisement with their teddy bears in their hand, he told me that this was a decisive moment to make a photograph. The way my uncle explained to me framing, moment, and ultimately the creation of stories through photographs, unlocked a new way of viewing the world for me.

At this time, I haven't considered photographing people or telling stories with a camera. The idea of juxtaposing people and the world around them became a visual game that I embarked on ever since that day.

My family moved to Center City Philadelphia, and I began photographing consistently on the street. I started practicing street photography without even knowing what it is. He would let me borrow his Leica and I grew fond of using the 35mm Summaron lens. I photographed religiously along Market Street and Penn's Landing. The hustle and bustle of the summertime in Philadelphia provided me with the perfect place to practice street photography. I made some work early on that taught me how to see, photograph people candidly, and continued to explore the streets endlessly from there on out.

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## Art School

Once I graduated from high school, I decided to enroll at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore as they had a very prominent graphic design program. During the first year of school, you learn how to draw from live new nude models, sculpted with plaster and wood, experiment with multimedia and video, paint, and explore the fine arts from a general perspective. These things were all very new to me, but gave me a solid foundation on the various approaches to art throughout the very different mediums.

Once my second year came around, I enrolled in the graphic design program and declared it as my major. After a few months of taking graphic design courses for the semester, I was introduced to a course that combined photography with design. In this course, I was able to explore photography once again, and found myself in downtown Baltimore along the inner harbor, where I started to practice street photography again. I enjoyed making portraits of strangers, asking for permission, and engaging with the people on the street. I would come back to school, import the photos, and combine them with typography and design.

The teacher offered an extra credit opportunity to work on a project outside of class. It involved engaging with a local church community for people in need. The goal was to make portraits of strangers and uplift their stories through written word. The final product was promotional material and a gallery show where locals came and viewed the photographs and shared their stories.

My job was to make the portraits. I found this to be where I found my love and interest in both people and photography. I enjoyed chatting with strangers, and interacting with a community that I otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to engage with. This experience brought me closer to the people of Baltimore and I then realized how much more there is to explore in this city.

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## **Baltimore Street Photography**

I purchased the Ricoh GR11 around the end of 2015 and started to hit the streets. I no longer was interested in photographing the same old downtown Inner Harbor area and made an effort to engage in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood of West Baltimore, which was just nearby my school. Most people view this location as rather dangerous and not friendly towards tourists or random people walking around with cameras. However, through the skills I learned with talking to people during my class project, I found my way through this community with ease.

I learned that you have to play a different game than simply making candid snapshots on the street like I would back in Philadelphia. I needed to engage with people in order to gain trust and access to make photographs. I started by interacting with people at the bus stop as this was a hotspot filled with people. I would simply make an effort to chat with the crowd, ask for permission to make a few photographs, and discuss my interest in the neighborhood as a photographer and artist at the school just nearby. The people were understanding and allowed me to continuously come back to the same bus stop to make new pictures.

Every day after class I walked around West Baltimore with my Ricoh GR11. This was the perfect camera for the job as it was small and compact and could be concealed in my pocket. I didn't appear as a photographer and was merely curious about this new neighborhood.

## **Winning a Street Photography Contest**

One day, I stumbled upon a Basketball game behind a high school. I approached the scene as the light was just right during the golden hour, and there was a beautiful mural casted along the wall behind the court. As the boys played, I asked if I can make a few photos and proceeded to make pictures. At the time, I set the camera to P mode, and would simply point and shoot using the LCD screen on the back of the camera. I made loads of pictures of the scene as it was probably the most incredible thing that I've witnessed as a photographer up until this point.

When I finished photographing this particular scene of the basketball game, some men were gambling and throwing dice with money on the ground. A dispute broke out, and a fight commenced. I witnessed the fight and quickly made a snapshot and left the scene. I walked home that day with my head held high with confidence and courage, imported the photos, and was surprised by the results. The photograph I made of the basketball scene was my first successful photograph that I made in Baltimore very early on in my journey.

