



*Photographers*  
Writing on Photographs



# Photographers

## WRITING ON PHOTOGRAPHS.

Stories written about images taken by the writers or stories about other photographer's images.

By the members of my Mentorship Group.

I am thrilled to present these great short stories and original images.

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PHOTO AND STORY  
BY STEFANIE SPENCER

## Scott at The Orman Croft Hydroelectric Power Plant

Back in June, my husband, Mark, and I had the pleasure of visiting the other side of our beautiful country. I had never been to Vermont before and was eager to explore a new place that is so very different from Arizona, while visiting our friends that just moved back there.

We had plans to explore the maple tree groves and the remote countryside covered with dairy cows, but something else was nearby their house that also intrigued me very much. I have been inside a coal-fired power plant, around solar panels and wind turbines, but I had never had the chance to explore a hydroelectric power plant.

The Orman Croft Hydroelectric Power Plant is located on Highgate Falls in Swanton, VT, just a few minutes from our friends' new home. Being the small town that it is, our friends were able to connect me with Scott, the maintenance supervisor for this plant.

I shared my passion for industrial photography with him and my desire to see the plant, and Scott was happy to give me a tour. I could tell right away that he was very passionate about his job.

When we arrived, we hit it off right away, both fascinated with the machines of industry. He began to give us a grand tour, top to bottom, inside and out, showing us the many systems that are all intricately connected to make this power plant function. He knows the touch points between every system, and it seemed like he had volumes of schematics memorized in his head.

There were stories of problems solved with creative solutions around every corner. But as technical as his job might be, he has the passion and intuition that holds it all together; you can tell that he runs this plant with his heart. The individuals working there seem more like family than just coworkers.

I can't remember all the details of the systems of the plant, but I still feel privileged and thankful that I was able to visually capture the care that he puts forth to help keep everything running for those around him, providing jobs and electricity for this small American town.



PHOTO AND STORY  
BY GREG REEVES

## The Siren's Song of Wandering

I look at my fingers and palms. They are marked with the pattern of chain link. If I had a mirror, I'd see the same marks on my forehead; marks left by the fence as I leaned against it, pulled it with intertwined fingers. I don't know how long I stood there, at that gate, looking and longing. I reached out and pushed, then tugged at the fence. It was really a gate since there were hinges at either end with a length of chain wrapped around the center posts of each piece of the gate. The chain was thick and the padlock hefty and both were a color that only comes from years of exposure and neglect. It may as well have been a fence, though, with all the evidence of non-use.

There was dirt and trash built up along the bottom of the fence that had scrappy weeds and stubby green growth. Little survivor plants that grew out of the sandy soil and up through the first links nearest the ground; obstinate and stubborn plants whose sole purpose was to make the most out of their meager environment to reach up and grow, despite the odds. Noticing the plants, I was a little envious. I'm sure the other plants told them to give up, that it was going to be too hard to grow there, to flourish. The little plants just didn't care. It looks like they are giving the world the finger and growing on. Good for you, little plants!

I leaned against the fence/gate again. I heard the soft scraping of the chain link against itself as it flexed in response to my weight. "You will push, but I will not open. You may not pass." The gate stood with firm resolve, diligently carrying out his duty. In reality, though, I knew the gate did not care.

I gazed beyond the gate at the long slender road running far off into a grove of trees. These trees that stood tall and overwhelming, growing up from the slough beneath this road, grown over the top from either side and meeting again, embracing and holding her. The time they have had together has allowed the melding of the two of them, the trees and the road, obscuring and mystifying what lies beyond. What is through there? Where does she go? I bring my attention back toward the gate, my eyes lingering over the years of graffiti decorations.

There are so many colors and patterns contributed by so many artists over the years. From my obtuse perspective at the fence, they all run together creating random patterns that almost flow, or sway as she runs from the gate. I close my eyes and feel the fence pushing back at my forehead as I lean into it. The links are cool and firm. A breeze touches my face and fills my nose with the delights of the Spring-time slough and I hear her singing and calling to me . . . "Come and explore me; discover me . . ." and finally she whispers, "Know me."

This is the Siren's Song of Wandering and my resistance is fading.





PHOTO AND STORY  
BY ALEX BAKER

## SOLACE

As the car rolls to a stand still I scan the horizon for signs of life. “Shit” I think, “that would be just my luck that I would run out of gas in the middle of nowhere.”

Now I would have to walk God know’s how far. I reach around behind me to grab my bag and check on Eloise - she’s still sleeping, her head resting heavily on the dusty window, a tiny sliver of drool just beginning to fall from her lip. I’d have to wake her, and she’d have to walk, amidst much complaining. But before that I grab the map out of the door pocket and spread it out on the front of the car, trying to figure out which direction would be shorter. We’d been headed towards Wall, of the drugstore claim. I’d visited it once with my parents when I was not much younger than Eloise was now. I remember being in awe of the sprawling maze of the shop and the tiny concessions selling a plethora of tourist tat. I came away with a cow-pie frisbee which for that summer was my pride and joy. Of course, this year I was pretty sure we wouldn’t be finding any stores open, much less ones catering to tourists.

“Eloise won’t be finding any frisbees here today” I think to myself, not that she would ever pretend to want such a childish thing any more. Right now the only people we’d seen were like us - too desperate to stay put. I dig around in my bag and feel for the gun that I’d sworn to Bill I wouldn’t use. I hadn’t used it, yet, but things were different out here, West of civilization, and we were going to have to walk into an unknown town, find gas, water, food, maybe even a tow if we were lucky. It was anybody’s guess how long it would take.

As the sun climbs higher overhead I look around at the scenery. Nobody sane would ever choose to call this place Home. There was a reason the first pioneers called it The Badlands. The earth, scorched black under an unforgiving sky, the horizon continuing forever, straight as an FBI agent fresh out of Quantico. The rock formations just visible make an other-worldly landscape seem even more alien and desolate. I curse myself for taking the backroad, but in truth I wanted to avoid the likely police road blockades.

“Wake up Eloise,” I whisper and gently shake her awake. “Come on, we have to get walking. We’re out of gas and I can’t leave you here alone. Put your mask on.”



PHOTO AND STORY  
BY JOE COSENTINO

## ON THE BOARDWALK

This photo was taken a few years ago and funny thing I noticed when sorting the photos, This was taken a week before my first P52 assignment was submitted.

