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# The World Through Young Eyes: A Photo/Essay Exploration of How Children Perceive Their Environment in the Modern Day

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**The World Through Young Eyes:**  
**A Photo/Essay Exploration of How Children**  
**Perceive Their Environment in the Modern Day**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors

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Honors Capstone Project in Photography

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## Abstract

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My Capstone project is an exploration of how children perceive their environment. This exploration stems from my curiosity to know what it would have been like to grow up in a different part of the world. This analysis was executed through the mediums of both photography and writing.

Implementing the use of e-mail communication via the Internet, I got in contact with fifth grade teachers from Overseas Schools in countries across the world. The seven countries currently represented in this project are Iceland, Poland, Greece, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Japan and the United States of America. Additionally, studies are currently in the process of being conducted in Thailand, Burkina Faso, and Peru.

In coordination with the teachers located in each of these countries, I sent a package with one-time use cameras, as well as other necessary materials and a detailed set of instructions outlining how the project should be carried out. After obtaining permission from a parent/guardian, each child was given a camera and instructed to take photographs documenting his or her life. Exactly what elements to record were not specified; the child was open to interpret this prompt as he/she may.

After taking all available photographs with the camera, the child was then instructed to return the camera to the teacher and, following a provided outline, write an essay providing some information about themselves as well as insight into what they had photographed. After all students completed these steps, the teacher mailed the package back to me in the United States.

Upon receipt of the packages, I reviewed all of the photographs and essays. These materials were then made into a website which can be viewed at [thecameraproject.com](http://thecameraproject.com). The implementation of the data into a website allows the data to act as an educational tool for both the students and the world.

In essence, my project accentuates the beauty of the world that connects us to one another, a beauty that is deep and surpasses the realm of aesthetics. I have found that children see the world with purity and innocence. It also serves as a reminder that, despite cultural nuances, we are all so similar – accentuating the importance of experience and human contact. As such, the increased opportunities for this human connection, in light of the interconnectedness of contemporary society, should be continually acknowledged, appreciated and explored.

## Table of Contents

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Reflective Essay	8
Sources Consulted	22
Appendix	23
Written Capstone Summary	24

## Reflective Essay

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Upon receiving a Crown Scholar grant from the Honors program in the spring of 2008, which made this project financially feasible, I spent a lot of time contemplating exactly how I was going to logistically cultivate the project into existence. At this point, all I had was a copy of the proposal I had submitted to honors for the grant consideration in my hand and the beginnings of an idea ~~sitting~~ within my head. Over the next year, I found that actually enacting my ideas and working to complete my project would be a trying experience, and only time would show how much I would change and grow with this experience.

I began to prepare myself mentally before delving into the project. As a student of Buddhism, I understood the importance of being mentally sound, stable and balanced before undertaking such an all-encompassing project. I believe that without recognizing the importance of a harmonious state of mind and well being at this early stage of the project, the likelihood that I could be detoured from my ultimate goal, or dissuaded by setbacks, would increase significantly. Gaining this awareness of body and mind in preparation for the journey on which I was about to embark established an energy and awareness necessary to effectively carry out the project. Upon reaching a meditative state of mind, I set the ball in motion and truly began researching every avenue of possibility I could think of that could potentially contribute to a successful final project.

There was one major concern regarding the reality of the project. It was wonderful that I had secured the funds to send cameras to children in a variety of countries across the world; however, I had yet to come up with a way to actually get in touch with the children. This connection was the most critical aspect of my project. As I worked through this problem, it became increasingly clear to me just how critical human connections are and how much they should be valued in their delicacy.

I found myself at an important crossroads. I considered many ways of getting in contact with the children who would take the photographs, and all of the options I came up with involved locating the participants via the Internet. But I had to be smart about it. I asked myself, if I were to send a box of cameras to a place half way across the world, what would be the likelihood that I would actually receive these cameras back? There would be no way for me to enforce this return; I would be at the mercy of those who held the cameras in their possession. I knew I would have to trust the people with whom I was interacting, for I would not be able to travel to each country physically to deliver and/or retrieve the cameras and materials myself. In short, I had to think logically and channel the cameras through a credible and reliable source.