Later that year in 2016, I submitted this image to the Miami Street Photography Contest judged by Martin Parr, and won first place. What he found most surprising by this photograph was the visual effect of the gestures that I caught in motion of the boys playing, which resembled the feeling of wind blowing along a windmill. Winning this contest inspired me to keep pushing with my street photography and continue the hunt for that next shot.

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## **Photojournalism and the DNC**

In 2016, I was hired to work as a photojournalist for the DNC. I attended many different events, photographing politicians, speakers, and various festivals that popped up throughout the summer. One festival I remember in particular, was the African festival here in Center City, Philadelphia. There is a moment where I saw a man handing out newspapers of Muhammad Ali upon his death. I made a photograph and juxtaposed him against the worker. I always made sure to bring my Ricoh GRII along with my workhorse camera, the Canon 6D, to make my own street photography work during this experience of practicing photojournalism.

Once the convention occurred in South Philadelphia, I made an effort to document the protesters and events happening outside. There was lots of chaos and people started hopping over the fences as the sun was setting. I made some photos of this event with my Ricoh GRII using the pop flash. I also had the opportunity to photograph indoors, and make photos of the activity that took place around the floor of the convention. Overall, this was an interesting experience to be in the field,

work on assignments, and practice photojournalism. It kept me sharp, always prepared with the camera, bringing my laptop with me to quickly cull through photos and submit them for publications or various uses for social media.

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## **The Road from Jerusalem to Jericho**

In 2017, I decided to study abroad in Jerusalem, Israel at Hebrew University. Before my trip, I went to B&H in New York City and purchased the Fujifilm X-Pro2 with a 23mm F2 lens as a more robust solution for my travels. I spent six months exploring this biblical location with my camera and channeled my child-like adventurer's spirit.

On the weekends after class, I would take the bus all throughout the West Bank to various Palestinian cities. I've explored all over from Ramallah, Qalandia, Hebron, Jenin, Nablus, Bethlehem, and my favorite city, Jericho. Once I established a strong relationship with Jericho and the people there, I decided because of its location and the access I had from Jerusalem, that this was where I should make more photographs.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is a magical experience. Jericho is known as the city of the moon and the lowest elevated city in the world. I explored Jericho without much research other than a few of the stories I learned in catholic school as a young child. I find that by traveling to new places without preconceived notions of what I will find, I explore with my camera more openly, and honestly.

I went back each weekend, slept in a hostel, and walked through this desert town with the scorching sun above my head. While the city is rather small, there are many people condensed in the refugee camp just nearby the border. This is where I mostly walked around and got to know this specific community on a deeper level.

One day I exited a mosque in Jericho after prayer. A group of men, the Jahlin Family, took notice of my curiosity. They invited me to their home, shared tea with me, and took me on an adventure. I got in the back of their car, and we drove to the top of the Wadi Qelt mountain range. The road was treacherous, and one of the

vehicles broke down along the way. The men exited the car and started pushing the car uphill. As the chaos ensued, I hopped out and started making pictures. Ultimately, we made it to the peak, made some coffee over a fire, danced, sang, and enjoyed the view of the Dead Sea.

## **War Photography**

Because I spent so much time photographing along the border of Israel and Palestine, I encountered conflict on a few different occasions. I found myself at the frontlines during clashes between the Israeli Defense Force and the Palestinians in both Qalandia and Jericho during the day of rage.

While in transit along the border of Qalandia, the bus driver told everybody to get off of the bus. I quickly ran to the side of the conflict where the IDF was located, however, to my surprise was the wrong decision. They took notice of me with my camera and quickly made an effort to shoot tear gas my way. Blinded and filled with tears, I ran as quickly as possible throughout the nearby alleyways and made myself comfortable on the Palestinian side of the conflict zone.

When I entered a shop for cover, the owner offered me a high visibility vest to wear during the event. This was such a kind gesture as he was looking out for my safety and did not want me to get hurt. I then proceeded to propel myself closer and closer onto the frontlines of conflict, completely exposed without much cover from the live ammunition, tear gas, and rubber bullets that were shot in my direction. On this particular day, there were Palestinian casualties and people were killed. I am grateful to have made it out of this crazy situation alive immediately headed back to Jerusalem.

