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CAMERACRAFT

SHOOTING PRO BONO IN VIETNAM

GARY FRIEDMAN
DOCUMENTS THE WORK
OF HEARTS FOR HUÉ
FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS
WITHOUT BORDERS

MOUNTAIN MAN

THE ENDURING ART
OF OUTDOOR LIVING
WITH CHRIS TOWNSEND

BEST FRIENDS THROUGH THE LENS

ANIMAL COMPANIONS BY HANNAH FREELAND,
LINDA JOHNSTONE & RICHARD FALLAN

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

 THE GUILD OF
PHOTOGRAPHERS

EPSON COTTON
RAG FINE ART PAPERS
SIGMA 100-400mm f5-6.3
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VOIGTLÄNDER 110mm f2.5 APO MACRO
& 21mm f3.5 COLOR SKOPAR FE
8mm f4 SLRMAGIC MFT

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PRO BONO IN VIETNAM

In a Catholic church in the Vietnamese city of Huế, there stands a statue of Phaolô Tong Viet Buong. When Emperor Ming Mang began a new round of persecutions of Christians, he ordered the apostasy of Christian soldiers; Phaolô refused. He was arrested in 1832, spent a year in prison being tortured, interrogated for the names of other Christians, and ordered to renounce his faith; Phaolô refused. He was finally convicted of being a Christian, kicked out of the army and was beheaded. Pope John Paul II later made him a Saint.

His great great great granddaughter – portrait below, now 82 years old and living in Southern California – saw the image I took of his memorial, right, and started to cry. She grew up in Huế (pronounced "Whey") just before the Vietnam war; spent two years in a labor camp before escaping to the Philippines. She got married in this church. And she's never returned to her home country because there was no family left, and it would bring back too many negative memories.

So how has Huế, once the capital of Vietnam, changed since the war? In December I was sent there as part of my assignment through Photographers Without Borders, an organization which dispatches volunteer photographers into needy areas around the world, helping Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) document their work and success stories and provide visibility to the global

Gary Friedman signed up – and got past demanding approval and validation. He was sent to Vietnam to document the work of an innovative NGO promising independence and security to challenged communities and individuals. Read about his time working for Photographers Without Borders.



problems being addressed. On this trip I was to document the work of Hearts for Huế, an NGO which is making a difference in the lives of the disadvantaged and neglected citizens in this once-prominent city. My assignment was to tell the story of the positive difference they were making, in both stills and video. As the Photographers Without Borders representative advised me, "Pretend you're shooting a commercial for the A.S.P.C.A." (<https://www.aspc.org>)

Hearts for Huế, in conjunction with several corporate donors around the world, administers several programs to help its neediest citizens:

1) Chicken, pig, and duck raising program – HfH donates livestock and trains recipients how to care for them, breed them, and take them to market (as well as using them for feeding the family). This not only brings in disposable income, but it also helps feed the families and gives people meaningful work they can do. 200 years ago everyone knew how to do this, but this knowledge has been lost through industrialization. More than 1000 people who can't hold conventional jobs due to disabilities have been helped through this sustainable program.

2) Microfinance – small loans are made to groups within communities to help local businesses ramp up. Generally these loans are made to groups of 10 or so families within a community;



Above left – it always amazes me at how people react when they see an American visit their city. You become an unwarranted instant celebrity. Above right – one picture of many happy children found in some of the underfunded schools I visited. Left – the Motorbike Book Club hostess reads to kids in the village. Below: orphans taken in by a Buddhist temple learn English.

Facing page: centre and bottom left, see story. Gary is seen with a group of Hearts for Huế staff, bottom right.

larger loans are only made available once all the families pay the loans back (thereby providing social pressure for everyone to repay the loans).

3) Clean Water and sanitation project, which has brought clean water and sanitary toilets (complete with septic tank) to ten households in the Phuc Loc village. What you can't see is all the work uphill: they built a dam, they filtered the water, and brought the water to the houses.





HfH coordinated this effort with local authorities and international donors.