This step, determining how I would actually locate reliable people to distribute and return cameras, consumed weeks of my summer. I was frustrated and confused about how I was going to make it work. One day, as I was scouring the internet for possibilities, I happened upon the United States Department of State website. This webpage appeared to me there on the screen like a mirage of

an ocean upon the horizon of a desert--only this was no mirage. I couldn't believe my eyes. Right there in front of me was my solution staring me square in the eyes. It was a list of United States Overseas Schools around the world, complete with links to many of the schools' websites.

These Overseas Schools, which educate young United States citizens whose families are living abroad as well as students native to that area, would be the perfect solution for participants in my project. Immediately I realized the added value of using Overseas Schools for my work. The concept of the Overseas School adds an interesting dimension to my project because many of these students would have an American frame of reference, similar to my own as a child, to draw from and compare to when completing the project. It also worked out well for the sheer fact that, as an American Overseas School, the primary language spoken would be English, giving all parties involved--myself, the teachers, and the children--a viable way to communicate with one another. In these Overseas Schools I had found my answer and I used this avenue to recruit the help of grade five teachers across the world.

Accessing Overseas Schools as the means of contact was much easier said than done. After I had determined that this would be the way in which I would reach out to the fifth grade students, I spent weeks searching through the websites of these Overseas schools, looking for people to contact via e-mail message. At the time, it did not seem like a difficult thing to do--send an e-mail and wait for a response; however, in reality it was a pain-staking process. Upon drafting a letter that outlined the project's aims and requirements and sending it to teachers and



principals of the schools that I wished to pursue, I found myself at the mercy of those who I had contacted as I waited for them to get back to me. This process proved tiresome because, expectedly, many schools overlooked my initial contact.

Seeing how people responded to my contact was, in itself, an interesting social experiment. A majority of the schools I contacted failed to respond at all. Some schools or teachers e-mailed me back with questions or said that they had forwarded my initial e-mail to the correct individuals. Because of the many unresponsive individuals, it became all the more special when a few people e-mailed me back excited and impassioned at the prospect of participating in my project. I believed I would be able to trust these people straight away because of their implied dedication and commitment to the idea behind the project, and this was just what I was looking for.

Looking back on it now, I was very fortunate to have located such solid contacts in a multitude of countries. At the onset of the project I aimed to get at least one teacher I felt I could trust as a contact on every continent of the world. As I soon realized Antarctica was out of the question, I focused my attention on the six continents of North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Australia and Africa. I set out trying to include a multitude sites because I believed that continental divisions in culture and lifestyle would be really interesting to explore. I felt that having an expansive geographical reach would increase and enhance the educational implications of the world for the children as well.

In determining which locations I would contact within these six continents, I oft relied on my intuition and personal experiences to serve as a

guiding compass. I believe in following your heart and letting things unfold organically whenever possible, and I feel that my work reflects these principles. For example, I was set on securing the participation of Poland in my work because I am fifty percent Polish and have always wondered how my life would be different had I grown up there instead of in the United States. I was drawn to Iceland because the band Sigur Ros, a very important musical influence in my life, comes from Iceland. When I was living in England during the summer of 2007, I met a girl I cherish to this day as one of my dear friends who grew up in Greece and often spoke to me about its flourishing beauty and culture. For this reason I worked hard to find a contact in Greece. I chose Los Angeles because a boy I once loved, and love still, left Syracuse University and moved to Los Angeles last summer to work in the television industry. I pursued Lebanon because I have always dreamed of traveling to Beirut. Japan was added to the mix because I have followed its technological developments in the field of robotics and artificial intelligence for a number of years. Finally, I chose Sri Lanka, as I am a student and practitioner of the Buddhist roots of the nation. I feel inexplicably linked to each of these places through an invisible umbilical cord. It was the fusion of personal sentiment and magnetism that drew me to these places in the larger spectrum of trying to cover each continent.

Admittedly, to many people these connections, the attractions to these places, may seem nonsensical, trivial, overtly romanticized, even contrived. Regardless, I feel very strongly that people can be physically and/or spiritually pulled toward places and things for reasons we may not understand. In their own

small way, each of these places has had an influence on my life and added to the person that I embody today. These unexplainable feelings of connection to a place can only be described as magnetic.

Within my project, forces of magnetism seemed to be at work on a variety of levels. This idea of magnetism is embodied in the fact that I was initially drawn to specific places. From there I sent out a signal via e-mail to those places and by chance several people in each of those places felt the same at that moment in time and space. These persons must have felt magnetically drawn to me or my idea in some way because they responded to my message – therefore completing the divine circle of contact and forever linking us to one another through the solidification of the chain of human contact and search for meaning.