I then proceeded to make my way to the frontlines of the conflict zone in Jericho, where I found myself being shot at once again. The border of Jericho is even more dangerous than Qalandia because there is hardly any cover to hide behind besides a few ditches to duck under and a couple of concrete barriers. I inched my way closer and closer to the frontlines until I noticed the perfect subject to photograph. As the Palestinians were trying to break down a barricade and lighting tires on fire



to create a smokescreen, I noticed a man with a tattered mask upon his face. I made a photograph of the scene, with his eyes gazing through the mask towards me, and the scorching hot fire and smoke rising in the background.

## **The Wall**

In East Jerusalem, there is a refugee camp named Shuafat. This is the largest Palestinian refugee camp that I explored throughout my travels. The wall that surrounds the refugee camp was so tall at about 30 feet high, which is double the size of the Berlin wall. When you enter the neighborhood, you must go through security screening at a military checkpoint. Because I have an American passport, I was allowed access to this community freely.

I was interested in this location primarily because of the wall. I spent my time walking along the wall and the winding maze of alleyways all throughout Shuafat. I would visit after class most days and try my luck at making a successful photograph of the wall. One day, a group of children were playing alongside the wall. They mostly spent time throwing rocks over the wall and at each other. I was actually pelted in the back of my leg by a rock being thrown at me from the hillside nearby, which certainly hurt. But alas, I kept pushing and made one of my strongest photographs during the trip of a boy throwing a baby stroller at the wall. I managed to keep going back to this location time and time again and came home with something I was looking for through trial and error. I wound up climbing on top of the wall myself, and felt like I have conquered East Jerusalem with my photography.

## **The City of the Moon**

What amazed me most about Jericho was the beautiful backdrops of the desert mountains that overlook the dead sea, the beautiful and vibrant colors that cast along the walls of the buildings, and the blue sky up above. Needless to say, it was a magical place to practice my street photography, and provided me with the opportunity to hone in on my craft, and approach the streets as a documentary photographer.

I would carry around an instax camera and gift prints to strangers as a way to interact with people and ask for permission. The joy of photography is the gift of photography. By leaving pictures behind, it allowed me access to endless stories to tell through my photography. After six months of photographing all throughout Jericho, Jerusalem, and the West Bank, I joined my brother for a trip to Italy.

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### **A Summer in Napoli**

In the summer of 2017, my brother and I went for a two week trip to Napoli, Italy. Our roots are from Caserta just nearby about 30 minutes from Napoli where we have family. I enjoyed the gritty streets of Napoli as it provides a great place to practice street photography.

While I enjoyed the streets, I found myself interested in the Mediterranean sea. Locals gather along the rocks by the sea to sunbathe and swim. My brother and I decided to grab some fresh seafood nearby and relax amongst the Italians. As we hung out by the water, swam for a bit, and sunbathed, we began chatting with a group of men who invited us to eat some watermelon. They showed us how they keep the watermelon cool under the water as a natural refrigerator. When they lifted the watermelon up, they began slicing and sharing amongst their friends, as well as my brother and I.

During this time, I made an effort to photograph the scene as it was a beautiful moment. The red color, the blue sea, and the tan skin of the men provided a perfect opportunity to make a photograph and tried my best to align the various puzzle pieces together in a cohesive composition.

As the man swam in the sea, and they began sharing, the decisive moment appeared, and I pressed the shutter. The photograph is the perfect representation of the experience I had with the locals here in Napoli. Overall, the trip was brief, but I came home with a successful photography and story to share with my brother from an experience we had along the Mediterranean sea in Napoli.

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## **Attending a workshop**

During my last year of university in 2018, I received a scholarship to attend a workshop with Alex and Rebecca Webb in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Chris Boot from Aperture was scouting my class for participants. Once he recognized the work I was making, he informed me of the scholarship opportunity, and how it was the perfect fit for me.

During this workshop, I learned about sequencing, and how to edit my work. It was a bookmaking workshop, where I got to make a mock book, and ultimately made one using Blurb. It was quite an informative session to see how a master photographer selects images and sequences them to tell a story.