It was a late September morning; the weather report was calling for cold temperatures and the usual thick fall fog in the morning. This was back in my landscape photography days, so getting up at 4 am and heading out was a weekly ritual. I was heading to a small lake in the southern Adirondacks near the town of Inlet, NY, where I knew the sun would rise over the water. The end of September is peak leaf-peeping time, so I knew I wanted to be heading south by 10 am while the hordes of people started showing up.

After spending an hour photographing the sunrise and getting some photos of water plant reflections on the calm lake, it was time to head into town about 2 miles up the road. I drove to the town park and headed down toward the lake. As I was walking down to the lake, there is a channel between fifth lake and fourth lakes of to the left, and a wooden boardwalk leading out to the town dock. I was taking my time walking out when I heard the engine of a small boat in the channel. The boat passed by me, heading out onto the fog-covered lake. I was thinking to myself he has to be a local, no one else would venture out into fog with about ¼ mile visibility.

I looked down the boardwalk to the dock I saw this woman sitting there on the edge of the dock in the cold fog. I notice the boat passing her and heading out between 2 buoys into the thick fog. I framed up a few photos and captured them before she knew I was there. It turned out she had a DSLR in her lap and was taking pictures of ducks and just enjoying the quiet morning.

The photo made me think of someone watching a loved one heading off into the unknown, and she wished him safe travels.





PHOTO AND STORY  
BY JAY CHATZKEL

## Plan B: A Travel Photographer's Day in Old San Juan

As a travel photographer I do whatever I can to discover what is particularly iconic about a place, i.e., what brings out the “vibe” of a place that is its own and only its own experience. A good way to make that happen is to find someone who has the local knowledge to bring me into the people, custom, sites, sounds and even smells of a place. I read guidebooks, watch bunches of YouTube videos before a trip, and they do open my mental doors to a place. As I gather that kind of intelligence before I land, I start to engage my eyes and ears, plus all my other senses so I can be as ready as I can to make the most of my short travel window.

I track down a local “guide”, preferably a photographer who already leads tours of an area. Sometimes this works out and quite honestly, sometimes it does not. But making this effort by itself helps me approach that “insider experience” that is a big part of getting to know a place.

A recent example of this preparation, its value and having a Plan B comes from traveling to Puerto Rico at the beginning of this year. What is Plan B? It is your “go to” plan if Plan A crashes and burns. As a wise photography tour leader put it, after he found out that our planned route to a Maya mural site would run into a road blockade and potentially violent situation, “You don’t hire me for my Plan A, you hire me for being able to come up with a Plan B.” We went another route and even with that came across another demonstration anyway. But eventually we got through and arrived at an alternative major Maya ruin. So, having a Plan B is not a guarantee, but it at least gives you a chance.

Our plan was to spend a week in San Juan and then another week at a beach area north of the capital. I signed up for a photo workshop tour of Old Town San Juan so I could get a quick familiarity with the Old Town first thing in the morning after we arrived. After a long day and night of flying, I rose early, got myself out the door, and warily followed a map and phone navigation to find our meeting place – outside a café near the waterfront. I waited and waited. Then I waited some more. While I was waiting, I saw a parade of people on the way to start their day at their offices.

To my surprise, these were very fashion-conscious folks who could easily fit in any cosmopolitan urban setting anywhere. This was very different from my image of Puerto Rico, which was that it was a third world country, barely recovering from two massive hurricanes and an epicenter for earthquakes that had been shaking the southern part of the country for the last two months. So, there I was, learning right away that there was more to Puerto Rico than I imagined, and it was walking by directly in front of me.

When I finally got through to the photo workshop office, they apologetically told me that because they did not have the minimum number of people booked, they cancelled the tour. After saying, “Hmhmh” to myself a bunch of

times, I walked into the café, ordered a cup of fresh Puerto Rican grown coffee and realized that since “my connection” failed miserably, my best move would be to simply begin my own exploring. The café was a place people stopped at on their way to work to savor their morning coffee, check email, maybe have a first meeting of the day and take in a piece of cake or breakfast plate. It was a show unto itself. The café’s coffee was ground in a massive ancient red coffee processor.

I placed my order in broken Spanish and guessed what the outcome would be. Everyone spoke Spanish there but me, it seemed. That is part of my adventure of being in a Spanish speaking country with barely passible Spanish language skills.

After my morning dose of raw caffeine, I meandered to the waterfront a block away, where the cruise ships dock. Almost magically, this was exactly where I needed to be – at the front door to the Puerto Rico Tourist Board office – which made sense since it is diagonally across from where tourists disembark from their massive cruise ships and desperately traipse over to find out how they can survive on their one shore day in San Juan. The two women holding down the “Welcome” desks were a total pleasure, taking their time to introduce me on how to go about a self-guided walking tour of Old San Juan. Their office’s air-conditioning and the WIFI became all the comforts of home for me.

I told them I was a travel photographer who wanted to do a photo walk through the grab bag of streets that make up Old Town San Juan. They handed me maps, booklets, and at the end of our conversation enthusiastically suggested their favorite and nearby restaurant, which had live jazz piano every night as well as outstanding food.

Now oriented and refreshed, I could cover pretty much everything I would have done had I gone on my morning tour – so, off I went. The island of Puerto Rico was colonized by the Spanish in the 1500’s. It immediately became a target for every other colonial power in the world, as well as roving privateers for centuries to come. To protect the capital of the colony the Spanish built two massive forts over the next three hundred years - and San Juan became a walled city. To see the city, you need to follow those walls. My goal was to find how I could give someone who had not been there a sense of why they would want to be there.

I had talked to Don Giannatti, my photography mentor, before for this trip for his suggestions. He said simply “Take lots of pictures of people.” While I worked the list of usual “postcard ready” sites mapped out in the guides, I looked for an opportunity to shoot people and did just that. Even when there were no obvious opportunities, I would work to make one. I shot lovers on the sea wall who were in no rush to do anything but have their moment together, shopkeepers who were unique as their shops, and kids who were brought by their dad to a one-of-a-kind pigeon park, and on and on.

Many years earlier, the caretakers of this little park, Parque Las Palomas, built walls of pigeonhole apartments where the birds make their homes, going in and out all day long. That is where this photograph was made. The dad in question brought his young daughters to the park. They were now covered with pigeons and enjoying their time immensely. I told the father that I was a photographer and asked if it would be OK if I made some photographs of the girls.