4) Literacy programs – the Motorbike Book Club. Like a bookmobile, once a week a representative comes to a small village and loan out books – mostly in English, but have been hand-translated into Vietnamese. The kids also can indulge in puzzles and played fun games before the visit ends.

5) The Solar program provides solar-powered lights to areas that lack electricity; usually the areas selected also participate

Top right and centre: meet Miss Hanh, who was born with no arms. She was one of the first recipients of HfH's chicken and pig program for self-reliance. She was given 100 chickens, 50 ducks, and one piglet. The piglet has since given birth four times, with a litter of 4-16 piglets each time. She and her sister can live off the money when some of the animals are brought to market, plus they provide food (as does the vegetation around the house). I found her attitude to be inspiring.

Bottom left: a Buddhist monk provides a very Michelangelo-esque moment; since Buddhists believe God is inside every one of us.

Bottom right: scooters, mopeds and motorbikes comprise 95% of road traffic here, so I wanted to create an iconic shot of this mode of transportation. I stood in the middle of the road and shot at 600 mm using AF-C mode and the camera had no trouble tracking this family.

Top left: this woman has had a very hard life. In 2007, her husband suffered a brain injury due to a railway accident, and was paralyzed for four years. He's recovered partially but still has mental issues. In 2017, her son got a brain injury and her husband fell and broke his wrist the same day. She lost all of her money to hospital bills, and has had to quit her office job in order to care for them both. HfH is helping in two ways – by enrolling her in the microfinance project, and the pig/chicken/duck feeding program. She can now stay home and still care for her family. This is her first year in the program.

Bottom left: more participants in the chicken raising program. Hearts for Hué recruited volunteers to build them a chicken coop, then populated it to get the families started.



in the Motobike Book Club so the kids can read the books they borrow at night.

“Use your highest-quality, full-frame camera!” they said... and so I brought my Sony A7R III and a variety of lenses, plus a backup for everything because I know how things go. Ignore everything you ever read about mirrorless camera systems being smaller and lighter than DSLRs; once you get to the realm of great glass those theoretical advantages melt away.

What PWB doesn't know is that about 65% of my images were shot with the amazing Sony RX-10 IV, always at my side and operable with just one hand so I could get grab shots on the back of a motorbike. I know from experience that when the light is good the image quality from this camera is nearly indistinguishable from the A7R III; and I'll bet nobody at PWB will be able to tell the difference. The RX-10 IV also produces better quality video (video and interviews were a part of my deliverables) and has an in-lens motor for smooth zooming. The right tool for the job.

I'd say two of my strongest techniques I used on this trip was to tell stories via sequences of images (in addition to trying to capturing it all in one image), and underexposing, since a camera on autoexposure consistently tried to make the image look brighter than it did to my eye.

To nail the exposure in a literal instant, I had assigned *Spot AEL Toggle* to a button beforehand – this function switches to spot metering and locks the exposure at the press of a button. In the field, just before I shot I'd put my subject's face in the center, hit the preassigned button, recomposed and took the picture. A perfect exposure under non-average conditions like these can be a challenge since you essentially have two different bosses with two different deliverables; the NGO itself that has their own photo needs, and Photographers Without Borders who expect delivery of video and 400 edited and tweaked art images ten days after the trip, complete with embedded captions, names, copyright info, and keywords.



Above, I visited a mental institution. Hearts for Hue partnered with the D.O.V.E. fund to help build the facility and donate pigs, chickens, goats, and ducks to help give the patients something meaningful to do as well as help sustain themselves. This facility also makes fishing nets, hats, and dried mushrooms to sell in the open market. Below: the ever-present faces of curious children, here looking out from a schoolroom.



Above: a woman drinks water from the tap for the first time, thanks to the clean water project piping potable water into their village. Below: A collection of fishing boats in Thanh Phuoc where entire families live - some have as many as five children. Back in 2015 Hearts for Hue helped to supply solar power for these boats so they could at least read the books they borrow from the Motorbike Book Club at night. Since then the power company has provided conventional power for these boat houses so they can power more substantial appliances. Most of these kids get little education. At around 7th grade they head over to Saigon to work in the garment district.