At the end of the workshop, I spent some time speaking with Alex and Rebecca, and she informed me of the possibility to continue traveling through volunteering in various countries. This led me with the idea of returning to Israel to volunteer on a kibbutz and continue making photographs.

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## **Volunteering on a Kibbutz**

Upon my graduation from university, I wanted to continue my project photographing in Israel, and decided to volunteer in Haifa at Kibbutz Ein Hashofet.

I spent about one month on the kibbutz alongside volunteers from all over the world living amongst this Israeli community. Everybody in the kibbutz has a different job that they are assigned to work during the day. I chose the hardest job, landscaping, and worked in the gardens with horticulture. The days were long, and the summer was hot, but the work was very rewarding, and I enjoyed it. I even spent some time milking cows as this was the primary contributing factor to the economic growth and prosperity of this particular kibbutz.

## **Living with a Palestinian family**

After one month of volunteer work, I found myself at a dead end. I wasn't making any progress on any new pictures and decided to spontaneously leave the kibbutz. I hopped on the bus to Jerusalem and from there made my way to Jericho and arrived after a long journey late at night. I knocked on the door of the hostel and was allowed in to stay. The next day I had tea with the family that manages the hostel, and discussed my return to Jericho as they were surprised to see me once again. They allowed me to live rent free for two months where I volunteered in various capacities at the hostel. I swept the floors, burnt the trash, cleaned the exterior and interior of the hostel, made the beds, and in return had a place to rest for the foreseeable future. Each morning I had breakfast with the family, which typically consisted of eggs, pita bread, hummus and delicious dates. I would finish my chores around 10 or 11 AM and spend the rest of the day exploring Jericho freely.

## **My friend Mohammed**

I made friends with a young man named Mohammed, who was around my age at the time, 21 years old. I would knock on his door each morning and have him show me around the city on a deeper level. I got to observe his morning routine and learn more about his life. He had no family and was a refugee living alone and built his own home from scratch. He had a mentor named Hassan who he went to each day and brought me along with him. We spent each afternoon with Hassan, watering his plants and chatting with him. One day Hassan drove me, Mohammed, and his friend Ahmed to the Wadi Qelt Valley, where we hiked many miles along the river. It was a very beautiful place, where we cooled off along the valley, and enjoyed a nice hike.

## **Sleeping in Mosques**

Upon my return from this hike, I expressed my interest to learn about Islam to the Palestinian family I was living with. I would go to the Mosque each day in the evening and pray amongst the brothers in the main mosque at the city center. They

introduced me to an Imam named Hirsham who took me along with several other young men and mentors to learn about Islam. We spent two weeks sleeping on the floors of different mosques all throughout Jericho. We fasted, prayed five times a day, and shared our meals which primarily consisted of pigeon, rice, and potatoes. I learned all about Islam with this group of men where I spent time reading the Quran, learning how to pray, how to sleep, how to clean, and how to live like the prophet Muhammad. We would hike around various neighborhoods surrounding the mosque that we slept in and knocked on people's doors, inviting them to join us for prayer in the evening. We actually gathered large crowds of people as others were interested and curious about why an American, myself, was in this small group. At the end of my journey learning about Islam, I learned a lot more about Palestinian culture and Islam on a deeper level.

At this point, I made a lot of progress with my photography during these few months and was proud as I made the right decision to leave the kibbutz and return to Jericho.

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## **Joining the Peace Corps**

Upon my return from the kibbutz in Israel and my time volunteering in Palestine, I decided I wanted to continue traveling and pursue more volunteer work. When I found out about the Peace Corps in 2019, I recognized it was a no-brainer for me to sign up. They assigned me to Zambia, Africa to join the rural aquaculture program, where I worked with fish farming alongside the department of fisheries in remote villages.

For the first three months, I learned the local language, Bemba, lived with a host family, learned to practice fish farming, embraced a new culture, washed my clothes by hand, slept under a mosquito net, fetched my water from a well, slaughtered and prepared chicken to eat, cooked over a fire, rode my bicycle along dirt paths, and integrated myself in this new country. The Peace Corps does a really great job of teaching you the customs, practices, and language that you will be using throughout your service.