Since he saw that I was a “professional photographer” and all he had was his cell phone camera, my offer to send him some of my images was warmly accepted - and he let the girls know that this was OK. I made a bunch of shots of the girls having their special play time in their special place with their special pigeons. I later sent him photos, and he appreciatively told me they were much better than the ones he had have gotten on his own.

From there, the afternoon went on - going in and out of shops and taking photos of the shopkeepers, until the heat of the day caught up to me. My tired feet told me it was time to go back to our Airbnb to give them and the rest of my body a chunk of R & R.

After that break, at the suggestion of my new tourism friends, we went to Carli’s Fine Bistro for dinner. This is a smallish space with under twenty tables, all of which were reserved for when Carli, who owns the place, sits down at his piano at 8 PM every night. Carli is a pianist of more than local renown, having been the accompanist for the Beach Boys on their tours and inducted into the Puerto Rico Music Hall of Fame. He plays jazz, blues and whatever strikes his fancy. It is his place after all.

The only seating was available was at bar, which turned out to be a much better way to go anyway. We had an easy conversation with our very new friend, the bartender, as he demonstrated the craft of making the restaurant’s signature mojitos. The secret turned out to be how you pound the mint that goes in at the end, giving the drink its distinctive taste. Our dinners, the conversation and the music were all a treat and, and although the day did not start as planned, it turned out to be far better than I could have expected – as all good travel days should be.

And it was people, not things or tourist postcard sites that made the experience one of a kind day. As it turned out, the money for the cancelled photo tour covered our dinner. And the “sense of place” we got for all of that was just perfect!





PHOTO AND STORY  
BY CARLA MCMAHON

## HEROES

When I am asked which one of my images is my favourite, I can undoubtedly choose this one. I made this photo of my daughter 6 years ago. At the time she had just undergone a 2nd bone graft in her femur within the space of 16 months, due to an aneurysmal bone cyst. The second graft was an allograft (a cadaver's fibula was inserted into her femur and held in place by a screw).

After she had the graft, she once again needed to use crutches for 6 weeks, as she could not place any pressure on her leg. This was then followed by 6 months of no sport – no field hockey, no dancing, no horse riding, no tennis, (only swimming was allowed). For a child as active as her this was absolute hell and this second graft occurred a mere 10 months after she had just got back to normal living after the first one.

When she was about halfway into her 6 week stint of crutches, she fell and broke her femur, right next to the graft. The fall happened while she was away on a weekend getaway with one of her school friends and her family. I never felt comfortable letting my daughter go for the weekend getaway in the first place, due to her vulnerability at the time. But my pity for her with the ordeal she had just gone through and being stuck at home got the better of me and I (we) allowed her to go.

Anyway, she fell on the first evening. Not a big fall, she just fell backwards. She was actually standing and not even walking (or hobbling) when it happened. The family downplayed the fall and we only realized the seriousness of it the following day, even though my daughter knew at the time and told me much later that she had heard the bone “crack” as she fell, and she was certain that it was “very bad”. The following morning, after a sleepless night and my gut telling me something was not right, my husband and I drove 2 hours to Arniston, the seaside town where the family was spending the weekend, to collect our daughter.

The moment I saw her lying in bed with tears and panic in her eyes, I knew this was serious. And that image has never left my mind and has imprinted a permanent scar on my heart. She could not move, or even be moved because of the excruciating pain. After at least an hour of tiny, minuscule movements we finally got her into the car and drove her straight to the hospital where her orthopaedic surgeon practiced, mindful of every little turn and bump in the road.

After an x-ray and consultation with her doctor, (who was actually on-route to a family holiday, and saw us while his family waited in the car) he told us that he could not repair the break, as it would require a plate and the area was far too close to her growth plate which would get damaged in the process. If her growth plate got damaged, then her leg would not grow properly and she would have a permanent deformity.

The only option was for it to heal by itself. But this meant that she could not move, at all, for 6 weeks. For 2 weeks she had to be on strict bed rest. We had to use bed pans and bed baths, no movement at all. Once the two weeks of lying in her bed was up, she was able to progress to a wheelchair, for a certain amount of time per day. And that is when I created this image.

The reason that I love this image so much, is partly because I am so grateful that she healed perfectly. especially after her doctor told us how amazed he was by her progress and that he had honestly expected some damage to her growth plate, but mostly because during the whole ordeal from the first bone graft to the second, with all the weeks of crutches, bed rest, wheelchair use and no horse riding or any other sport, this smile never ever left my daughters face. I have said it before, and I will say it again – she is my hero.

She is now sixteen and teenage hormones have set in and I can't say the same for her endless cheerfulness. But she is still my hero.





PHOTO AND STORY  
BY CARMEN BLIKE

## THE IMAGE THAT STAYED

Brandon S.  
6 years old  
2003

It's not often you receive a call for an emergency portrait session. I've had 3 in my career.

Two were for pets about to cross the rainbow bridge.

The studio line rang on a Saturday.

Don't remember if it was morning or afternoon. He had a wiggly tooth and she wanted a full smile of baby teeth. No gaps. No unsightly adult sized teeth he would eventually grow into.

I booked them for Monday morning 7:30 am before he went to school.

"Tell him him to stop playing with it." Yeah – that one.

Early Monday morning! What was I thinking? I was thinking I didn't want to work on Sunday. Back then my consumer portrait studio was M-F and you paid extra for Saturday, closed on Sunday.

During our phone consult, we discussed clothing. The kind of clothing a happy smiley boy could wear.

When I opened the door Monday morning, an excited nervous mother and a shy dressed-for-a-funeral boy came in. What!?!?

This was the test shot while setting up.

Brandon S.  
The Candidate  
2005

There's a lot to learn from entering print competitions. At our local PPA (Professional Photographers of America) affiliate we absorbed the judging and corrective feedback. We had many nationally recognized photographers and it was a bit intimidating to enter prints along with theirs.

It was a time-consuming expensive venture to enter competitions in the 90s. You were judged on the overall impact of the image including the quality of the print, the title and presentation within a 16"x20" area.

It was my ex's idea to start a photography business and he had a competitive streak. Don't ask me why I prepared his prints first and then mine, but the straw came one 2 am. I was too tired to prepare my prints. "That's it! I'm

done! I'm not entering anymore."

Funny - neither did he after that...