As I became aware of my connections with other living, breathing human beings through the internet, I truly felt as if my project was progressing. Of course, I continued to search for additional places to engage with, but I now began sending boxes and instructions, bringing the project from the mere virtual world to a tangible world.

I sent out boxes and waited. Waited for word that the packages had arrived. Waited for word that the parents had given consent, for word the cameras had been shot and collected and the essays written. Waited for word the box had been sent back and then waited as the mail system took its course. The concept of waiting and the passage of time were sewn into the fundamental fabric of my project. I found that this waiting closely mirrored what I have learned in my studies of Buddhism. I had to maintain a certain level of meditative

contemplation in order to stay focused on the outcome of the project and to gain the ability to move through the necessary steps with patience and diligence.

This level of patience was also very helpful in working through the obstacles that appeared on the path to completion. Besides the problem with determining how to find people to connect with, there were many other situations that had to be dealt with. For one, I found myself delayed in sending out the packages of cameras and supplies due to two pressing issues.

The first of these issues was figuring out how to send the cameras without the film being ruined in transit by an x-ray machine. In order to work through this problem I phoned representatives at Kodak to gain insight into the issue. As a precautionary measure, I also marked the boxes extensively with the label 'Do not x-ray: unprocessed film,' researched more options online, and largely hoped for the best.

The second issue I had to work through prior to shipping was filling out the extensive paperwork to be reviewed by the Office of Research Integrity and Protections at Syracuse University. I had to go through this channel because I was interacting with human subjects. Typically research that involves the participation of people needs to be reviewed to ensure that the contact is ethical and non-invasive. After completing this paperwork and meeting with officials at this office, my case was reviewed by the Research Integrity and Protections Department (IRB). I lost two weeks of time as I waited for IRB to review my proposal and contact me with their response. Finally, IRB got back to me with

word that I did not need to get their approval after all as my interaction with these children was considered non-invasive contact.

With the go-ahead to send the packages, I gathered all of the necessary materials in preparation for shipping: the cameras, markers, paper, consent forms and teacher instructions. These instructions outlined every step of the project for the teacher to follow. As seen in the following excerpt from the teacher instruction document, the children were given this prompt:

I have sent your teacher a camera for each of you to use to take pictures of places, things, and people in your life. You can take pictures of anything around you that you feel is important: this could be places unique to your town such as grocery stores, landscapes, shops, people on the street, markets, things you like to do, and so on. You may be surprised how interesting it would be for someone on the other side of the world to see photographs of things you see every day.

Once you have taken all of the pictures with the camera, you will bring it back to your teacher and write a very short essay on what you took pictures of and why. This won't be hard; I have provided an outline for you to follow. These photographs and essays that you produce will then be put on a website that people around the world will be able to access. I have chosen your school as one of 12 schools around the world that will be participating in this project. This means that you will be able to go onto the website I create and see photographs of your lives and be able to compare these photographs with the lives of kids on the other side of the world.

Any frustration I had experienced with setbacks quickly dissolved, like a puddle in the summertime, upon the receipt of my first package. As I developed these first cameras, which had been shot by children in Iceland, I could not believe my eyes. I was mystified in every sense of the word.

Upon reviewing the photographs, it became immediately clear what the children value in their world. As they are children, they possess a certain aesthetic innocence. Generally speaking, their photographs seem not to have been

tainted by intensive thought or a need to justify their actions; instead they appear to have acted on raw naturalism - an almost innate sense of determining what to photograph. I was magnetically drawn to this innocence. Each photograph serves as a manifestation, to me at least, of the vision pulled from the children's eyes and made into a physical manifestation, a photograph. Therefore the photograph is a tangible slice of the child's thought process at that exact moment in time. This insight, this presence of memory, is a mind-blowing concept that I feel extremely privileged to have set in motion. I feel so blessed to have been the influence that enacted this manifestation and brought these memories into the physical world in the form of photographs.

I believe, and I feel this project has proven, that it is here that photography holds its power. That is to say that photography gains its efficacy in its ability to preserve moments that under normal circumstances (read: situations without the utilization of an instrument such as a camera) would pass unnoticed. The camera's selectivity has an innate power. In receiving the cameras, the children were encouraged to be selective of their environment, of their experience as the nature of the project. Built in, from the beginning, the children were informed that they had a finite amount of memories they could preserve in time – as seen in the excerpt from the written instruction the children were given which I included earlier in this piece. This selective preservation therefore provides a direct and effective insight into exactly what the children value.