GUERILLA STREET PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY



This girl's father was exposed to Agent Orange, and the damage it causes to DNA is hereditary. She's now 18 years old. This was the most heart-wrenching story I encountered and photographed on this trip.

Right: a participant in the Microfinance program performs step 1 in making a traditional dish called *cơm hến*. Bottom: huge open-air farmers' market with an ineffective roof – it rained so heavily everything got soaked. Even my backup RX-100 V, ended up with condensation between the lens elements, fortunately evaporated by morning.



After undertaking this trip I can sincerely recommend this kind of eco-tourism adventure if you're looking for a way to leverage your photography story-telling skills in ways that make a difference.

For more information see Hearts for Hué website: www.HeartsForHue.org

My blog will post other pictures from this trip in January: www.FriedmanArchives.com/blog

Photographers Without Borders are very much like Doctors Without Borders except they don't actually save lives.

If you would like to help me offset my costs for this trip, my fundraising page is still open for donations: <https://bit.ly/2AL9R8G>



The Hearts for Hué office was too small for conventional portrait lighting, so we took these staff portraits on the street at noon. Thank goodness for the RX-10 IV's insanely fast flash sync speed, which can make daylight background look like night!

The 'studio': how it looked to my eye, right.

Step 1: set the camera to manual, and set the camera to underexpose the ambient light tremendously (centre left).

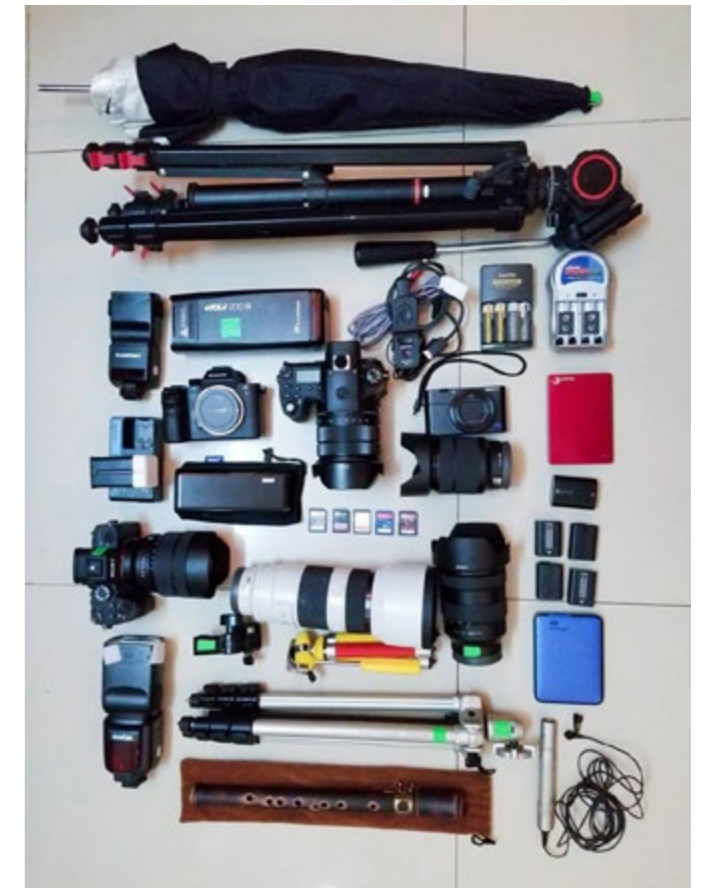


Step 2: turn on the flashes with attached lightshapers (these are might brighter than the ambient light) and fire away!

Bottom left: nice result, eh?

Bottom right: when you're on assignment you have to take a backup for everything, which made packing light a challenge. But I wasn't counting on going everywhere on motorbike.

The big flash umbrella and fluid-head tripod (for video) stayed at the hotel.



To learn more about Photographers Without Borders, see: PhotographersWithoutBorders.org You need to become a member in order to be considered for an assignment.