Fast forward ten years to 2005. I'm now on my own and the desire to compete creeps in. How to title my sole entry of Brandon's image. Lots of head scratching to come up with 4 clever and now obviously forgettable titles. "Here's my list of candidates." I asked my teenage son for his opinion. "That's it." He said. "Yes, but which one?"

Around and around we went until I figured out, he meant "Candidate".

You're allowed to witness the judging but not the selection of the award winners. What a shocking surprise to be awarded Best of Show. A twinge of vindication ran through me. All those years I had put myself second.

Brandon S.  
I See You  
2015

The second assignment for Project 52 was to write a short descriptive tag line for your work. With several of my favorite prints scattered on my desk, Brandon stared back. In that moment, what I do became clear. "I see you".

Epilogue: Brandon's session was one of my best sales EVER.





PHOTO AND STORY  
BY GREG KINDRED

## THE WHITE WITCH PROJECT

One of the great things most kids have in common are their imaginations. Fueled by books and movies, both my kids loved to play dress-up. Virtually every day my wife and I were greeted by friend or foe, pirate or princess, man or beast. Pretending to be something, or someone else was as common in our house as breakfast.

Family photos were common too, and as the resident photographer, I was reminded frequently to take the shot. Back in those days I had a starter digital DSLR, and knew enough to bang my on-camera flash at these creations—resulting in those “hard” wall shadows, that were sometimes scarier than the made-up creatures I was trying to capture.

In her early teens my daughter was super interested in attending the local Anime convention, and every year there was also a Renaissance festival. In either case full costume was considered mandatory. Face makeup, or glued on elf ears might accompany wide leather belts, laced up boots or fuzzy feline tails. “What are you supposed to be?” was greeted by annoyance, and the shame of even having to be seen with her father.

It wouldn't be surprising to know that by high school Claire showed interest in theater. Plays meant more costumes, although assigned parts were less creative they offered professionally made outfits, and makeup techniques not previously explored. By this time I had developed some real skills as a photographer as well as acquiring enough equipment to be able to produce an image without those nasty shadows.

Claire was often asked to be my test subject while I experimented around with my newly acquired studio strobes. At times patients grew thin for both the subject and the photographer. There is nothing so boring as waiting for dad to re-adjust the lights. But over the years, having a dad with a bunch of “professional gear” was almost considered cool.

After high school my daughter was invited to spend the summer in Phoenix, her high school sweetheart had moved there the year before with his parents. This was new territory for all of us. As exciting as this summer trip was, the tears of homesickness accompanied almost every call. As the summer drew to a close I told Claire I missed our shoots and maybe we should plan something when she returned. I said let's do something more elaborate, let's go all out. I told Claire that maybe we should rent a victorian costume, or something that would be different than anything we had done before.

I had come across a photo of a woman in complete white face makeup and was struck with the look. I told Claire about it and asked if she could do that or should I hire a makeup artist? Claire was liking the idea and offered to do it herself. I think she suggested the words “white witch.” That seemed

interesting, a google search revealed several stunning images, great makeup, great costumes. It was decided. After Claire got home we spent a day at a theatrical supply buying the white face makeup, eyeliner and hair spray. In the days prior to her arrival I had been experimenting with a flowing costume idea — a bunch of fabric, and some chickenwire. Ok, the chickenwire didn't work out.

On the day of the shoot Claire spend almost two hours working on the white face. Then came the mascara and finally hair spay. We were standing outside taking this all in and she said she was going to use black hairspray to paint her arms and hands. This was definitely the big production I had been wanting. I photographed Clare in the studio that day and it was awesome, she was enjoying it as much as me. The previous week I had scouted a thick wooded area and shot several backgrounds I thought would be suitable. We agreed this background would be perfect for the white witch. With the aid of a little photoshop the image was complete.

Claire lives in Phoenix full time now with her husband, the high school sweetheart. This might be the end of the fantasy photoshoots with Claire, life moves on, priorities change, but I will always remember the white witch.





PHOTO AND STORY  
BY DON GIANNATTI

## “I NEED FOOD”

I was talking, well actually shouting, to myself over the rumble of the big twin engine below me. Even at cruising speed the Cobra pipes did their thing and let it be known that I was coming. Or going, depending on which way you were situated to the road.

It had been about 4 hours since I started across the Wyoming prairie. One tiny, two-lane road after another. The rain a few hours earlier had left patches of water along the sides, and big wet spots on the road.

“I trusted you Google...”, I yelled in the wind, “and all I get is pavement and nothingness. And I am hungry, dammit!”

That really wasn't true, I knew that eventually I would hit the interstate and there was a reasonably good-sized, but still small town a few miles from the junction.

“Something Springs”... whatever. It wasn't important enough to remember, I just kept riding and hoped I'd find someplace to stop, have a bite and check out what was happening in the world while I was riding over long, straight roads.

Maybe I would spend a few minutes walking around the little town – take a few photos. Or just pack up and head out for the little Utah town I was going to be spending the night in.

I still had a ways to go to get to the scheduled evening stop.

The road in front of me was long and straight, and although it had a large enough shoulder to pull off on, there was nothing else as far as I could see. Every once in a while there would be a ranch road heading off to north or south, but I couldn't see where it would end up.

Two lanes of dirt and brush.

Just Wyoming... lonely, vast, and incredibly, heartbreakingly beautiful.

And I bet it would even be more beautiful if I wasn't so damn hungry.

A small rise appears in front of me and as I ride to the top I get a very familiar scene... at least 15 more miles of straight on road, stripe in the middle, and not even a hint of a curve.

“Aargh...” I shouted and pulled off to the wide shoulder to take a break. I knew I had something I could grab in the trunk, so I got off the bike, opened it up, and grabbed the bag of chips.

I sat on the bike with my bottle of water, handful of Frito's, and just listened to the breeze as it softly swirled around me making just a bit of sound in the brush.

I ride solo. Alone.

I ride for moments like this.

I ride for the experience of being alone, in a place I have never been, and to sit quietly and just listen.

The bike below me makes popping noises as the engine begins to cool. It is a sound I am well familiar with, and it reminds me to check the oil and coolant.

After a few minutes I realized something that gave me a kind of a chill... in the hour that I had been riding on this particular piece of asphalt, and the 10 or so minutes I had been sitting there, I had seen no other cars, bikes, or anyone.

I walked a couple of dozen yards west - up to the crest of the hill and looked at the road I had just traveled. Not a car in sight. I turned around and looked east and the same nothingness ahead.