This project was, in essence, propelling them to make conscious choices, to engage in their environments in ways they may not have done had they not had

a camera in their hand. My project inspired them to make choices – choosing what to photograph, thinking about their lives on a (hopefully) deeper level, attempting to recognize some deeper insight into their lives—while they reciprocate and provide me and everyone else who views this project with a sense of insight into our own lives as well. In other words, in seeing how other people live we have a basis for comparison.

It is so beautiful, so sacred, that the learning, the growth and the exchange of ideas happened in a few fleeting instances, without reserve as the children held in their hands the camera I sent to them. In reviewing the photographs that were sent back to me, I was especially enraptured by the photographs in which you can see another student holding one of the cameras that I sent. Actually seeing a photograph that a child took with a camera I sent, of another student holding another camera that I sent preparing to take a picture is quite a fascinating thing. Two examples of these photographs can be seen on the first page of appendices. Reviewing these photographs makes me wonder, it all makes me think, how much are these kids thinking of me now and how much of this project will they remember? Will I have made an impact on their lives?

It is fascinating and therefore interesting to me that I will very likely never meet any of the students who participated in my project – I will know them only through their photographs, through those transient clicks of the shutter, through those ephemeral moments that act as a brief window into their daily lives. They say a photograph speaks a thousand words. In giving children the choice to capture twenty-seven moments of their life as well as the opportunity to verbally

express what they photographed is a really powerful means of education and a tool to implement and affect change both for the children and for the world at large.

For this reason, I asked each child to comment on his or her photographs, which resulted in fascinating essays. I provided each student with the same outline to follow so as to make the responses more directly comparable between students from each participating country. It was invigorating to read their words, especially the ideas conveyed in the last sentence of their texts. It was in this sentence that each child was urged to reflect on the project and express something that they had realized about their lives in the process of documenting it. As I was reading these essays, I became emotional because I felt so in touch with the blissful and innocent side of humanity. Children are real. They are real because they are not afraid to be themselves. They speak openly and freely about how they feel, and it is this connection to the earth and the world around them that I was searching for and therefore was so ecstatic to witness.

In this sense, my project was really a search for humanity, the quest for a reassurance that beauty exists. I have always maintained a certain level of optimism regarding the world; however, it is easy to lose sight of all the possibilities when we're surrounded by the monotony of our daily lives. -I think it is in this way that the Internet has truly been a blessing. Most people spend the majority of their lives in the immediate area surrounding their home. But the Internet has the potential to act as an open window of salvation – a ray of worldly light connecting us with the glimmer of the world's daily experience. In this



sense of our connection to people, the Internet acts as a dove or carrier pigeon--flying into the window of our stationary homes we live in throughout our sedentary lives, gathering information and messages and departing from our window out over the world instantaneously. As seen in my connections with the people who engaged with me and agreed to work on this project, the number of people we can connect to with these virtual-doves, with these messengers, is potentially infinite. There is no limit to our reach, and this is a beautiful thing.

Realizing the beauty inherent in the connectedness of the Internet, I chose to display the results of this project in the form of a website. This website format is a powerful tool as it is an effective and mass communicative way to convey the information to a large viewing public. This range of dispersion is important to note. Without the use of a website, the information gathered for my project would be stunted in its availability to the public. Without a website and the use of the Internet, only people who are immediately in contact with me or one of my participants would be aware of the project. The Internet opens up the possibility that anyone could stumble upon my project and be influenced by it – unbeknownst to even me.

The website is also critical because it reinforces the virtual world in which the foundation and framework of the project was built and functions. Much of the project was communication devoid of physical or even verbal human contact; all communication was virtual (through e-mail). My work is essentially the fusion of the real world, in the form of the children's photographs and essays,

with the virtual world. This underlying fusion of elements, culminating in the final project, adds to my dedication to the whole concept.

This convergence of past and present into a unified website mirrors the relationship of the act of photographing itself. Just as each photograph represents a frozen moment of time at one particular place in time and space, the website is an artifact of past moments and memories, preserved like a fly in amber for the world to see. To educate, to learn from these children is my biggest aim.