## **Off the grid**

After three months, I was stationed in the Luapula province, and lived in Mpanta Village in the Samfya District. This was a very beautiful location as it was right alongside beautiful Lake Bangweulu. Upon my arrival to the village, my host father, names Bwalya, presented me with a goat to slaughter. He handed me a knife, and I cut through the neck of the goat as it was presented to me hanging by its limbs upon a tree just nearby my new home. I've never experienced a more welcoming introduction in my life and for the next few days, we feasted together in the evenings.

I got to know his family, spending my time speaking the local language with him and his children. His wife drew some water from the nearby well, heated it up on a pot over the fire, and handed it to me to use for bathing. During my time in the village, I would take bucket baths with a cup and a bucket of water. At this point, I've become comfortable with using the outdoor latrine, disposing my trash in the nearby pit, drawing water from the well, and spoke conversationally and comfortably in the local language.

My goal was to share my culture from America in exchange for Zambian culture. I also worked with local farmers on their fish farming projects and started my own fitness club with some young men who joined me in the morning to use gymnastic rings and practiced weightlifting outside of my home every morning.

## **Village life**

The dirt path that led to nearby villages is where I found myself lost in the open world. I mostly enjoyed riding my bike throughout the village every day as a way to get around. Cycling is one of my favorite hobbies and combining it with the exploration of living in a remote village was pure bliss. I would commute to the center of the village where there were many shops and people gathered by the lake. I spent my time chatting with the locals, played billiards in their clubhouse, and enjoyed the company of others as this was a very bustling village.

Many trucks would come through this village as it was strategically located at a port, where many deliveries were made. I befriended a man named Amaz, who guided me on boat tours around the lake as he spent lots of time working in transportation and delivery of goods to villages across the lake.

During mango season, we would climb the trees and pick fresh fruit to eat. Many of the young boys played football on the dirt with no shoes in bare feet. At the time, I tried to join them and play without shoes, but my feet became blistered and battered, and I had to soak them in hot water for the next few days. The men in the village work without gloves, and have callused hands and feet unlike Americans who use protective gear and thick soles on our shoes. It was a challenge to overcome the various physical conditions that I was thrown into, but I find that the different modes of living opens me up to new perspectives.

What I learned through my time traveling throughout Zambia is that there is a hierarchy in a functioning society. There is God, tribe, and land. Everybody in the village has a role to play. Every morning I would see mothers coming home with firewood on their head and babies on their backs. The men were building homes and churches. The boys were creating bricks from the mud and sand. The girls were sweeping the floors and preparing the food for the day. Every morning I would wake up to the sounds of chickens and the banging of a mortar and pestle before sunrise.

The staple food of Zambia is Maize. The maize is harvested from the farms and then pounded with a mortar and pestle. It becomes a fine powder and by adding water, it creates a substance that is similar to the texture of play-doh. The food is called Nshima and is the foundation of every meal eaten in Zambia. You use your hands to roll it into a small ball and then grab some fresh vegetables or protein, which was always fish.

I learned that your hands are the best utensil and a meal shared on the floors of these homemade bamboo mats brings family together. I shared every meal with my host family. Most foods that are available in the village are grown locally. The vegetables found in my village were eggplant, ground nuts, spinach, tomatoes, maize, and cassava. The main protein source that I ate every single day was fish from the nearby lake or fish ponds.

In Zambian culture, it's custom to give the head of the house, the head of the fish or the gizzard of the chicken. The organ meats such as the brain, or the heart were sign of respect when offered to eat. I now understand why, as these meats are typically the most nutrient dense parts of an animal.

### **One tribe under God**

The most incredible experience I had during my time as a Peace Corps volunteer in Zambia was during a two week Seventh-day Adventist church camp. Every Saturday I would join my host family in prayer in their church and made an effort to engage with the community this way.

When I arrived at the Seventh-day Adventist church camp, I was greeted by thousands of Zambians. Every home was made from scratch, using sticks and tarps as tents. There was a giant church in the center of town constructed just for this two week event built of sticks and tarps similarly to the homes.