All I could mutter was "cool".

Deciding to embrace my solitude and just have fun riding the open road with no cars or trucks or people to get in my way, I packed up the trunk, took a few shots of the bike, and headed out for the Interstate.

About 20 miles on, there was an incredible bluff and valley, and the previous straight road became a set of switchbacks and twisties that definitely keep you on your toes. At the bottom of the cliff, I rode up the entrance to the freeway with a groan.

I hate freeways. I hate the speed, the wind, and the trucks that can blow you into another lane when you pass them - or they pass you.

But mostly I hate them because they are ugly. Devoid of culture, their design is to get you to somewhere from somewhere else. And I want to enjoy the journey, not rush through it at 85 miles per hour.

In a few miles the town appeared north of the freeway about a mile or so off the road and I took the exit heading for the tall signs and lights. The sky was getting dark again, but I knew I would be in town before the rain let loose.

That's when I saw them.

That big set of Golden Arches.

Now to be honest, I rarely eat there, but after that bag of Frito's and a bottle of water, the idea of a burger seemed like a good one, and McDonald's has free WiFi so I could 'check in' with the wife and friends.

I swung the big bike to the left and rode right up next to the arches. They seemed to be reaching for the sky in some sort of strange gesture to be seen.

At that point I noticed was the empty parking lot, the second was the 'closed for remodeling' sign on the door.

More isolation?

No Wi-Fi?

No worries, though.

I ended up having lunch at a great little Mexican food place with killer Tacos Carbones.

And great tacos are, of course, the best part of the journey.



PHOTO BY ALEX BAKER | STORY BY JOE COSENTINO

## GRANDFATHER DAYS

At my stage in life, this photograph hits home. I am not a grandfather yet, but that is the next significant milestone in my life and many others. We began as kids, and when I was a kid, my Grandparents seemed old, but in actuality he was my age. My grandfather was from the old country (Italy), and when I was young, he owned and operated a small corner grocery store, seven days a week Sunday was after church to 5pm.

My grandmother took care of the house. But I remember they always would take time out of their day to show the grandkids parts of their life that were important to them. My grandfather would take us into his garden and teach us how he grew his vegetables and how to keep the critters out. My grandmother would show us how to make cavatelli, gnocchi, and other Italian goodies.

No matter how busy they were there was time to spend with us.

As I write this, I am waiting for my grandfather days to start. I know it is still a ways off, but I can wait. The big difference between the 1950s and early '60s is people stayed closer to home, and everyone was more rooted in tradition.

I can see my grandfather days being more like what Alex has shown here in her photograph. We tend to be more on the go nowadays and more spread out than ever.

My Son is in Tampa, and My daughter is in Central Pennsylvania, so I am looking forward to feeling young days again and having grandchildren to spoil and play with.





PHOTO BY JOE COSENTIONO | STORY BY GREG REEVES

## “THEN LEAVE IT THERE”

I pulled myself up to the next level. I had nearly over-exerted as evidenced by my elevated heart rate, breathing and the fountain of perspiration cruising past my brow to burn my eyes. I leaned over and put a hand on each knee and sucked as much oxygen out of the air as I could. It was hot and dry and dusty; it tasted old, so I closed my mouth and turned all breathing duties over to my nose.

When my survival systems relaxed some and returned to more normal rates, I stood and leaned against the vertical. This journey would be so much easier if I were not dragging all this baggage with me . . .

“Then leave it there!” This perfectly sensible bit of advice came from both everywhere and nowhere. I looked around, trying to find the source, but it remained elusive. I could not identify the origin of the words, so I surmised that there was nothing spoken.

It appeared that the next leg of my journey continued in a single direction but had veered from the path I had just followed. This is a junction, then. Why, if it is a junction, is there only one way to go?

Why did I think junction when it is more of a turn? Do I understand the difference between the two? I don't know . . . maybe not.

I faced the unknown, seeming to be the only direction available. It is well defined with right angles of light and shadow. I peer down the pattern to a possible end or junction, then slowly drag my eyes back to my feet. In that slow drag I see the age of the walls and blackness between the steps. I look down at my feet and cannot see that I am standing on anything; it appears that I am standing on the inky shadow that is between the lighted steps before me.

Panicked, I jerk my head up to see if I am falling, to orient myself and to ready for an abrupt stop. I am not falling. I reach out with my toe to test the solid that is illuminated by the light. I am not balanced with my load and place my hand on the wall to steady myself.

I watch as the tip of my foot disappears into the pool of luminance. There is no ripple, no disturbance and no solid footing. There is just a line running across a portion of my foot; one side revealing the top part still attached to my leg and the other side secreted it from view. I draw my foot back slowly, bumping my heel on the shadow and find firm footing on . . . nothing.

“Leap to the next nothing and keep your gaze turned up! Your eyes will show you where you want to be and will betray you with each step! Eyes up!”

Decision time. Where do I put my trust and faith? I have already received the gift of revelation that what I see is not the same as what is. I have also received the gift of the Voice of the unknown supporting my betrayal of sight.

I take that first leap with my head high and eyes on the point at the end of the leading lines, aiming to miss the light and land in the shadow. I mostly missed but caught the darkness with my fingers and dangled in the light. It was a blinding light, illuminating nothing. I struggled until I found myself standing again on the firm nothing between the revealed.

“Put the baggage down,” said the Voice. “You need none of it.”

“I don’t know how.” I dropped my eyes again and focused on the next patch of light. “I don’t know how.”



PHOTO BY JAY CHATKEL | STORY BY CARMEN BLIKE

## BEST FRIENDS FOREVER

I remember the summer before we entered 3rd grade. Maria and I shared a common experience - living in two worlds. I suppose all immigrant children feel this way. At home we ate rice and beans and did not listen to Walter Cronkite on the CBS Evening News. At school we learned to read from books with Dick and Jane that lived in houses with green lawns. We lived in tenements in the South Bronx. Double parking was legal...in our eyes.

Maria's family had a car.

Besides the parish priests, nobody I knew had one. They were going to the beach...for several days.

I was invited!

Back then I didn't understand parents taking off from work for leisure. What is this thing vacation? You only took off from work when you were sick. My single working mother started her job at 6:30am but I digress.