I feel this project is educational, and furthermore beneficial, on a variety of different levels. At its most basic, fundamental level, in terms of its logistics, the successful completion of this project shows just how much can be done in the modern world. Our level of virtual interconnectedness is so deep, so far-reaching that at this point in time there are so many opportunities at our fingertips. Ten years ago, a project of this nature would not have been able to be completed within a year. The project's reliance on technology through both the Internet, as the main mode of communication, as well as on camera technology, in the form of affordable and reliable one-time use cameras, is astonishing.

I feel that the power and implications of this factor are easily and all too often overlooked in our increasingly industrial and technological world. In a sense, living within an influential and generally affluent Western societal framework, the elements at our disposal seem to become commonplace or mundane over time, therefore losing their magical, mystical tendencies. The Internet is a phenomenon that has become an integrated part of our everyday lives, and so we tend to forget its far-reaching power. We tend to forget about all

the benefits and possibilities that are tangled up in its web, waiting to be selectively removed. Too often we get caught up in our daily lives and routines, the environment of our daily microcosm, that we can easily lose sight of how big the world is, how much is going on, and how connected we could potentially be if we only take it upon ourselves to initiate the contact.

It was this idea of expanding our consciousness beyond our immediate environment that I was really trying to develop and gain an understanding of through the children participating in this project. Growing up in one place, or taking up residence for an extended period, can have a multitude of effects upon a person's psyche. One of those effects, which I have experienced personally having grown up in Rochester, NY and lived there all my life prior to college, is the adoption of perspective that this place you are living in is a representation of the rest of the world, a microcosm of sorts. For me personally, this had negative connotations for me during a period of my life. I began feeling trapped by all of the similar buildings, repetitious daily routines and entrenched ideas. I felt isolated in my hometown, and it was easy to forget, or not to acknowledge, that my life and my hometown is only one tiny mark on the large face of the world. I think it is possible to forget that there is so much out there, so many other different living situations and landscapes and beliefs and thought processes, that nothing is concrete, nothing is fact, all is experimentation, all is adventure and experience.

What are our lives but a collection of our experiences? As the children who participated in my project grow older, as we all do, they will have more

experiences. Perhaps they will take more photographs of those experiences such as the ones they have captured here. Perhaps in those experiences, as in these, there will be connections that link us all together, an undeniable thread joining us to one another. A photograph of a sibling, a picture of a pet, an interaction with someone on the street, all of which differ in terms of the context and culture in which they were created, but still are so similar in terms of human experience. For each child, each individual who took these photographs was capturing beauty - ephemeral, fleeting, and transient beauty. This project confirms the mantra in my life that I repeat to myself on a daily basis and firmly and whole-heartedly believe: beauty will save the world.

What I present here before you today, though complete in the aims that I set out to investigate and explore, is just a beginning. Working with the ideas that my project encompasses and carrying them through to a realm of development has shown me a definitive direction I would like to continue to follow.

Currently I have children working on this project in Chiang Mai, Thailand, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and Lima, Peru. I have also contacted a local doctor who does bi-monthly relief work in Sudan. I will be meeting with him to discuss the possibility of getting cameras into the hands of the children there, giving them the means to document their lives and environment. This could potentially lead to more individuals being aware of what is taking place in Sudan.

I have so many related ideas that I would like to begin working towards making a reality. I keep thinking how interesting it would be to have a group of adults in each of the individual locations chosen for this project complete the

exact project under the same requirements and stipulations. How would the photographs compare? What would this say about the world? About age? About time?

Perhaps to a greater degree I would like to start a website in which children around the world can upload their photographs. A website where, with the click of a mouse, one would have the ability to travel to any region of the world and see it like never seen before--through the eyes of a child. Images that children from that region have contributed to the site would create a chronicle of an individual child's photographs as they develop over time. With diligence and hard work, I hope to gain funding for this project in the near future and make it a reality.

There are no words that can express how thankful I am to the Honors program for awarding me the grant and the support that made this project possible. This work has been, by far, the most fulfilling element of my college days for its sheer reality and inherent exploration of beauty. I cannot say for sure where I will be tomorrow, or the day after that, but I can affirm that this project has had a deep-seated effect on how I view the world and what I value. I have a positive, resonating feeling that this work will guide the rest of my days on this earth. In all honesty, I could only be so lucky.

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## Appendix

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A photograph by Linnea P of Reykjavik, Iceland

## Written Capstone Summary

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In beginning my Capstone Project I set out to gain some insight into how children around the world view their immediate environment. From my youth, I have always been interested in the perception of environment and the concept of perspective. I very much believe that we are products of our environment, and therefore I have always wondered how my life would differ had I grown up in an area of the world other than the United States.