Every morning and evening, and every hour of the day there was an opportunity to join in prayer, song, and dance amongst the people. I usually spent my days wandering through the camp with my camera and a group of young men with my host brothers. This was the most joyous time of my year journey in Zambia.

Everybody was excited to go to camp and spend time with other people from different villages that they otherwise do not have the opportunity to be around. Everybody gathered at the lake to wash their clothing, bathe, draw water, or simply go for a swim. I was amazed at the amount of people at this camp in such a small surface area. There were shops and markets that sprouted up all throughout the village, where people would sell and buy goods and share meals together.

### **Baptism in the lake**

What I found most incredible about my time during this camp was the baptismal procession that occurred in the lake. Everybody gathered by the lake and certain people that were ready for baptism were offered the opportunity to join the



Seventh-day Adventist church. They lined up and were dunked underwater by the main preacher of Samfya.

Before the baptism, there was song and dance in the church that was very uplifting and filled with love and joy. When I arrived at the lake, I threw my shoes off, dropped my batteries, and anything else that were in my pockets in the dirt, and walked into the water to make photographs. With the water up to my chest, I got as close as possible to the baptism and the dunking of the individuals. At the end of the day, it was worth getting wet and entering the water as I made photographs that truly capture what it was like during this experience.

### **Documenting funerals**

In Zambian culture, it is a sign of respect to pass through a funeral, even if you do not know the family. Whenever a funeral procession occurred in my village, I made sure to pay my respect and join the people as they mourn and pray. Needless to say, I gave myself the opportunity to make photographs of these situations, as I had spent nearly a year amongst this community and people respected me as a photographer.

As the procession occurred, people pray upon the casket and circle around it to view the body of the dead person. They then lower the casket into a hole where the men of the family fill the hole with dirt and mourn, sing, and pray. I dropped to my knees to make a photograph of the scene and captured a man mourning in the foreground as the chaos and dirt flew about the background. I truly felt the need to make a photograph of these things, as it definitely encompasses the tradition and culture of Zambia and what occurs in these rural villages.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

I was supposed to be in the village for 27th months, but was cut short a year early because of the Covid-19 pandemic. I packed my things up and was evacuated quickly and efficiently with every volunteer from the country. When I returned

home, I was saddened as I did not get to continue the projects that I was working on and really grown to enjoy my time in the village. I've become so close to my host family. It was a really sad moment when I had to leave.

Honestly, my host brothers and I broke out into tears as we became so close to each other, working on our fitness together, exploring the villages, biking through dirt paths, riding boats throughout the lake, swimming, climbing trees, making feasts, and exchanging our cultures. To cut the time so short really put a damper in our moods. I will never forget my time spent in the village and especially with my host family.

### **Gazing at heaven**

I'll never forget the times I spent in the evenings speaking with my host father, Bwalya, about about life in America and the differences between living in a village and living in Philadelphia. We would look up at the night sky together and gaze out at the shooting stars, the moving satellites, and the constellations. When you're in a remote village, and you look up at the night sky, you truly fuel yourself with imagination and dreams. It is unlike anything that I've ever seen and needless to say it was a beautiful site. Stars covered the sky every single night, and I would always see a shooting star. I fell asleep to the sounds of birds and insects in the village under my mosquito net, always eager and excited for the next day. I still to this day vividly remember the time I spent in Zambia as it was an experience that holds some of my most fondest memories, and cherish them with all my heart. The time I spent in the village taught me so much about life and shifted my paradigm unlike any other travel experience that I've had.

When I returned home to Philadelphia, I continued practicing street photography in my hometown throughout 2021.

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## **A Month in Mumbai**

In March of 2022, I travelled to Mumbai, India to practice street photography for one month. I stayed on Juhu Beach, alongside the beautiful ocean. It was there that I began to hit the beach and photograph the chaos by the water. I found myself lost amongst the sea of a diverse crowd of people. The clothing and colors fueled me with curiosity.

I would spend my mornings on the beach, followed by taxi rides to the southern part of Mumbai where I explored the bustling markets. The complexities and chaotic nature of the streets are unlike anywhere that I've ever been.