Five kids, two adults in a Mercury Comet and it wasn't even a station wagon. It seemed like forever before we arrived at a small rundown bungalow in Atlantic City. When you're a kid everything takes forever. We weren't far from the beach. It was, however, a bit of a hike for a pair of 8-year olds to get to the good boardwalk rides.

For the first family beach outing, her mother packed a small picnic. Could've fed an army. We had our towels, bathing suits under our shorts. Neither of us had been in the ocean...ever. Our bathing suits having only tasted chlorine.

I was afraid of the waves and didn't go in. So was Maria. We played at the edge in the sand. If we wanted to go to the bathroom we walked back to the bungalow. No concession stands or public restrooms where we were. Every once in a while, a rogue wave would wipe out our budding works of art. Afterward her parents deemed we could go without supervision to the beach but not the ultra-cool boardwalk rides.

Maria and I met at a church picnic. I couldn't open a spicket. It was a pipe sticking out of the ground with a slightly rusty handle. She came to the rescue. We were 3, our birthdays two days apart. She's wearing a frilly Sunday dress with black patent leather shoes and I had crisply ironed capris, white socks and sandals. We have a black&white picture. There's proof. In elementary school, through the years, we ping-ponged the top student position in the class.

As our interests changed, we slowly parted ways through high school and



college. Our relationship remained though as we were bridesmaids at each other's weddings. Just recently, a scant few weeks ago, she sent me the gold reference for getting old – a copy of her Medicare card.

Near the end of that Jersey shore vacation, one afternoon heat overcame our fear.

We looked at each other.

An unspoken consensus.

We stepped back, gleefully holding hands.

We ran in.



PHOTO BY CARMEN BLIKE | STORY BY CARLA MCMAHON

## THE MEAL

She stared intently at the old man as he studied her face while making each deliberate pencil stroke. She wondered how much he knew about her. Did he know as much about her as she knew about him? She had watched the man for some time now and had seen how he made a little bit of money drawing portraits for willing passers-by.

He worked for his living, he earned his money, he provided a service, she respected that. Not like her, who begged or like Jacob, who stole. She had noticed that for the past few days the man hadn't had any customers. The streets were quieter and colder than usual and people were keeping their distance from each other. She had felt the effect too, as she made barely enough, each day, for her and Jacob to survive.

Luckily she had eaten a good meal last night. The manager of the diner had left out some scraps for her. As he often did, when he took the bins out, but only on the nights that the owner wasn't there. The owner didn't approve of the street kids hanging around his establishment. It was bad for business and it made his well-off customers feel uncomfortable. She understood and stayed away, watching from a distance just in case the owner left early and the manager could sneak out some leftovers.

Last night she had shared her bounty with Jacob, so she knew Jacob had eaten too. She also knew that if the man didn't work he didn't eat. And that left a pain in her heart that was far worse than the pain from the beating that she would get from Jacob for coming "home" empty handed. She was grateful that the Blakely brothers had moved on to another bridge further downtown, as they would have given her a far worse beating than Jacob ever could.

Once the man had finished her portrait, he gave her a slight smile as he handed it to her. She took it thankfully and reached down into the pocket of her oversized trousers. The ones she had received from the social worker last year. They were still way too big for her and she kept them up with a piece of hessian, that she had found in the supermarket's bin area.

She grabbed all the coins in her pocket and proudly handed them to the man. With tears in his eyes, he shook his head slowly and pushed her hand away. He knew. Just as she had been watching him, he had been watching her too.

She slowly walked away, distraught that she could not help the man but also a little thankful that she had escaped a beating from Jacob. She walked passed the bakery, and watched as the baker packed up for the evening, after trying to sell the last of his baked goods at half price before closing his doors. Everyone was battling to make ends meet these days. She had an idea. She grabbed her coins and handed them to the baker in exchange

for the last loaf of bread. She sprinted back up to the alley where the man was slowly walking away, with his broken easel under his one arm and a tattered plastic bag in the other. She softly touched the man's hand. It was so soft it almost wasn't even a touch at all. But he felt it, and stopped in his tracks and looked down at her.

She broke the loaf in half and put one half into her pocket, for Jacob. The other half she handed to the man. She was nervous, she knew he was a proud man and didn't accept handouts easily. She stared at him, waiting, wishing for him to take the bread. He slowly sat down on the curb and beckoned for her to sit next to him. She did, and he took the half loaf from her hand, broke it into another half and handed one piece to her as he bit eagerly into the other.

And there they sat, two strangers, generations apart, with two different stories, sharing a meal, sharing a moment, both trying to survive these difficult times.





PHOTO AND STORY  
BY SIVANI BOXALL

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SWEETS

In South Africa, most restaurants give you individually wrapped mints when they bring you your bill. As a child I ate them all, as a teen I picked out my favourites, at some point I started leaving them behind. These days I collect them. Let me tell you why.

A few years ago, I heard one could do tours of some of the townships in South Africa. I thought it was despicable to go into a township and gawk at the poor as if poverty were some kind of an attraction, but I was, as always, also curious.

The next time I was in Cape Town, I stayed at my favourite hotel and while driving to the Waterfront I asked the shuttle driver, whom I knew quite well from my previous visits, what he thought about the tours. I didn't expect such a passionate answer.

He was all for it, urging me to go. He said, it was good for people to see how the government made people live. He said that he too lives in a township and how could things get better if nobody knew how bad they were? He said that the money from the tours goes to support the local community and that the community agrees on what to show. The community liked people coming in and seeing their world.

That trip I was travelling with two friends from Switzerland and after some research we booked a township tour. To my surprise, most of the people we saw were happy to see us. They smiled, waved and initiated conversations. They were just as interested in us and our lives as we were in theirs. The people who opened their homes for the tours were proud to show us how they lived, and I was incredibly impressed to see how tidy and clean even the smallest shack was. Some had roofs made of pieces of corrugated iron, wooden planks and even cardboard boxes, most floors were dirt but there wasn't a spec of dust on any of the surfaces and everything was neatly packed away on wonky bookshelves, in cabinets and cupboards which looked like they'd been scavenged from somewhere.

It was shocking to see the conditions they lived in and yet, seeing that there were different levels of poverty and that there are even some very nice houses in the middle of the township was eye-opening. Some people don't strive to leave the township, they strive for one of the better homes in the township.

It was a cold September day, and everyone was bundled up warmly yet many of the children were running around barefoot. We were walking past of the few communal taps when a little girl of about seven asked me for a sweet. I was taken aback, I hadn't even considered bringing anything for the people I'd see.