As a student of photography I set out to explore this concept of place photographically. Upon brainstorming ways in which I could do this effectively, I came up with the idea to send one-time use cameras to children in other countries to give them the opportunity to photograph their lives. I believed that the provision of these cameras to children would result in an intimate and unaffected look into their lives as they could document their existence in their own terms without anyone prying over their shoulder. In addition to the photographs, I also asked that each child write a brief essay describing what he or she took pictures of and why in order to supplement my research and provide a further communicative element to the work.

With the help of a Crown Scholar grant through the generosity of the Renee Crown University Honors Program, I was able to secure funding for my project and begin to consider it in real terms. I began my search for contacts in various countries to which I could send the cameras. To aid in my search, I employed the use of the U.S. Department of State website's list of Overseas Schools. I worked



to select countries that were geographically multifarious and connected to me or my values in one way or another.

These Overseas Schools were a great resource because they provided me with a reliable source to send the cameras to as an avenue of reaching the children. Going through these Schools also ensured that I would be able to communicate effectively with all participants, as English is the primary language spoken.

In sending the cameras and materials to these countries, I was really trying to explore the idea of connections in our modern day society. This idea of connection was apparent right at the start as I attempted to forge the bonds of contact via e-mail to reach out to the teachers at these Overseas Schools. Prompting a response from individuals whom I contacted via the Internet proved to be challenging and time-intensive. Over time, however, I secured the trust of grade five teachers in Reykjavik, Iceland; Krakow, Poland; Athens, Greece; Beirut, Lebanon; Colombo, Sri Lanka; Tokyo, Japan; and Los Angeles, California, United States.

In this exploration of connectivity, my project involved a constant play between the virtual world and the physical world. This is to say that my project can essentially be divided into what took place in the virtual world, over the Internet, and the physical world, actual tangible reality. As I was communicating with people from all across the world, I had never physically met anyone I was sending materials to and therefore all communication was through e-mail message only. After this virtual exchange of ideas, I sent a tangible package to the teachers

who then distributed the materials to the children. In this sense, I was an instrument propelling the children to take an action.

Throughout this portion of the project, I was connected to these children in that I was directly affecting the events in their lives at those moments in time when they held the camera in their hand, despite the fact that I was hundreds or even thousands of miles away, living my own life, unaware of this person's actions. It was in this realization that I came to the conclusion that the Internet is an extremely powerful tool, influential in our contemporary society. If it had not been for the interconnectedness that virtual communication provides, I would never have been able to influence someone living on the opposite side of the globe.

Upon the receipt of the packages returned to me, the impact that I had potentially had on these children's lives really began to sink in. Looking at the moments these children had captured with their cameras, I could not believe my eyes. I was captivated, enthralled and appreciative that this project was becoming a true manifestation of life, connections and beauty. For in these photographs, it became immediately clear what these children value in their day-to-day world. In providing the children with a camera that had the ability to take only a finite number of photographs, I was inherently prompting them to be selective of what they saw, and therefore, each click of the shutter seems to have been inherently infused with a deep meaning and significance to that child.

Again, in terms of connectedness, it is fascinating to me as I stare at all of their photographs and texts, that I would very likely never meet any of these

children personally; however, I would always have this connection to them, through this project, for as long as I shall live.

In understanding the implications of connection, I put the data into the form of a website, playing again off of the virtual quality of the contemporary world. Here the implementation of the Internet expands the number of people who can view the work and be influenced by it, thereby acting as a powerful tool in its effective way of conveying information to a large viewing public. The website can be viewed in its entirety at [thecameraproject.com](http://thecameraproject.com).

I have found that there is so much beauty in the world that connects us to one another, a beauty that is deep and surpasses the realm of aesthetics. Perhaps overall I realized that, regardless of place, we are all similar despite our cultural nuances – highlighting the importance of experience and human contact. This contact is increasingly important in light of the interconnectedness of contemporary society and should be continually acknowledged, highly valued, appreciated and explored.

I cannot say for sure where I will be tomorrow or the day after that, but I can affirm that this project has had a deep-seated effect on how I view the world and what I value. I have a positive, resonating feeling that this work will guide the rest of my days on this earth. In all honesty, I could only be so lucky.