Some days I would wake up early at 4AM to photograph Sassoon docks. This location is the oldest fishing dock constructed in Mumbai. When you walk around this location, you can hardly move without bumping into other people. There is so much energy in the air, and you can smell the fish all around you. Some of the fish I witnessed were so big and unlike anything I have ever seen before. There are colorful walls, many people, and lots of subject matter to work with. This was certainly the most chaotic scene I have ever photographed in my life.

## **Exploring the World's Largest Slum**

I explored the largest slum in the world on my own, and was kindly invited into people's homes with hospitality. I was shown how families craft with Clay and sell goods to make a living. The alleys, playground, and homes of Dharavi was an endless maze to explore with my camera. I then explored the world's largest open air laundry market, Dhobi Ghat, where I photographed workers and families who lived amongst this community.

Just nearby, I rode in an auto rickshaw towards Haji Ali Dargah, where I found myself in Paradise. Along this beautiful mosque, there are so many people who go for pilgrimages to pray, and also play amongst the ocean. This was probably by far my favorite location that I've ever photographed in the world. Sometimes when it was low tide, the water would reveal rocks scattered all throughout the body of

water. Here you would find many families walking amongst the treacherous and wet rocks. I enjoyed eating fresh cucumber from a street vendor here outside of the mosque where I cooled off during sunset.

## **Celebrating Holi**

I had the opportunity to photograph during Holi celebration in the ancient fishing village, Worli. Late in the evening, there was a big celebration in the village. Many people gathered in this very small space to dance and celebrate and early in the morning the next day, many children played with water and splashed paint upon their bodies in the spirit of play. Celebrating Holi in this village was an authentic experience.

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## **Climbing Mountains in Mexico City**

I spent two weeks in Mexico City in June of 2022 with my friend that I made in Hebrew University, Matt Wong.

During our trip, we decided to make a journey towards the outskirts of the city and climb the mountains. There was a beautiful cable car ride station that we found, Indios Verdes, that took us up into the mountains where there were many different neighborhoods to explore.

The locals warned us that it is a dangerous neighborhood, however, our experience here at the mountain was the most fruitful in terms of photography. Being at an elevated space in the mountains provides the perfect place to make photos as the backgrounds are clean and the light hits just right.

I found that when we got to the top of the mountain, everything started to click. We were discovering small markets, meeting new people, and was even hanging out with a group of construction workers that were building a home alongside a beautiful cross statue that gazes out towards all of Mexico City. Being at the top of the elevated space was breathtaking. I made a photograph of a man at the

construction site right before it started to rain. We went back to the same location the next day, and had the opportunity to make photographs of children at play, climbing the giant cross statue.

### **Markets, Plazas, and a Gondola Ride**

We spent time exploring the historic center of Mexico City and many other neighborhoods. The area in particular that I was most fond of was called Tepito. In this neighborhood, there are many vendors, selling goods, and so many people in a gigantic open air market. It was a much more gritty part of town that I appreciate for street photography.

Another great location that we photographed at night was Plaza Garibaldi. Here there are mariachi performers, and lots of nightlife. One night, I spent some time dancing with local women who were partying and listening to some music under a covered area while it rained. It actually rained a few times during the trip, which I actually enjoyed as a change of pace. One downpour turned into a beautiful scene that I photographed of a young couple kissing as everybody was soaking wet.

We also explored via gondola ride on a boat through various streams, visited farmers, and had an overall great time in Mexico City. It was a really great adventure for the short amount of time we spent there.

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### **Meditation in Hanoi, Vietnam**

I then traveled to Hanoi, Vietnam and stayed alongside Hoàn Kiếm Lake for one month. This was probably my favorite city that I've ever visited in terms of the culture, food, people, and overall vibe.

Walking around the lake each morning was very peaceful. I would rise around 5 AM, and watched people practice yoga and fitness as the sun rose. I even started to participate, and made an effort to focus on my fitness each and every morning alongside the locals.

I had great coffee, beef pho, which is absolutely delicious, and hit the streets with my camera. I loved exploring the bustling markets all throughout Hanoi. The mix of peace and tranquility along the lake and the chaos of the markets makes Hanoi a great place to practice photography.