Frantically digging around in my bag and pockets I found one single sweet. The problem was the much smaller girl which had appeared next to the first. I didn't know what to do so I decided to be honest.

I said, "I only have one sweet and there are two of you. I can't give it to you because it wouldn't be fair to your friend." The older girl got very excited and said that they would share. Share? I couldn't imagine how they would share a hard mint but they were both so excited that I gave it to them. They took it carefully, looked up at me and said thank you very politely before running off together.

Minutes later I turned a corner and my heart just broke. I doubt I'll ever forget what I saw next. There they were, the two little girls, standing in a tight huddle with a few other little girls. The younger one I'd met spat something into her hand and held it out, another girl took it from her and popped it into her own mouth.

One by one, every little girl that was there got to suck on the sweet, spat it out after a very short time and passed it on. There was no shouting or pushing, not one child kept for too long. They each waited their turn, happy and excited to have a chance at tasting the sweet. It was disgusting in a way, all I could think about were germs but it was incredibly humbling to learn about sharing from these little girls who didn't try to keep it to themselves but went and found their friends so that they could all share the candy.

Since then, I collect the sweets. When I see children begging in South Africa, I give them a sweet. Last year, I did a tour of Soweto, the largest township in South Africa with over 1,2 Million inhabitants. It was absolutely fascinating and the children I encountered were thrilled with my stash of sweets.

I cannot make their lives better. I don't have the resources to pay for their school uniforms so that they can attend school. I cannot teach them not to eat the fast food they find in the trash which makes them sick nor can I convince their government to build public toilets for them but I can make them smile by giving them a sweet.





PHOTO BY JOE COSENTINO | STORY BY JAY CHATZKEL

## GETTING THE PERFECT SHOT

Joanna joined her photography club for a photo walk at the Onondaga County regional “art park” for what passed as a spring morning in that part of the world. “We have to be out there early for the morning golden light,” they said. Photographers being photographers, the conversation soon shifted to the “usual suspects”: shapes, textures, tones, lighting, atmospherics, cameras and lenses, and in the end – what might be a bit different to shoot in this rural setting.

At that point, the back and forth went a bit deeper: What were they looking at, where did it come from, how did it get to be quite like this? After a cursory walkabout, they came across a cluster of what first appeared to be a pile of branches and roots of a tree. But there was a question: Was it all one tree or was it a coming together of gnarled branches and roots from a number of trees? It occurred to Joanna: does any of that matter really? For her, the point was to get the shot.

What fascinated her was the number of layers to look in the cluster. She stopped to spend some time with it, examining the gamut of dimensions of size, angle, time of day, looking up, down or level at them and on and on. Over the next twenty minutes time slipped by and Joanna found herself moving closer and closer for a better look.

She mused that a sepia cast could evoke a softness in tone, as well as a sense that this twisted bunch had a story that went back in time, possibly well before our time, but also was the skeleton of a story that could continue on with no discernible end.

While Joanne was absorbed in her thoughts her group continued on its way. The original Covid-19 rule of “six feet for social distancing” quickly went to a spread of 20, then 40 then 100 feet apart. Group members meandered towards the views or sites that attracted them most, stopping to fixate on the subjects that were special to them.

Joanna’s thought her special place was the simple one – a knotted clump of wood tree limbs and roots – or that’s what it first seemed. But a keener look revealed a complex array of pieces weaving in and out of one another, then looping back to twist and turn again and again becoming a true and mysterious jumble.

This image was both intensely detailed and distinctive, all at the same time. At the same time there was an extensive dynamic taking place that shaped what how she experienced this tangle, seeing how it reconfigured incrementally over time. Then came the insight - rather than being a fixed object, its wavelike transition became as much of its reality over time as was the apparent solidity of its roots/branches.



Now textures and shadows took on a life of their own. Joanna looked at the heap this way or that, under different sets of lighting conditions and different times of day. What a difference each element came to make up in this mashup now versus how it all would be at any other hour of the day or night.

Joanna began to sense that these discrete areas were boxes within boxes, all there for her photographer's eye to unpack: the light here, the shadow there, the hardness of one area and the organic relatedness of another. And even this did not even take into account ranges of textures, tones and shapes.

But what struck Joanna to take the time to stop, examine this array and how the light reflected of it? She began to grasp that this physical clump of stuff was also an abstract, with something uncommon and not just an arbitrary pile of different size tree parts. But what is that something?

At that point, Joanna decided to stop her world, to give herself time for experiment in seeing it from every perspectives she could think of. Each perspective yielded a just enough variation in reality. She noticed that what was happening was that the flow of her thoughts was now a search for the special nature of what lay in front of her.

So, Joanne came nearer, examining each bit and piece as it came more tightly into view. She began to wonder about something that she had been tossing about for some time: Is the goal to capture what ever was in front of her or to more simply, reflect on it?

As she thought about it, the word capture now seemed to take on the character of being an arrogant illusion. Her thinking had shifted. She felt she couldn't really capture it, since even thought it appeared inanimate, the cluster evoked a feeling of being alive and ever changing. Her new stance began to be: Engage with it and go with whatever images emerged.

But this is where things went wrong, terribly wrong. As Joanna pivoted closer she felt a magnetism coming from the cluster of wood, pulling her towards it. The more it drew her, the more her excitement and intrigue grew. It became an uneven battle as the wrangle of wood became an ever more powerful force.

Joanna's last act was to take the picture above. It was the image she had come to seek, her perfect image. With it, she had actually made contact with what was on the other side. Now, in less than a moment things would move from a relation of subject and observer, to becoming a relation between subject and subject. Each both became part of the other.

Joanna felt herself slip into the wood and disappear, never to be seen again.

Her colleagues eventually came back to look for her. They tracked her footprints back to the wood clump. In fact, that is where they found her camera with the final frame in it. Park rangers and volunteers swarmed the area but were not able to find a trace of Joanna either. Once or twice they thought they heard sounds coming from within the wood, but in the end their sniffer dogs could not detect anything, and they came to think it may have been the wind or passing animal.

Joanna was simply gone, but her photograph stayed behind. In tribute, her colleagues entered it into the state photography competition, and it was awarded the grand prize. The photo club accepted it in Joanna's honor. Afterwards they brought the award out to the county park, the last place anyone had seen her. As they approached the wood, some felt a murmur of satisfaction coming from it. Joanna had gotten her shot after all. The group got permission from the county to erect a small plaque there.