The people are extremely kind as well. Everybody I met was just so warm and friendly towards me. I found that life in Vietnam is always moving at all hours of the day. Early in the morning is when I found the most opportunities to make pictures, so I started to go to bed earlier each day so that I can wake up for the sunrise.

It was around this time of changing my lifestyle, focusing more on fitness, and meditating around the lake, that I started to really contemplate my photography and life in general.

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## **Transitioning to Black and White**

When I returned to America after this one month trip, I decided to make a change with my photography. I had to do something different. It just felt like it was the right time to do so.

I made a trip to New York City and sold my Fujifilm equipment to B&H and replaced my cameras for the Ricoh GR111 and the Ricoh GR 111x. I started practicing street photography in a new way, shooting in high contrast black and white.

I felt as though I accomplished my goals within the realm of color photography and was looking for a new challenge to embark on. Now I'm mostly focused on documenting my everyday life without need for any extravagant trips, or interesting subject matter. I'm much more interested in embracing the mundane and applying the skills that I've learned along my travels and practice.

Nowadays I am open to photographing everything. I don't just pigeonhole myself to photographing amazing scenes filled with decisive moments or only photographing people. I'm interested in the multifaceted complexities of life and creating my own world through the medium of photography. I view the photograph as an instant

sketch of life or an abstraction of reality. Making photos is a way for me to explore the world openly. I'm looking to continuously photograph until the day that I die with curiosity and longevity as my ultimate goal.

Because of this change of process, I'm much more fulfilled than ever before. It feels as though after a decade of practice, travel, and repetition, I finally figured thing out and what I want out of my photography. I'm now only making pictures for the simple sake of making pictures because it brings me pure joy. I'm looking to expand my photography and creative pursuits further and beyond and never stop innovating. I want to be like a child forever, just a kid with a camera, treating the world as a playground or my canvas.

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### **All Roads Lead to Rome**

I decided to make a trip to Rome and spend two months studying Italian at a local school in the Monti neighborhood. After all, I am a dual citizen between the United States and Italy, so I figured it would be worth a shot to learn a little bit of Italian.

I woke up each morning, attended class, and was let out around 1pm. I would then go and hit the street and practice my street photography. There's something special about the history of Rome and the beauty in the architecture that is just so inspiring. I also found that it's perfect for black-and-white photography and was a great test of my skills with my new process.

I made a weekend trip to Florence, where I took a tour of Dante Alighieri's house, explored the town, and admired the beautiful sculptures of Hercules, David, and Achilles.

I then found myself in Ostia, which is a beach town just along the outskirts of the city. It's a very beautiful beach with so many local tourists and people. I was practically the only outsider on the beach, but blend right in while sunbathing. I tried to practice my local language skills and made photos here for a nice weekend trip at the beach.

After two months in Rome, it made it feel like I found a new home. I certainly can see myself returning to Rome and Italy generally to continue practicing my photography as I have deep roots and affection for this beautiful country.

### **The Birthplace of Street Photography**

During my trip to Rome, I made it out to Paris, where I practiced my street photography there. I wound up spontaneously making a photograph of a friend of Henri Cartier-Bresson, just outside of the Eiffel Tower.

This old woman asked for me to make a photograph of her and her family. When she reviewed the composition that I made, she told me that it reminded her of Bresson. I was flattered and also interested that she was familiar with his work, and asked where she learned about street photography. She proceeded to tell me a story about how her and Bresson were close friends. It felt like all the stars aligned, and filled me with lots of joy when I found out this information.

Paris was a great city to photograph, and I can totally see why France and Paris is where street photography and photography as a medium was born.

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### **Into the future**

Going forward, I would like to keep my photography practice as simple as possible. I merely put the camera in my pocket, and take it along with me for the ride. Wherever I may be, if I see something, I will simply make a photograph. I no longer hold any pressure standards for myself to perform at a high rate. Perhaps there really is no such thing as good or bad photographs, but only new photographs to make. I simply treat photography as a stream of becoming where each next photo I create is my next best photo that I've made.