So, when you go to the county park looking for that perfect shot and come across the wrangle of wood, think about it. But do be careful not to come too close!



PHOTO BY GREG REEVES | STORY BY STEFANIE SPENCER

#### “WHAT WILL REMAIN?”

As spring arrives, the hillsides and softly rising mountain slopes are filled with bright yellow and orange poppies. They beam so happily as the days begin to warm. It's easy to be swept away into their hopefulness of the coming summer and the joy they seem to display. Seeing the trees budding and the birds building their nests, it feels like anything is possible with the only slightest effort.

Then as summer starts to beam down with an intense heat, the struggle begins as even small tasks seem to take more energy. As the days grow longer, the flowers diminish and the green fields turn golden brown, but the hope of a great year remains.

In a moment, the beauty of the fields turns into terror as they are consumed in blazes of red, while billows of smoke and an otherworldly orange glow fill the skies. The inside of the house begins to smell like a campfire, and outside it's becoming hard to breath. Is it coming even closer?

Thoughts and questions of what is important start to flood my mind. What will remain after this devastation? As disbelief is replaced by fear, I am almost paralyzed considering what I must do. Wanting to hide, but knowing we must push through, as I draw the curtain back to see the flames even closer. In frustration I shout, “Why aren't all the valuables in one place?” But after a moment of reflection, I'm not even sure what the valuables are. Hopelessness and anxiety overcome me, but I know we must fight for our lives.

As the fire passes through, taking with it the parts of life that we must relinquish, only offering in return a new tomorrow. These events are out of our control, and many material things which seemed important are now only distractions. What is the foundation that my life is built upon? What hope do I have for the future? What will next spring's flowers bring? Sifting through the broken pieces and rubble, charred black and melted, what will remain?



PHOTO BY GREG REEVES | STORY BY ALEX BAKER

## SERVING COFFEE AT THE TOP OF THE WORLD

It was one of those crisp bright days, when the sea fog lifted long enough to be able to see the mountains on the mainland across The Minch. The air was cool, and a song lilted on the radio in the warm cafe where Alison spent most of her time, serving the locals what they described as ‘the best cup of coffee North of Stornoway’.

To be fair that wasn’t too difficult given that it was probably the only fresh coffee North of Stornoway, but out here the locals liked to stake a claim on everything. It helped set them apart from the droves of tourists and ‘influencers’ that swept through every summer. It had been a day much like today when Alison had first wandered into the small fishing village, with nothing more than her guitar, a suitcase and a dream.

She was just a young woman then. Too idealistic and romantic to know what life was really about, to know that when times were hard a pretty voice and a middle eight probably weren’t going to get you far, but she was in love with the idea of being a singer-songwriter. She’d travelled North for the summer back in 1998, looking for, well, something. She thought she knew back then, now she wasn’t so certain.

She’d completed her first year of her undergrad degree at the Scottish Academy with a bittersweet feeling. Sure, she loved studying music, but the classical side just wasn’t quite doing it for her. There was so much structure, so many pointless lectures on music history and boring old dead white men.

Music should be alive, Alison always felt, and where better to find it than in the folk traditions themselves? The music seamlessly weaving itself around people’s lives and livelihoods, encapsulating both the mundane and the divine.

And of course there was Brendan. A tall-ish slightly enigmatic post-grad student, who, after a few months of flirting invited her to visit him at his parents that summer on the Isle of Skye.

They’d travelled together from Glasgow across on the ferry in his beat-up camper van. Alison remembered it was the same color as the choppy sea, a patchwork of rust barely holding it together. The idea was that they would start in Skye, then take the boat to the Outer Hebrides for a few weeks. They would work in various b and b’s, play sessions in the bars at night and sleep in the camper.

Of course it hadn’t quite turned out that way. As was becoming common, they’d argued, and Brendan had stormed out of the van saying he was going for a walk. After he never returned that night, Alison packed up her things and left the camper van at first light with her guitar on her back.



As she walked up the road, the handle of the old suitcase cut into the palm of her hand, but she was too angry and upset to care. Never again, she thought, would she waste her life on such a complete prick. But she also wasn't ready to return home to her parents on the mainland. So she hitched a ride North with a middle aged nurse and ended up here.

The door to the cafe opened with a cheerful tinkle of the bell, and Alison was reawakened back to reality. That was so long ago, she thought, and she'd always meant to return to the mainland. But up here, at the top of the world, time slowed down and anything was possible. She was where she was supposed to be, serving the best cup of coffee North of Stornaway.



PHOTO BY CARLA MCMAHON | STORY BY GREG KINDRED

#### ONE EVENING LAST SUMMER

It happened here, last September. They did a good job cleaning up and rebuilding this kitchen but I still see the stain, the tragedy that happened that Thursday evening will remain seared in my mind forever. Joe and Thea Wilson were home, they had just finished dinner. Thea had been loading the dishwasher, the glass of wine she was drinking was found on the counter half full. Joe was sitting at the table, pap and vleis were in two bowls on the table. His iPad was found on the floor with a news story about Radovan Krejcir, the notorious gangster. I wondered if that was a clue to what happened here? I arrived shortly after 9 p.m. the front door was open. The jam around the door was splintered, it had clearly been forced. The forensics team had been there a couple of hours. I stood in the doorway of the kitchen looking at the carnage. There were shell casings all over the floor—136 bullet holes were found sprayed across three walls. Thea was on the floor between the island and the sink, blood all over the white counters. The coroner later said she had been shot by 18 rounds. Joe had been duct-taped to the chair both hands had been cut off at the wrists and his cause of death was a single bullet to the back of his head. Somebody needed information and was willing to go to any extent to extract it. Who would do this? What could Joe have been involved in to warrant this savage execution? The Wilson's had lived in the wealthy neighborhood Higgovale in Cape Town for 10 years. Joe worked for Rofor Imports and Exports. Neither Joe or Thea had ever been arrested. They had been married for 30 years and never had kids. After more than six months we have no solid leads. The team investigating these murders has been reassigned to two new drug related murders down near the docks. I still wake up in the middle of the night with one thought, why?

# Photographers

## Writing on Photographs

Stories written about images taken by the writers or stories about other photographer's images.

By the members of my (Don Giannatti) Mentorship Group.

I am thrilled to present these great short stories and original images.

Featuring the photographs and writing of:

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